

National Churchwatch

Tackling Anti-Christian Hate Crime

National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

SECURITY OF CHURCHYARDS



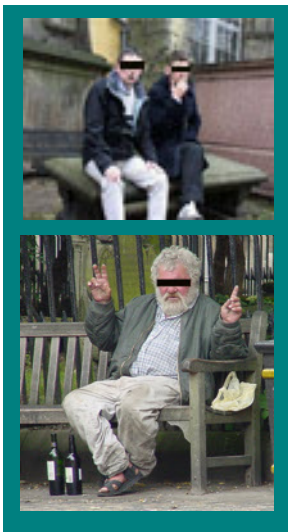
Helping Faith Communities to Worship Safely

National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

SECURITY OF CHURCHYARDS

An escalating problem

Churchyards are becoming a focal point for public disorder and inappropriate behaviour



Introduction

Churchyard is a general term that includes any area which is an open space that is primarily for the burial of the dead and quiet contemplation. It is usually the area immediately surrounding a church but may be in a separate location nearby.

The legal responsibility for the security of churchyards can fall to a surprisingly wide variety of organisations. These can be the local authority, the church members, the church council, the local Diocese or others.

The moral responsibility for the security of churchyards falls squarely upon the community that surrounds the area. There are certain key players within this which include the police, the local council, and the church members. However, the immediate neighbours, local businesses, and the community in general must have an involvement in protecting the churchyard in order to make it safe.

Churchyards are not only for the burial of the dead and quiet contemplation they are frequently becoming vital for the promotion of wildlife and bio-diversity.

The simple truth is that a churchyard that is used by the community is a safe churchyard.

Starting at the beginning

The first people who are usually directly affected by misuse in a churchyard is the people who regularly worship or use the church within the churchyard. These are often older people who are intimidated by the groups of young people who may use the churchyard as a gathering place. These people will usually complain to the church authorities.

The first question to be asked by the church authorities should be “Do we actually have a problem?”

Groups of youths gathering in a churchyard are not necessarily a problem. It is good to recognise that 73% of 16 - 20 year olds are involved in volunteering. Often the churchyard is the only open space in an urban area that is not routinely watched or patrolled, therefore it is a natural gathering point for young people, they are part of the community after all and can actually be part of the solution to any crime problems.

However, it is also important that inappropriate behaviour is challenged in an appropriate way and by the appropriate people. Often misuse of a churchyard is a result of people using the area as a habit and the first part of a community reclaiming the churchyard is to break the habit of these people.

National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

SECURITY OF CHURCHYARDS

First Impressions

Any area which appears to be uncared for will immediately attract the attention of those who wish to act inappropriately in a churchyard.

The first impression when you approach a churchyard must be good. The grass must be cut, any damage must be repaired as soon as possible, any spray paint or similar must be cleaned up, rubbish must be picked up.

Whoever is responsible for this must take this duty very seriously. A tidy and clean churchyard encourages the local community to begin to use the churchyard. The aim has got to be for people to feel safe when walking the dog, visiting a grave or simply seeking quiet.

A Churchyard that has clear signage at the entrance to a churchyard is also much safer. The intention of signage is to guide visitors to the areas where you are happy for them to go. It also allows you to be able to ask people to leave a particular area when clearly the area is private. A simple 'Please keep off the grass' sign is enough to inform people that they should keep off the area. Should they ignore the sign it immediately empowers those who need to move on the people behaving inappropriately.

Asking people to leave an area politely is an essential part of the conflict management skills that you need in order to reclaim your churchyard. Obviously if it is immediately apparent that their behaviour is inappropriate then you must get assistance from the police or other agency.

The Boundary

In an ideal world a churchyard should have a very obvious boundary. If you have one, or it is relatively easy to create one, then you should consider the following;

It is very important that it is clear which area is a public area (*ie the road or pavement*) and which is the churchyard. This needs to be achieved by means of a boundary. If you can have a fence or wall with few access points then that is good. The area needs to be locked at night which makes it clear that the churchyard cannot be used after dark.

Some people state that they cannot lock any entrances because there is a right of way across the land. If the churchyard is still in use then Ecclesiastical Law specifically bans the creation of a right of way across the land.

Ensure, however, that your churchyard does not look like Fort Knox. The more overt security that you have the more likely it is that you will suffer from crime. Many schools and GP surgeries have found that increased security simply increased the number of attacks against the premises. The damage then caused to the fencing began to impact dramatically on the cost of carrying out the security.

Low level security is often the best. A good boundary to have is a prickly hedge. It looks good, is often a haven for wildlife, and is very painful if you try to climb over it. Remember that it needs to be kept tidy and cut to no more than chest height so that people who are on the outside can see if there is anything going on inside.

Internal pathways & buildings

It is important that any pathways within the churchyard are clearly marked. If you can it is good practice to actually place ropes or chains alongside the pathway to give the message to people that you should not go onto the grass.

Placing benches in a churchyard is a double edged sword. On the plus side the benches encourage the local community to come and sit in the churchyard and enjoy the peace and quiet. On the negative side the benches can often be taken over by groups of people who are acting inappropriately. On balance, if you have a good policy for dealing with any inappropriate behaviour the benches become a very positive aspect of the churchyard.

