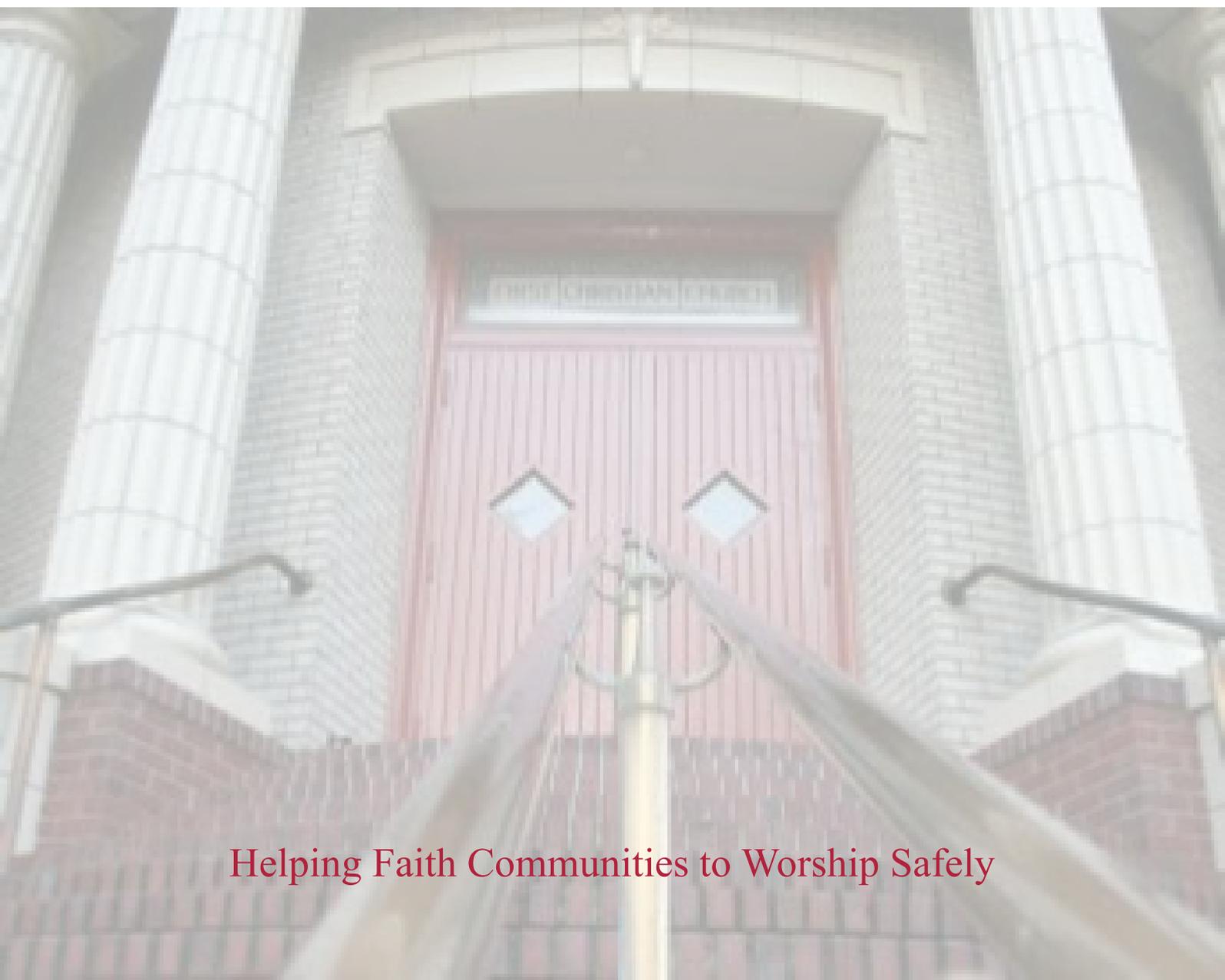


National Churchwatch

Tackling Anti-Christian Hate Crime

National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

Personal Safety for Church Volunteers



Helping Faith Communities to Worship Safely

National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

PERSONAL SAFETY FOR CHURCH VOLUNTEERS

An escalating problem

Any church can have a violent incident with little warning. These attacks are becoming more frequent and churches need to think about this now.



