Starting a “House of Worship Watch Program”

Though many people assume that vandals and thieves would not want to focus on crimes against houses of worship, sometimes the opposite is true. In fact, the word is getting out that it can be easy to break into church or other religious organizations buildings to steal or cause damage because of their lack of security efforts.

In some cases, religious organizations almost invite problems because they have not taken the steps necessary to protect their facilities. Beyond the standard steps of providing adequate lighting, locking doors and windows, and trimming bushes around entrances and windows, a congregation may also help protect its property by forming a “House of Worship Watch Program.”

The process to set up such a program is straightforward and won’t damper your religious organization’s budget. By adhering to the following guidelines, you are taking steps that may end up protecting the resources and facilities entrusted to your care:

- Educate members that the protection of houses of worship resources and facilities is an act of good stewardship.
- Invite members to make an effort to drive around the property whenever they are out and about in the neighborhood.
- Ask them to look for suspicious activity, cars, or people.
- Encourage them to observe unusual activities, and call the police if they believe something looks out of the ordinary.
- Ask them not to confront individuals or take any unnecessary risks.
- Invite house of worship neighbors to also report anything suspicious to the appropriate authorities.

Use the house of worship’s newsletter or bulletins to remind members of the watch program and to thank them for their participation in making your religious organization’s community a safer place to worship.

The added traffic through your parking lots and around your facility will be a significant deterrent to potential vandals and thieves. By taking the time to ask for the assistance of all attendees and members, your property and resources can stay better protected and ministry can continue uninterrupted. Further, members may take a more active role in the overall safety and security of all areas of ministry.

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