

National Churchwatch

Tackling Anti-Christian Hate Crime

National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

Clergy Home Security



Helping clergy to follow their vocation safely

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Clergy Home Security

A real problem

50% of assaults on clergy occur in the clergy home¹. Good security is a vital part of a strategy for keeping clergy safe.

¹ Violence against Professionals; University of London; Gabe; 2001



Introduction

The only academic report published by the University of London in 2001 into violence against clergy stated that 12% of clergy had suffered from some form of violence in the previous twelve months. We know that five members of the clergy have been murdered in the last ten years and there have been a significant number of nasty assaults on clergy reported in the press recently.

The Clergy Home is where 50% of assaults occur. It is a natural target that often is easy to identify. People come to a clergy home with a preconceived idea of what will be provided by the Minister inside. When that preconception is not met then violence can be the outcome.

Violence is always difficult to predict and most clergy will not experience it at all in their ministry. However, the effect on the small number that do often far outweighs the original crime and can last for many years affecting their vocation.

With some simple preparations clergy can keep themselves and their families safe. It is often confusing as to who is responsible for the safety of clergy but we all have a duty to be responsible for our own safety and for the safety of others, and that includes members of the clergy.

Starting at the beginning

It is always useful to remember that it is your home as well as your workplace and very few people can enter without permission. When you first arrive in the clergy home it is essential that you make the rules about who may enter clear and how you would like to operate from your clergy home.

Remember that people who visit the clergy home have different perceptions of what you will do. It is always good to lay out quickly what you can and cannot do for someone who comes to the clergy home.

Often the clergy are the last chance for some people. You are the last 'official' presence that lives in the area and as such people have high expectations.

Look at your clergy home with the eyes of a visitor. Start at the front gate and work your way in. Sometimes it is useful to get someone else to look at your home as they will often see things that are easy to overlook. It does not matter whether you have had trouble or not, spending a couple of hours in preparation will pay dividends when you are confronted with someone who is out of control and unpredictable. .

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The Vicarage Sign

There is an on-going discussion as to whether you should tell people where you live. The argument for a sign is that it is not always obvious which house is the vicarage anymore. People need to know where to find the Minister.

However, it is the experience of the author that most assaults on clergy come from people who spontaneously decide to go and ask a vicar for money when they see the vicarage sign.

It is better to remove the vicarage sign but ensure that the parish noticeboard has some method of contacting the vicar. A good practice technique is that a parish will have a parish mobile phone. This number is displayed on the noticeboard and the phone is given to a 'duty' parishioner. (Which changes each week!) This number is advertised on the noticeboard and elsewhere and if someone needs the vicar urgently they can ring the parish mobile, get a real person who

The Boundary

Although every clergy home is different there are some practical things you can do in order to reduce any problems.

Any driveway should have gates fitted. Make sure that you close the gates. This gives a signal to people that it is your home. Burglars will often select a home to burgle on the basis that the front gate is open. It is a good physiological barrier.

Using prickly bushes around the boundary is good practice. They look very nice and they have a good deterrent effect on anyone who may wish to avoid being seen coming through the gate.

If you have a long drive it is useful to fit some form of warning device fitted to the gate or entrance. This normally is an infra-red beam that sets off a bell when broken. This warning will give you time to look out of the window and make a decision about the person who is coming down the drive. The few seconds warning may allow you to respond appropriately to any problem..

Internal pathways & the back garden

Once a visitor has entered your property it is important that they are guided to where you want them to go. This normally is the front door. Sometimes it is not obvious which door people should go to.

It is a good rule that no-one should go to your back or side door. Just place a small sign saying "Please use front door" with an arrow pointing them in the right direction is useful, even if the door is just a few feet away.

Ensure that no-one can go to the rear of your property without having to go through a gate of some sort. Always have a 'private' sign on the gate to show that people cannot enter your rear garden. This is very important for the police as many incidents occur when someone surprises the Minister in the rear garden when they have wandered through an unprotected entrance. You want to try and prevent someone surprising you by appearing at your back door.

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The Front Door

It is very strongly recommended by the author that you be able to see who is outside the front door. This is a basic requirement. Ensure that your front door has a spy hole or CCTV fitted. You have to have the choice as to whether to speak to someone or not.

