



Safeguarding Our Holiday Traditions

THE HOLIDAY SEASONS

Christmas, Easter, and other holidays throughout the year, are times of deep religious significance and time-honored traditions. They are also times of extensive activity within the church, which requires extra attention to safety. Some hazards are unique to the Christmas season; other hazards are magnified during the holidays. Ideally, safety preparations should begin months in advance.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

The exterior portion of the building and grounds should be kept in good repair at all times. Reduce tripping hazards in parking lots, sidewalks and stairs. The roof should be checked to ensure it will withstand winter weather conditions.

Gutters and down spouts must be securely attached to the building, in good condition and clear of debris. Any water lines subject to freezing should be shut off or the area properly insulated and heated. Areas of the building and equipment that may not be used the rest of the year should be carefully inspected to ensure they are in good condition. The railings, seats, floors and exits for the balcony should be checked if they are used infrequently.

CHRISTMAS TREES

Natural evergreen trees and garland present significant fire hazards. When selecting a tree make sure it's a fresh one. Freshness can be determined by examining the needles. The needles of a fresh tree will be supple and will bend in half without breaking. Color may not be an indicator of freshness, as some trees are touched up with paint to give the appearance of being fresh.

Exercise care when determining where to locate the tree, just in case it does catch fire. The tree should be placed away from doors, stairways, fire exits, other combustible material, ignition sources and congested areas. The trunk should be recut two inches above the original cut just before it is placed in the stand. The tree should be placed in a sturdy, stable tree-stand with a large water reservoir. The water reservoir should be checked daily and kept full.

Fire resistant artificial trees are safer. When selecting an artificial tree, look for a statement specifying the duration of the protection. Artificial trees should also be kept away from ignition and heat sources. Metal trees do not present a fire hazard; however, they do present a shock hazard if Christmas lights are installed on the tree. If a metal tree is illuminated, it should be done with colored floodlights. Floodlights can become quite hot so they should be positioned where people will not come in contact with them.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Purchase only UL (Underwriter's Laboratories) approved lighting. Outdoor lights must be designed for outdoor use. When buying new lights, purchase only lights which can be used indoors and outdoors to prevent the Christmas season confusion. Carefully check all lights before use for frayed wires, damaged insulation, loose connections and broken or cracked sockets. Discard any lights which cannot be safely repaired. Do not connect more than three strings of lights together, unless the manufacturer instructions permit.

Christmas lights should not be left on overnight. Use timers or designate a responsible person to turn the lights off. Careful handling during unpacking, decorating and repacking will reduce the chance of damage to the lights.

Electrical Wiring. If extension cords are needed use high-quality, heavy-duty, U. L.-listed cords with grounded outlets. Extension cords should be taped down if they are located in areas where they present a tripping hazard. Care should be exercised not to overload electrical circuits. When in doubt, check with a licensed electrician.

Other Decorations

- ✓ Hallways and exit ways should be kept free of combustible decorations. Small objects should be kept out of reach of small children.
- ✓ Candles are a beautiful decoration, but they can also be hazardous. If candles are used, they should be firmly set in sturdy holders or candelabra that will not tip over. The candles should be dripless and placed away from draperies and other combustible materials. Candles should not be left unattended and should be extinguished at the end of every service.

HEATING, COOLING AND VENTILATING

Holidays can add an extra burden to all utility systems. Utility systems equipment, which is improperly maintained, may become dangerously overtaxed. A qualified technician should service the equipment regularly.

FIRE ALARM SYSTEM

The presence of Christmas decorations, as well as additional people, creates an increased fire risk. Fire alarm systems should be checked regularly.

EMERGENCY EXITS

Emergency exits should be kept accessible, clearly marked, and with illuminated signs.

Emergency lights should be tested to ensure they will function in the event of a power failure. During crowded services it is important that aisles and exit ways be kept clear. Ushers should know where the emergency exits are located and be trained in emergency evacuation procedures.

WALKING SURFACES

Sidewalks, parking lots, floors and stairs should be in good condition and kept free of ice and snow accumulations. Additional water-absorbent mats may be needed at the entrances to the church to avoid slippery floors. Keep in mind the special difficulties the young and elderly may encounter. Additional information regarding slip and fall hazards may be found in MPM – Slips, Trips and Falls.

FOOD AND BEVERAGES

If food or beverages are served, care should be taken to ensure that perishables are properly refrigerated; all plates, glasses and utensils are clean; and all cooking equipment is in clean, operable condition. Spills should be cleaned up promptly to prevent slips and falls. Consider appointing someone to assume the responsibility for food and beverage purchase, preparation and clean up.

DRINKING AND DRIVING

While alcoholic beverages are not present at church gatherings, Christmas and other holiday seasons afford many other opportunities for alcohol consumption. During this festive time, a general reminder about responsible drinking and defensive driving is a timely message.

BURGLARY, THEFT, VANDALISM AND ARSON

Holiday crowds and large offerings provide ample opportunity for increased crime. Security measures should be strictly followed, including making a systematic check of the premises after each service or function. Double-check doors and windows, and watch for any objects which may have been unnecessarily rearranged or missing. Test the burglar alarm system after the security check is completed.

COLLECTIONS AND SPECIAL OFFERINGS

All funds collected should be kept in a safe, if available. The moneys should be supervised until they have been counted and deposited. It is recommended that deposits be made immediately after the services, rather than leaving money on the premises overnight. Deposits should be made by at least two unrelated adults. A police escort is recommended for large deposits. Additional information is available in MPM – Your Church's Money.

The Ministry Protection Memo (MPM) series is offered as an educational tool in support of United Methodist Insurance's property and casualty insurance program to help you develop loss control and ministry protection procedures. United Methodist Insurance does not, with these MPMs, seek to establish a particular standard of care or to provide legal advice. Church leaders are encouraged to consult competent attorneys with regard to the church's specific needs. United Methodist Insurance encourages reproduction and distribution of this MPM within the United Methodist denomination.

Others may contact the United Methodist Insurance Service Center, via telephone at 1-800-975-5442 for permission to reproduce MPM.

For additional information please contact

Rev. Joy T. Melton, J.D., Chief Resource Officer

United Methodist Insurance

400 Perimeter Center Terrace, Suite 900

Atlanta, GA 30346

www.UnitedMethodistInsurance.org

Email: joymelton@bellsouth.net

Phone: 770-512-8383

©August 2011 United Methodist Insurance

Socialize with us on



YouTube: www.youtube.com/MethodistInsurance

Twitter: www.Twitter.com/UMInsurance



Sign up for our newsletter at

www.UnitedMethodistInsurance.org

United Methodist Insurance is an all-lines property and casualty (including Workers' Compensation) nonprofit captive reinsurer owned by its member Annual Conference and agency insureds. The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) fulfills its Book of Discipline fiduciary oversight through its membership on the Board of Directors of United Methodist Insurance. For more information, contact the United Methodist Insurance Service Center or go to our website www.unitedmethodistinsurance.org.

The United Methodist Insurance Service Center is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. eastern time. You may contact the Service Center at 1-800-975-5442.