



Churches need Guardian Angels

door **Nick Tolson**, National Churchwatch Co-ordinator GB

National Churchwatch

National Churchwatch encourages all churches to be open during daylight hours so that they can continue to be a dedicated space for public worship and a focus for events and community activities. We work with dioceses, police forces and other groups to give churches the confidence to deal with any crime issues they may have.

We also believe that clergy, volunteers and church members should be safe whilst following their vocation so we offer training courses in personal safety to help them deal with any threatening situation they may face.

National Churchwatch came into being following a national conference in 1999. With the support of Ecclesiastical Insurance and four other insurance companies National Churchwatch began to offer seminars to churches and other religious organisations in April 2000 after the appointment of Nick Tolson as National Co-ordinator.

Since this time National Churchwatch has run approx 60 seminars a year dealing with church security and the personal safety for churchworkers and clergy. They have advised the Home Office, the House of Lords, the Health & Safety Executive and many religious organisations since 2000.

Having started with mainly church security seminars the organisation now concentrates on personal safety after the realisation that there were no other organisations in the UK that could provide the specialist advice that churches need.

National Churchwatch is a non profit making company and intends to develop over the next few years to be able to advise even more church people about personal safety and to try and prevent yet more deaths, injury and problems.

Crime in Places of Worship in the UK

There is a significant problem with crime in Places of Worship in the UK. At the moment theft of metal is a huge problem. In February 2008 there were over 4,000 claims to the Ecclesiastical Insurance Company (who insure 92% of the UK's churches). Lead is literally being stripped from almost every church in the country, it is the fastest growing crime in the UK and is becoming a major issue. The theft is encouraged through high prices all over the world for metal. India and China in particular is where most of the stolen metal is ending up. The crime is particularly difficult to detect but there are various methods being used. The best method is getting the eyes and ears of the local community to watch out for suspicious activity. Any vans or cars that are parked near a church late at night have their registration numbers taken and this is slowly getting the people who are committing these crimes caught, but it is a long term crime reduction method.

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Other crimes that are a problem in churches in the UK are mostly petty theft committed by local criminals. These are annoying but can usually be easily detected or prevented.

Theft of antiques is a lesser problem these days after the introduction of due diligence in the antiques market. This means that any item that comes into an auction house in the UK is checked against the national stolen property lists. Most stolen items eventually end up at auction, (after traveling through various owners) and are then recovered. The companies that run the stolen property lists claim a 75% success rate for recovering stolen antiques within 5 years. This is very impressive.

A major crime that we advise on is violence against church workers. Clergy and lay people are regularly attacked and we have had five murders of clergy in the last 10 years.

Any church that decides to open to the public must recognize that there is a risk and must take steps to anticipate any reasonable problems. This includes not allowing people to work on their own without some form of communication device, and ensuring that valuables are locked away or adequately protected.

Opening your church

Step One

- Formally make the decision to open during the day
- Inform your congregation
- Identify the times your church may be at most risk

Step Two

- Invite a surveyor from your insurance company to advise you
- Invite your local Police Crime Reduction Officer to advise you
- Tell them your church will be open and remember that their advice is free

Step Three

- Identify what is valuable in your church (For example candlesticks, churchwardens' wands, furniture, collection boxes)
- Store any valuable portable items in a locked area of the church
- Ensure all items are recorded, photographed and marked and this reference is kept away from the church

Step Four

- Tell your neighbours that you are opening and ask them to phone someone if they spot anything suspicious going on
- Encourage people to use the church (a busy church is a safe church).
- Consider alpha-dotting valuable portable items. Alarm and secure any larger items such as chairs if they are valuable

Step Five

- Consider putting an alarm in your church. Alarms can cost less than £700
- Consider alarming your vestry as a minimum
- Get at least three quotes for alarms from approved companies. Ask the police for advice

Step Six

- Use a secure table box for donations. Do not use a wall money box as a criminal could cause costly damage trying to remove it
- Do not close your church as a knee-jerk reaction to crime

Step Seven

- Remember, locking your church may not deter criminals
- Your church is there for your community. Let the community help you

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Step Eight

- If crime at your church is a particular problem, consider closed circuit television. Wireless CCTV cameras are available for less than £300
- Take advice from experts, not salesmen

Summary

Crime in the UK is being addressed and is coming down. However, it is an on going problem that will need to be tackled. As criminals develop ever improving and diverse methods of committing crime then the churches and other authorities will have to develop better methods of combating it. Churches should always remember that their main role is the worship of God and the support of their community. Anything else that they do is secondary to this. What they must not do is to lock themselves up and prevent the achievement of those aims.

Nick Tolson biografie **National Churchwatch coordinator**

Nick Tolson is a former member of the Royal Air Force Police and was a Police Constable with the Hampshire Constabulary. In 1991 he became a virger in Wells Cathedral where he was tasked with keeping good order in church. In April 2000 he became the National Churchwatch Co-ordinator.

Nick is the UK's leading expert in Personal Safety for Clergy and is the National Churchwatch Co-ordinator. He is currently advising the Church of England and Church in Wales about personal safety issues for their clergy and has advised the Home Office, the House of Lords and Heath & Safety Executive about Clergy Safety.

Nick runs more than 50 seminars a year for all Christian denominations on clergy safety and other church crime issues. He is a Suzy Lamplugh Trust Personal Safety tutor and is a qualified Adult Education teacher.

Nick is the author of "The Complete Security Book for Churches", (published by Warminster Press) "The Pocket Book of Personal Safety for Clergy" and "ClergySafe". (Published by Lulu Press) He has written many national newspaper articles, on TV & radio and is a regular contributor to Security Professional Magazine.

In 2007 Nick published "The Clergy Lifestyle Theory", an academic work looking at the reasons for violence against clergy and some essential recommendations for dealing with it. It is now being used as a good example of the practical application of criminological theory by Universities around the UK.

As a former police officer Nick has assisted Dioceses and other church organisations in investigating issues such as hate letters, e mail abuse and other sensitive crimes that often involve church members. He gives advice on conflict management and methods of dealing with internal issues that are potentially criminal.