Careful consideration needs to be given to any sheds or outbuildings that are in the churchyard. They often contain valuable items that need to be kept in the area (*such as the lawnmower*) and can become the target of thieves. These buildings need to be alarmed. Alarms are cheap and will usually scare off any offender who sets them off.

If it becomes obvious that a building is beginning to be used inappropriately by drug users or similar, the authorities must take immediate action to deal with it. Security needs to be improved, and any rubbish or damage must be cleared up immediately. It must not be allowed to become a habitual place for undesirables to meet.

National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

SECURITY OF CHURCHYARDS

Physical Security

Churchyards are notoriously difficult to protect with the usual physical security features. They are often very dark, (*which means introducing lighting*) they often have trees or other obstructions (*Which means it is difficult to observe any inappropriate behaviour*) and in order to place CCTV cameras in the churchyard involves large works that may not be able to be achieved because of the graves.

The authorities have to look at each churchyard individually but really the money that would need to be spent could be used on community schemes targeting the people who are causing the problems. Many churches have successfully employed youth workers and the like, very effectively to engage with the problem groups.

Lighting, however, is something that should be carefully considered. It is vital that pathways are lit on health and safety grounds. However, if the paths are lit it means that the rest of the churchyard is in darkness. This allows people to gather unseen and behave inappropriately. It also raises the risk of attack as the lights hide anyone who is in the dark areas of the churchyard, whilst lighting the people who are walking along the path.

The most effective crime prevention method is to open the churchyard during daylight hours and to close it at night with clear signage that it is an offence to enter the churchyard at night.

The Law

There has been recent debate about faith crime. Most people who misbehave in a churchyard are not doing it because it is a churchyard. It is merely an open space to gather where they cannot be observed.

Modern public order laws are pretty good at dealing with anyone who is causing 'harassment, alarm or distress' to any users of a churchyard. But these laws are sometimes limited. If a group is sitting together under a tree talking in a churchyard, is that an offence? The simple answer is 'yes'.

Churchyards are consecrated ground. The ground is holy. Think about the protection given to ships that have sunk at sea, often they are classed as 'war graves' and divers are banned from visiting them out of respect for the dead. Graveyards are the same. They are the final resting place for thousands of people, the living should respect the dead. Sometimes people forget this and behave badly in churchyards.

However, there are several Victorian Acts which can, and should be used in order to prevent any problems occurring. The main act is The Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Act 1860. This states that it is an offence to act 'indecently' in any churchyard. 'Indecent' is defined as 'Any behaviour which the vicar or the churchwardens consider to be indecent.' It is open to a very wide interpretation. The police need to warn people once and if the continue with the behaviour or gathering then they can be reported for summons.

The Police

The Police are a vital part of any society. They are often unfairly criticised. It is vital that you get the police on your side. Always take to the police, invite them in regularly, encourage to come and drink tea with you!

The police will help churches and authorities IF they are told, in detail, what the problems are. The introduction of Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) has meant that there are now people who can patrol churchyards and move people on if necessary.

If you have a problem in a churchyard, consult with the police. Encourage them to patrol and enforce the law using the old Victorian Acts if they need to.

It has been proven that if the police become involved and are effective with their patrols and their prosecution of the regular offenders, it takes about two weeks to break the habits of the few who cause trouble for the many.

The police are part of the community and are a large part of the solution. Work with them, not against them and encourage, rather than criticize.



National Churchwatch Guidance Notes

SECURITY OF CHURCHYARDS

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 a 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

Using the users

There is a very successful strategy that has been used in many areas around the country and has led to a significant reduction in trouble in churchyards. It is called;

Vigilance>Engagement>Confidence

Vigilance means everybody working together to challenge the behaviour of the people in the churchyard. Rather than just one person being the 'bad' one, it is vital that all members of the community (both church and the greater community) challenge and most importantly, reporting this behaviour. Even if this means ringing the police every ten minutes!

Engagement is as important as vigilance. The church is central to the community. It is not there to become the 'enemy'. It is vital that the church community engages with the people causing the problems. Whether it is young people, other faith groups, drug users or drunks the strategy of the church has to enable it to be seen as the good guy.

Confidence is about knowing what the law is, knowing that the police and the council will support you, knowing that you are working towards creating a wonderful area for all of the community. It is difficult, and draining but ultimately rewarding.

Involving the Community

Apart from the police the local council should be involved in tackling any of the problems in the churchyard. The Community Safety Officer of the local district council has good advice and access to funding (or at least they know where to apply for it!). Involve the council as much as the police.

The most important people to involve, however, are the non-church going community. You want them to assist you by using LSD!

L- You want them to **LOOK** at your wonderful churchyard. You want them to walk their dogs, to eat their lunch, to sit and be at peace for a few minutes. Although the church is in the middle of the churchyard, it is theirs to use.

S- You want them to **SEE** what is going on in the churchyard. Is their any inappropriate behaviour?

D- and you want them to **DO** something about it either by calling the police or the church authorities.

When you give out your Easter or Christmas service list, put in a card with who to call if they see someone causing problems. Encourage them to help you to make the churchyard a beautiful place to look at and walk through.





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.

www.nationalchurchwatch.com

Nick Tolson - National Churchwatch Director

National Churchwatch, 8 Commercial Road, Shepton Mallet, Somerset, BA4 5DH

Tel : 01749 344992 Mob : 07931 353395 e mail : nick@tolson.com



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.