

Updating your Church Security for Today's Threats

including

Protecting your Church from Terrorist Attack and other threats

Churches, Chapels & smaller Places of Worship Edition



The RC Church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, France, scene of the first direct terrorist attack on a church in Northern Europe

by

Nick Tolson

NATIONAL SECURITY LEVELS

Threat levels are designed to give a broad indication of the likelihood of a terrorist attack.

LOW *means an attack is unlikely.*

MODERATE *means an attack is possible, but not likely*

SUBSTANTIAL *means an attack is a strong possibility*

SEVERE *means an attack is highly likely*

CRITICAL *means an attack is expected imminently*

WHAT DOES YOUR CHURCH DO WHEN THE THREAT LEVEL CHANGES?

Churches and Chapels need to know what to do when the threat level changes. The National Threat Levels are relevant to all public buildings and you have to take action. Do not ignore the warning. Sometimes there are specific threats to Churches and Cathedrals, what is your plan?

Use this booklet as a guide to know what to do to protect your staff and visitors.



About the Author

Nick Tolson is the Director of National Churchwatch

- Nick is a former military police officer, civilian policeman and cathedral vicar which gives him a unique insight into security in Places of Worship.
- He is a research fellow of the Winston Churchill Trust and spent time in the USA researching the American methods of dealing with violence in Places of Worship.
- Nick has been a member of the Place of Worship Security Committee at the Counter Extremism Directorate of the Home Office and is a member of the Home Secretary's InterFaith Roundtable.
- Nick has published research papers on dealing with violence against clergy and churches. Recently he has written guidelines for churches regarding security techniques for dealing with anti-Christian hate crime and counter-terrorism.
- He works with Dioceses, Police Forces, the Home Office and other agencies to develop new techniques for protecting churches and reducing the risk to churches.

National Churchwatch is the only organisation in the UK that specialises in Church Security and Personal Safety for Churchworkers. It provides training for clergy, volunteers and churchworkers in all aspects of church security. National Churchwatch receives funding from the Home Office to research and develop security methods for reducing anti-Christian Hate Crime.

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INTRODUCTION

Almost all of the terrorist attacks that have occurred in the last twelve months have occurred in cities and/or areas where there is a large number of people. Wherever the next attack comes, it is highly likely that there will be a church involved or very close by. The current level of risk of an attack in the UK is severe, that means a terrorist attack is likely. This means the chance of a church being caught up in a terrorist attack is also severe. This guide will give you some pointers to some of the most important things you need to be thinking about when considering your response to a terrorist attack or, which is far more likely, to another type of violent incident.

Some Places of Worship have been slow to recognise the necessity of having an effective integrated security plan. As a church there are many conflicting things that often means security is pushed down the list of priorities. Failure to integrate the different demands of a Place of Worship often leads to poor security that is ineffective. When an incident occurs it is vital that those working in the Place of Worship, whether volunteer or paid staff, know exactly what to do. Ultimately, the priority of security is to prevent the loss of life, to reduce the risk of crime and to protect the property and building. It is a heavy responsibility that must be taken seriously.

All of the advice in this guide has been thoroughly researched, based on best practice and is evidence based.

Nick Tolson

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CONTENT

Page 1 -	National Security Levels
Page 2 -	About the Author
Page 3 -	Introduction
Page 4 -	Content
Page 5 -	Changing Priorities
Page 6 -	The Security Budget
Page 7 -	The Human Element
Page 8 -	Keeping the Incident Outside
Page 10 -	Entry/Exit Door Control
Page 12 -	Physical Security at Entrance/Exit
Page 14 -	Controlling an incident
Page 17 -	Closing the Incident
Page 18 -	Day to Day Personal Safety for Staff
Page 20 -	Summary

CHANGING PRIORITIES

Over the last few years security has become more of a priority. Recent terrorist events have shown that whenever a terror incident occurs there will always be a church nearby. Security should be a top priority for all churches. This means reviewing your security, but also being willing to change attitudes, spend money and to take action is vital. If you do not commit to a complete security plan then you are putting the people who work and visit your Place of Worship at unnecessary risk. No plan is risk free, but preparation and practice can save lives.