Introduction

Churches could not survive without volunteers. Often the volunteers are older people who are able to give some time to help a church open for their community. The church is a vital part of any community and assists with community cohesion and is often the only ‘official’ building that is open in an area.

In any community there are some people who are willing to use violence to achieve their ends. Churches, being part of their communities, are not immune from people who use violence.

Violence in a church always seems to be more shocking than in almost any other place. Churches are meant to be areas of calm, reverence and an escape from the woes of the world. Unfortunately, all too often, the woes of the world are attracted to these highly visible buildings. This can manifest itself into violence.

Those who are responsible for the opening of churches are also responsible for ensuring that the volunteers who are helping in the church building are safe and know what to do should they come across someone who may use violence.

Personal Safety is often common sense and it is always useful to remind people about this.

Weighing the risk

Churches should be open. They are there for the community and we know that churches that are open get half as much crime as those that are closed. The reason for this is simple, with an open church there is usually someone around who can spot people who are up to no good. When a church is locked then there is no-one to see who is committing crime.

In an ideal world, a church would have stewards in the church the whole time that it is open. However, very few churches can do this. Churches need to look at who is in their churches who can act as ‘guardians’. These can be flower arrangers, cleaners, vergers or clergy. Whenever anyone enters a church these people are seen to represent the church, and should recognise this fact. These are the people who need to think about their safety.

The risk of physical violence is fairly small, but it does happen. Any building that is open to the public is at risk of getting someone who may use violence. Just because you haven’t had any trouble before then it doesn’t mean you should ignore the problem. All churches have fire extinguishers but very few have had a fire. The same is true for personal safety training and the number of people who use violence.

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What is Violence?

One of the problems of defining violence is that every person has a different level where the violence begins to affect them. For some, violence means physical contact, for others, it can mean words or behaviour.

A group of young people gathered together on a pavement may be intimidating but are they being violent by just standing there? Of course the answer is 'no', however, they may be very scary for people who are worried about the amount of violence by young people.

When deciding what is violent it is important to use your common sense. Churches are different, in that behaviour which is not inappropriate outside, may be inappropriate inside. An example may be that someone enters a church not wearing a shirt. This may be offensive to some people, but it is not violent. However, if that person refuses to put on their shirt after being politely requested to do so then their behaviour may become such that people are upset by it.

A good definition with which to work on is *"Any behaviour which produces damaging or hurtful effects, physically or mentally, on people."*

If this definition is applied with a dose of common sense then it can be an effective way of deciding whether someone's behaviour is appropriate in a church and whether the volunteer needs to take any action.

Conflict Management

It is very rare for violence to occur without warning. Almost all violent incidents begin as non violent incidents. Often it is the failure to recognise that someone is getting upset and the impression that you are not assisting them can lead them to use violence.

During any difficult conversation it is good to use the following method to try and ensure that any difficult conversation does not become a dangerous situation.

Calming : It is vital that you get someone calm enough to communicate during an incident. If someone is so angry they are not listening or keep shouting then you will not be able to assist them. Being calm does not mean that they are not emotional or upset, but it means that they are able to communicate with you so you can assist them.

Reaching : Churches are there to help people. Often these people are using challenging behaviour but if you are seen to be *'trying'* to help that is the secret of preventing violence. Using the term "I can't do that **BUT** can I do this." is good. An example is when someone says they are hungry and homeless. You can feed them but you will probably not be able to house them. However, you may be able to contact the council or similar on their behalf.

Controlling : In any situation you must be in control. If any situation gets too much then simply leave. Do not feel obliged to stay in any situation. You are in control, do not lose control of any situation or you may be at risk. It is better to walk away and get help.

