



## Securing Your Facilities

More than one staff member has arrived at their church in the morning, only to pull on the door and find it open. Initially, thought of a break-in or theft might have been a part of their thinking. But after enough incidents, their first thought now is “Okay, who left the door unlocked this time?”

Some of us can remember when churches used to leave their doors unlocked around the clock. The thinking was to allow members to come and spend quiet time whenever they needed it. And frankly, it worked most of the time. Unfortunately times have changed. Instead of righteous respect, more and more criminals increasingly view churches as an easy target, and couple this with what more and more churches have inside of their facilities. In the past, contents were hymnals, choir robes, bibles, etc. Now it is not unusual for churches to have sound boards, instruments, sound equipment, DVD players, computers, TVs, etc., all of which are in high demand and able to be sold on the street.

Though every church is unique in how they approach this issue, several key principles can be helpful, regardless of size, location, or type of church.

### COMMUNICATE

The security of the church facility is everyone’s responsibility. Therefore, by clearly communicating the responsibility of each member and group is a good first step. Let everyone know what you expect of them. Have policies and find as many ways as possible to communicate to the masses. Approach it from a stewardship issue. Help people know that caring for the facilities and property God has given to their care, is a faithful act of stewardship.

### SHUT IT UP TIGHT

Some churches are fortunate enough to have a full-time custodial staff. Some even have around-the-clock

security. But many rely on a small staff and volunteers. Regardless of the size of your church, someone should be responsible for doing a walk-through at the end of the day. Not only are you looking for open doors and windows, but safety concerns. A candle that was not extinguished or a leaky toilet can cause a great deal of damage. Someone (both during the week and after services) should be designated to do a complete walk-around, and make sure the facility is safe and secure.

### LIMIT ACCESS

Regardless if you still use the key system or have a security/electronic access system, you will want to find ways to limit access to the facility and the areas within the facility to those who are authorized. Each year a list should be made of those who have a need to get into the church facilities. From that list, you will want to break it down further as to who should have access to specific areas. It is highly recommended that you lock interior doors, into such areas as offices, sound equipment rooms, or anywhere that valuables or sensitive information exists. Access to those areas should only be given to those who have been approved. With more and more technology, it is also wise to seriously consider a monitored alarm system for your facility.

### CHECK IT REGULARLY

Occasionally throughout the year, someone should be asking, “has anything changed that might cause us to want to re-examine who is getting access to the facility?” For instance, if a leader has been asked to resign, or if a staff person has moved on to another church, you would want to make sure that they no longer have access to the facility and that the keys have been collected, or the electronic access codes have been changed.

### HANDLE CONCERNS QUICKLY

When you do come to the church and find a door open when it shouldn’t be, find out why. Check to see who was there last. Remind them of the concern and policies. If outside groups use your church, the tendency is to give them a key. But do you really want a church key floating around the community? Alternative methods should be considered, such as charging a fee that will allow a church member or custodian to unlock and lock the facility for the group. If violations persist,

then a new method of securing the facility should be considered.

### WORK ON MAKING IT BETTER—EVALUATE

Finally, it is good to evaluate regularly. If you have a key system, which is growingly becoming less and less desirable, then consider phasing in an electronic access system. The technology on these systems is increasing and in many cases, the prices are dropping.

Do a physical survey of your facility at least annually. Make sure doors and windows have good locks on them. Keep bushes around windows and doors trimmed. And make sure there is good lightning around your facility anytime it is dark.

Keep communicating with the congregation. Do not communicate it once and stop. New members and attendees need to be aware and existing members need to be reminded. If there are lapses in security, communicate more often and discuss alternatives.

Last, but not least, due to the change in our society and the more frequent loss of property and misuse / abuse of church facilities, leaders should think about what changes they need to make before there is an incident. One church, after two break-ins in the same week, finally got to a place where they were able to say, "Maybe we should re-think our approach." Don't wait for this to happen. Discuss it now, and avoid the losses that could occur by doing things the way they've always been done.

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