ARSON PREVENTION

FOR AMERICA'S CHURCHES AND SYNAGOGUES

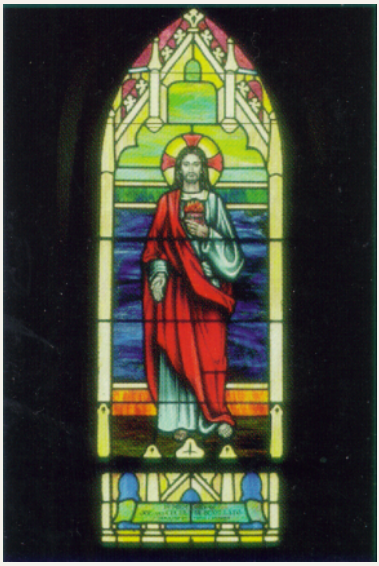
SECURING THE BUILDING

EXTERNAL SECURITY

Arsonists, like burglars, fear light.

- Illuminate the exterior and entrances.
- Use motion-activated lighting near doors and windows.
- Keep shrubbery and trees trimmed so building can be observed by passing patrols.
- If in a rural setting, ensure crops are far enough away to allow proper illumination of the area.
- Do not allow church signs to block the view of the building.
- Many churches have basement entries that are hidden from view. These should be secured with locking ground-level doors when church is not in use.
- Ladders, external stairways and fire escapes allowing access to roof should be secured.
- Painting the building white or constructing it with light-colored brick makes a human figure more readily seen at night.
- Consider fencing the areas or sides that are not readily visible to patrols or neighbors.

INTERNAL SECURITY



- Use properly installed deadbolt locks on all exterior doors.
- Windows that can be opened should have adequate locks on them.
- Consider decorative or wrought iron protection for windows. (Windows used as emergency exits must still be able to be opened in an emergency.) Doors should have similar protection.
- Installation of a combination burglar and fire alarm with a phone dialer should be considered.
- If there is a private security firm in your area, consider a contract with them as they will check the building at unscheduled intervals.

- Keep a current list of all individuals that have access to church keys and change locks periodically.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND COOPERATION

- ***Keep church leaders informed of problems.***

  Be aware of individuals who may be disgruntled or likely to cause damage to church property through arson or vandalism.

  Be aware that vandalism may precede arson!

- ***Open avenues of communication with fire and law enforcement officials regarding the arson problem churches are facing.***

  Appoint a person from the church to be a liaison with law and fire officials.

- ***Promote neighborhood watches and educate the neighbors with the lighting arrangements (motion rights, etc.).***

  Initiate an arson hotline.

  Educate neighbors on recognizing unusual activities.

  Encourage neighbors to make note of strangers spending time in the neighborhood, either on foot or in vehicles. Write down the license plate numbers of suspicious vehicles and inform the proper authorities.

  Have all guests register and remove registry from church each night.

  Raise public awareness through the news media that the problem exists.

  Be aware that individuals may pose as service technicians to get into the church.

  Arsonists may be carrying a liquid accelerant in an inconspicuous container, such as a beverage container.

- ***Do not advertise on church signs or bulletins when church will not be in use.***

- ***Involve your insurance agent.***

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United States Fire Administration

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