When considering the security of the building it may be that the way the church has operated in the past may have to be changed. This can cause upset and distress to people but it is important that an explanation is provided to them so they can understand the decision making process. They may not like change but hopefully they will understand that in the current climate some things need to be updated.

An integrated Security Plan involves physical security, personal safety, security training and practice. Each point supports the other and each has to be regularly reviewed.

THE SECURITY BUDGET

Security costs money.

It can cost a lot of money. However, it is common for churches to be persuaded to spend a lot of money on inappropriate security measures. It is also common that following an initial spend the security measures are not maintained or upgraded. Many Places of Worship spend significant amounts of money on tourism, art and staffing but neglect their security budgets. Many security measures are just a change of procedure or attitude and do not cost much money. Accept that there will be an initial spend with regard to some physical measures and employment costs but do not get distracted by technology and inappropriate security measures.

COMMON INAPPROPRIATE SECURITY MEASURES

Expensive CCTV systems

CCTV is a vital tool in gathering evidence after an event, but unless it is monitored 24 hours a day then it is an ineffective tool for incident response. CCTV is not a deterrent for the type of people who commit crimes in Places of Worship;

Bag Searches

These are staff heavy, give the wrong impression for people entering a church, and are ineffective in detecting items. If you are looking to prevent bombs and knives coming into the building then you would have to have airport style metal detectors and body searches. A quick search in a bag does not detect the knife in the jacket pocket of the offender. Evidence shows that the point of search becomes a target as a terrorist is looking for any group of people;

Inappropriate Posters

Often churches have random security posters on their notice boards. They might say '*Caution, bag snatchers at work*' or '*Thieves operate in this area*'. Even if they are technically correct, they create an atmosphere of fear that is not good to instil in visitors or users of your church.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

It is important that every church has someone who is responsible for security. Security has vastly changed over the last few years through technical developments and human factors. This evolution in security is ongoing and increasing in pace, Churches need to keep up. Even the smallest church should have someone who can think about the building's security.

THE SECURITY OFFICER

- The person responsible for security on a day to day basis , in a smaller church this could be mixed with other duties such as churchwarden or vergers. It is important that they are a named person rather than just anyone.
- They should be experienced in security or, importantly, be willing and interested in keeping up to date;
- The church needs to allow the security officer to attend training and seminars during the year to ensure that they remain current in security developments;
- The key to security is ongoing regular training of volunteers and staff, every person who has a role in the church should be reminded and preferably trained in what to do when an incident occurs.

Keeping people safe should be the top priority of every church and it is time that all churches nominate someone in the Security Officer role. The Security Officer can be a churchwarden or preferably someone who does not have other responsibilities.

Every member of the community whether they be volunteer, paid staff or clergy needs to have an awareness of security, but having one willing person responsible is an absolute requirement.

KEEPING THE INCIDENT OUTSIDE

It is always better to keep an incident outside of the building.

In order to achieve this then, as part of your security plan, you need to be able to see what is going on outside and be able to react to it. Obviously every building is different but having coverage of the immediate area outside of the entrance of the church is essential. This coverage can be human or by using technology.

Controlling the area immediately outside of your entrance is a vital part of your security. You need to influence how people enter and exit your building without it seeming to be intrusive or over the top security. Most churches will have a natural main entrance that paths lead to. Go to this area, stand outside and watch how people use the entrance. Can they approach without being seen? Are there any signs to direct them to the entrance. If there is a choice



of paths then consider putting an entrance direction sign so that most people will use the path you want them to use. This is especially important if one entrance is covered by CCTV and one is not.

You can also use simple rope barriers to block paths and guide people. Most people are very good at following signs. If they do not then it might alert you that they may be up to no good!