The Routine Activity Theory

The Routine Activity Theory is a very important theory that has been developed by criminologists. The theory states that in order for violence to occur there has to be three elements present. These are;

- *A motivated offender;*
- *A suitable victim;*
- *The absence of a guardian or protective device.*

If these three conditions are present then the chance of violence escalates to an unacceptable level.

If you recognise that these conditions may be present then you must take action to change the situation. Unfortunately too many people believe that 'it will be alright.' It probably will be but for more than 200 people last year it was not 'alright' They were attacked and ended up in hospital.

Understanding each part of the Routine Activity Theory is a vital part of keeping safe. Knowing what to do when you recognise that you are at risk is even more vital!



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Motivated Offenders

Motivated offenders come in two categories.

One : Premeditated Offenders. These are people who have planned to enter a church and are used to using violence in order to achieve their ends. These are extremely dangerous people. As they have used violence before whatever technique you use will invariably fail. These people will often give themselves away by the way that they enter a place of worship. (ie they will stride very purposely up to a steward) and the words that they use. (*ie They will be used to the vocabulary of the church and will use the correct titles and language*) If someone becomes very aggressive very quickly then you must act immediately to protect yourself by leaving and calling the police. Thankfully premeditated offenders are rare and are usually known to the police and the local community.

Two : Spontaneous offenders. These are the most common form of offender. They will use violence when they feel that you haven't met their expectations. Normally when they enter into the church they have a high expectation that you will help them. As they realise that you will not help, and sometimes this can take a significant amount of time to sink in, they will see violence as their only option. The way that you deal with these people is vital, you must be seen to be helping them, even if you know that you are unable to help them in the way that they wish. Often people's expectations can be changed once you offer a compromise or different option that may be more attractive.

Situational Clues

The chance of someone walking into a church and punching someone in the face is very small. Normally the people who do that have some form of mental illness or some form of long standing dispute that has boiled over for some reason.

Before violence occurs there are normally a number of situational clues that tell you someone is a risk to you. There are three areas where you need to pay attention when dealing with difficult situations.

Words : The words that you speak make up only 7% of communication. Put simply we are able to lie very easily and we are practised at it! There are some exceptions to this rule. "*I am going to kill you!*" is a BIG clue that you have a problem. For volunteers in a church another clue is "*Do you believe in God?*" Most people will assume that you do believe in God why ask?

Vocal Tone - no matter what words people are saying it is how they are saying it that is important. We all knew when we were in trouble with our mothers by the tone of their voices when they called us. Pay attention to the vocal tone. Vocal tone makes up about 30% of communication and is very important.

Body Language - this makes up 63% of communication. It is absolutely vital to be able to interpret it. Clenched fists, flushed face, quick breathing are all signs that someone is getting upset. People who are a danger are very rarely still, if someone is in constant motion then pay attention!

Guardian Angels

All churches need guardian angels! By this I mean people who act in defence of people who are at risk. Contrary to popular belief these are not people who will dive in and rugby tackle anyone causing trouble. It has been proven that if there are more than two people present during an incident the chances of violence occurring is much reduced.

There are two types of guardian angels.

One : Informal Guardian Angels These are people who are present in the building when you are trying to deal with a difficult person. They are not aware that they are acting as a guardian to you, but they are. There are some important points that you need to remember. You need to know that the guardian is there. The offender needs to know that the guardian is there and, most importantly, you must take action if the guardian leaves. (*Perhaps asking the guardian to wait a minute until you have finished with the offender.*) The guardian's role is simply to be a presence to deter the offender from using violence.

Two : Formal Guardians

These are people who have a specific role to assist you. These can be stewards, vergers, churchwardens and the like. If you are having a problem. They will come across and check that you are ok. Staying with you until the problem is resolved.



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Rules of Personal Safety

There are some simple rules that you **MUST** follow when dealing with inappropriate behaviour in the churchyard.

RULE ONE : On no occasion should you try to deal with anyone who is behaving badly when you are on your own. There are many examples of serious injury and even murder occurring when someone has tried to deal with trouble on their own.

DO NOT DO IT.