The person outside MUST not be able to see in. If you decide not to open the door the person outside should not be able to see you. Cover any windows in the door with one way plastic or some other method.

You should not have a letter box in the door. Letter boxes allow people to see in and are a weak point in the door where burglars can 'fish' for car keys and the like. More importantly the letterbox allows people to pour inflammable liquid or put fireworks through it. Replace the letterbox with an external security letter box next to the front door. You will need some method to communicate with the person outside without opening the front door if you do not wish to. A cheap intercom from a DIY store is a good solution and can be installed very quickly and simply.

Extra Security

For those who want or need extra security there are some investments which are worth having. Your front door can be a security door designed to resist entry. Most burglars enter through the front door and when someone causes a problem at the front door, they will often kick the door in frustration. The EU standard is ENV 1627 which means that a door can withstand an assault with crowbars for 5 minutes, withstand pressure on the lock of 600KG and withstand pressure on the corners of 300KG.

Doors need to be at least 44mm thick in any case and should have a 5 lever mortice lock which complies with British Standard 3621 : 2004. The front door should also have a 'Yale' type lock fitted to ensure that the door will stay shut if slammed in an emergency. You should also have hinge bolts or similar fitted which slide into the recesses on the hanging post of the door frame and hold the door in place even if the hinges fail.

Serious consideration should be given to replacing any plastic door with a solid door.

Even more Strengthening

For a very small price you can put in more strengthening that, once fitted, can be forgotten about until you need it!

A D-Locking N Latch is an extremely simple device which provides complete safety if someone tries to kick the door in. A latch can be flipped shut in one movement and seals the door into the door frame.

A London Bar is a strip of metal that protects the lock side of the door preventing anyone from kicking or forcing the door open with an implement. It is completely invisible once fitted.

A Birmingham Bar does the same job as the London Bar except that it protects the hinge side of the door. This is often the weak point in a door.



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Burglar Alarms

It is VERY strongly recommended by the author that all clergy homes have a burglar alarm that has personal attack alarms built into the system. When activated the alarm must inform someone that it has activated. It is pointless to have a 'bells only' system as most intruders know that the police will not attend a 'bells only' alarm.

The personal attack buttons MUST be monitored and MUST be silent. Having an audible personal attack alarm merely antagonises the offender and will not scare them off. If it is a police recognised alarm they are required to attend within 8 minutes and are often faster. There should be a button for the personal attack alarm by the front door, in the study and upstairs in the main bedroom.

Any alarm should be able to be zoned. This allows for the downstairs to be alarmed during the night should you wish to do so. You can also link the burglar alarm to the smoke alarms so that if one activates someone is notified. This is especially important if the Clergy home is left empty for long periods.

Your Family

If you have someone who lives with you you need to talk to them about how they should deal with callers at the door. It is worth remembering that you are experienced in dealing with these people and your spouse and children are not!

It is good to consider that when you are out, who opens the front door? It is impractical to ban children from answering the door but you can insist that they put the chain on the door every time. If it is a habit they will not even think about it after a while.

If you have children and use a babysitter, just tell them not to open the door at all. They should not feel required to open the door unless you have appropriate security measures in place.



Harassment

Harassment often makes the victim and their family feel unsafe and can mean that they are unable to follow their vocation properly. National Churchwatch has a very detailed advice booklet available but here is some general advice.

Always keep a record of what has happened. You need to record where, when and what happened. E-mails - Always print off a hard copy of the e mail but do not delete the original. The police are able to exact an incredible amount of information from a normal e mail which often allows the police to trace the offender.

With letters it is vital that you keep the original envelopes and contents. Do not let anyone touch the items and store them carefully. If you recognise that it is another letter of harassment then do not open it but store it carefully.

With telephone calls, always dial 1471 immediately to get the person's number. If they have withheld it BT can still trace it. Try not to hang up, just put the phone down and wait for them to hang up.



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

This advice and information is given in good faith and is based on our understanding of current law and practice. National Churchwatch, does not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors or omissions which may result in injury, loss or damage, including consequential or financial loss. It is the responsibility of everyone who reads this to ensure that they comply with their statutory obligations and any interpretation or implementation of the above is at the sole discretion of anyone who may read these notes.