KEEPING THE INCIDENT OUTSIDE

(Continued)

Remember that CCTV is not a deterrent to criminals who want to commit a criminal offence. It is, however, a vital tool in evidence gathering after an event especially when trying to identify offenders or suspicious people. With regard to keeping an incident outside CCTV is a vital part of the covert surveillance of the outside of entrance/exit of the building. 'Covert surveillance' is a strong phrase which has negative connotations but the intention is to have a less obvious view of what is happening outside of the entrance/exit as part of a joined up security picture.

As part of the security picture it is important that everyone who enters and leaves the building is recorded. It is also important to recognise that for some people this will feel like an infringement of their privacy. It is very important that if anyone questions the recording of people it is emphasised that the recorded pictures have very restricted access and will only be viewed should an incident occur. By following the data protection recommendations from your local police force and/or the Home Office should reassure people.

However, if it is appropriate it is important that any stewards are able to view the picture of what is going on outside of the building in order for them to see who is approaching. We see these sorts of screens in supermarkets and in hospitals where the pictures cannot be seen by people passing by the screen but only by people who are directly in front of the screen. These screens are inexpensive and are very useful for giving early warning of a problem approaching the door and allowing for some action to be taken by the stewards to protect the building.

ENTRY / EXIT DOOR CONTROL

Only One Public Entry / Exit Point to the building.

This is a requirement and can be controversial. It can be difficult to achieve but you need to try very hard to have the one entry / exit point as it is central to having an effective security plan. It allows you to concentrate your security at one point and makes for a quick and simple response if an incident occurs.

- Make a decision about which door you wish to make to make your public entrance/entrance.
- All other entrances should have a coded lock or similar fitted so that churchworkers or others who need a shortcut can get through.

****NOTE*** the code to the locks has to be changed at least once a month. This is a basic security procedure as codes can get known by locals (especially in a church!) Changing the code also has the benefit of reminding volunteers and others that the locks are there as a security measure not to make it awkward for them!*

- Exit doors that are secured need to have a method of opening them in emergency. There are various options such as break glass or similar.
- All emergency methods of opening doors should be checked before the building opens and after the building closes as part of the daily security plan.



****NOTE*** Having an emergency way of opening a door is always balanced with the risk of people being trapped within the building during an incident such as a fire. No system is perfect but having no security is worse.*

ENTRY / EXIT DOOR CONTROL

(Continued)

Manning the Entrance

In an ideal world there should be a human presence at the main entrance. However, for most churches this is not possible. Remember that your church is far safer from crime if you open your church, even if there is nobody in the church, than if you lock your church.

During a service, it is absolutely vital that someone is at the entrance at all times. From a welcoming point of view having someone on the door is a good thing. They can inform and direct people as part of their role, but, their main role is security. They are there to identify potential threats, to know what to do if an incident happens and most importantly, call for assistance.

Role of the Gatekeeper, Steward or Welcomer



A Gatekeeper, Steward or welcomer is usually a volunteer, whose job is to welcome people into the building. Every person who enters the building should be welcomed by being given a leaflet or just a verbal welcome. This is good practice from a visitor point of view.

This also has a security role. People who are a potential risk to the Church will almost certainly behave in a way that makes the welcomer suspicious or uncomfortable. The key thing with this is that the welcomer should know what to do when they are suspicious. They should be briefed to alert the police or other members of staff as soon as possible. They should not confront people who are acting suspiciously, especially if the person appears to have the potential to be violent. Call the police to deal with them. Ensure your stewards know to keep themselves safe.

PHYSICAL SECURITY AT THE ENTRANCE/EXIT

Closing the Front Door

The most simple method of preventing an incident that is occurring outside or preventing a suspicious person from entering the building is closing the front door. This can be done in many ways. This is the whole point of only having one public entrance to the building and ensuring that there is a human presence on the door.