RULE TWO : If there are two or more of you then, if you feel able to deal with a problem, then do so. It is proven that two or more people together are much safer than someone on their own. However, if you are confronted in any aggressive or violent way then back off and get the police to the scene immediately. Do not accept any abuse or threats, get the police to deal with it, it is their job.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

RULE THREE : Ensure that you always have some means of communication with you. This is especially important if you open or lock the church. This is often a regular routine and those who cause problems will sometimes target those who use an area regularly. You must be prepared for any problems. If you see something or someone you are not happy with then quickly think through what you would do if there was a problem.

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE YOUR MOBILE PHONE WITH YOU

When violence occurs

Sometimes, no matter how good you are, a person may use violence against you. There are many reasons for this but you do not always have the time to analyse this whilst the incident is occurring. These are the steps you must take if violence occurs.

One : Get away

It is a simple strategy. Get away as quickly and efficiently as possible. Church volunteers tend to stay in dangerous situations far too long because of some sort of loyalty to the church building. You **MUST** get away. Do not worry about the building. Someone who is using violence cannot cause massive damage in a short time because the one thing you will do is call the police on 999 IMMEDIATELY. They will attend, and they will get there as soon as they can. Get to safety as no-one will expect you to get beaten up on behalf of the church.

Two : Warn others

If you can, warn other users of the building that there is someone who is violent in the building. You need to get people out if possible. However, do not let this delay you in calling the police. You need them to deal with the person using violence, the longer that you wait the longer it will be before they can deal with the person.

Three : Be a good witness

Ensure that you make a note of the person's description as soon as possible. Write this down immediately. This is because once the adrenaline has gone away and shock sets in, you will forget things very easily.

Equipment

Every church should very seriously consider purchasing some equipment to protect their volunteers. Most churches do not need people wearing stab proof vests or carrying handcuffs! However, it is vital that you think carefully about the sort of equipment they may need.

Every church should have some means of communication in the building so that people can call for help. You cannot rely on someone bringing their own mobile phone as often their phones are running low on battery or they haven't paid their bill, or the usual thing is that they do not know how to switch it on as they do not use it very much! BT are required to fit a landline into any building for just £100. No matter where the building is!

The most important thing to have, however, is some form of personal attack alarm. Most alarms are battery or gas powered that sound an alarm if a wire is pulled on the top of the device. These are not that effective as it does not alert anyone that there is a problem.

The best personal alarm to get is an alarm that is monitored. These are called GSM alarms and work on the mobile phone network. When activated they alert an alarm company who can talk to you through the alarm to check on you or they call the police immediately. For more details visit our website at www.nationalchurchwatch.com





Churchwatch has been running free security and personal safety seminars for over 13 years in the Christian Sector. Churchwatch is the only organisation in the UK that specifically deals with crime in Places of Worship. Over the years Churchwatch has provided advice on Church Security to the Home Office, Police Forces and other statutory agencies as well as all Christian denominations, especially the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. In particular, Churchwatch provides personal safety advice to clergy and churchworkers, with a view to reducing violence against them. National Churchwatch is now aiming to highlight Anti - Christian Hate Crime with a view to eradicate this terrible crime in the UK. Churchwatch is a limited company.

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National Churchwatch Director

Nick Tolson is the Director of National Churchwatch. He is a former Royal Air Force Policeman, a former Police Constable and former Virger at Wells Cathedral in Somerset. In April 2000 Nick became the National Churchwatch Co-ordinator and eventually the Director of National Churchwatch. Nick has published several books including "The Pocket Book of Clergy Safety" and "The Guide to Church Security". He is the UK's leading authority on Personal Safety for Clergy and Churchworkers and has advised the Home Officer, Police Forces, Church Organisations and many individual Churches on security.

In July 2010, Nick was made a Fellow of the Winston Churchill Trust and spent four months in the USA studying how they deal with crime in Places of Worship. Nick has also produced "The Clergy Lifestyle Theory" which is an academic work that looks at the reasons why Clergy are often the victims of violence.

Nick Tolson is the lead in developing the new path for National Churchwatch with regard to Anti-Christian Hate Crime

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