There is no 'one size fits all' solution to this but you need to think about creating a quick barrier to prevent entry.



The front door needs to be able to be physically shut and locked as soon as a threat is identified as approaching the door. If the door is light enough, the welcomer needs to be able to slam it shut and secure

it. The cheapest and simplest way of doing this is having a simple bolt or hook which immediately seals the door. Many churches have these locks already in place from mediaeval times so oil up those hinges and locks to allow the doors to be closed quickly.



The simplest solution is usually the best.

Unfortunately a lot of church doors are very heavy and not very practical to quickly shut. So some other method needs to be found. This is where money needs to be invested. There are many solutions but keeping it as simple as possible so that anyone can operate the system is vital.

A very good solution is to create an inner porch. Many churches already do this and it is not very difficult to adapt these porches to become a sterile zone which gives welcomers a few moments to make a decision whether to let someone in or not.

PHYSICAL SECURITY AT THE ENTRANCE/EXIT *(Continued)*

Again, in an ideal world, the porch should be created where the person in the porch cannot see into the church but the welcomer can see into the porch. This can be easily done with special window reflective plastic that is extremely cheap and easy to apply. However, I appreciate that this is not very welcoming so consideration needs to be given to this. Again, the inner door of the porch should be able to be sealed quickly and easily.

One of the most effective ways to do this is to put a magnetic lock onto the inner door. This can be sealed at the press of a button which can be located where the welcomers are placed. This can be operated in two ways. Firstly, when the security level is not critical then the door can be left open and allow people to enter when they wish, If the security level is raised to critical then the door can be sealed and people are let in by the welcomer once they are happy that the people are not a threat.



A good example of a church with an inner door. The door could be controlled by a magnetic lock which can be normally left open but locked should the security level be increased. If a threat appears in the doorway, the porch door can be locked instantly.



CONTROLLING AN INCIDENT

You've shut the door - What now?

If the Welcomers have shut the door because they feel that there is someone approaching who is a risk to the church then they need to tell someone immediately. Who they tell depends on the seriousness of the incident.

On every occasion the door is closed because of a threat then a record needs to be made later for the information of the security officer. The door should never be opened unless the volunteer is absolutely happy that the person who caused them to close the door has gone, is not a risk or the police have arrived.

Welcomers need a method of communication to contact the appropriate authorities or other members of the church. This will almost certainly be by using a mobile phone. It is vital that the Welcomers are encouraged to use a phone if in trouble. It should be a requirement that they have a phone on them (that is switched on!) at all times. Perhaps the church could consider buying a cheap pay as you go phone that belongs to a network that works in the church. Definitely worth the investment of £30!



More serious incidents

The key to dealing with a more serious incident is that an emergency plan smoothly goes into operation and everyone is comfortable with what they need to do. The best way to do this is to have regular practices. Every volunteer should be clearly briefed as to what to do and, preferably, have seen a practice scenario so that they know what to do. You have to be strict with this as security is so important that it cannot be skimped on! Gone are the days on muddling on, if a serious incident occurs and someone is injured then the emergency plan will be examined as to whether it was fit for purpose.

CONTROLLING AN INCIDENT

(Continued)

Lockdown or Evacuate - A Difficult Decision

Within your security plan it should be clear who has the responsibility for locking down or evacuating a building. It is a decision that may need to occur before you receive any police advice but ultimately it is the decision of nominated person. There should always be someone on site who can make this decision, usually the Security Officer. Closing the entrance will have gained you a few minutes to make the decision. It is vital that there is prompt and clear communication about the next step. The decision to lockdown or evacuate will need to be made. Generally speaking, once you have locked down, the people inside the building are safe and the Security Officer can make the decision.

Making the decision

- If there is a clear and obvious immediate threat to the people in the building, then the gatekeeper or welcomer who are on the door should be encouraged to close the doors of the building without waiting for instruction from elsewhere;
- If there is no obvious immediate threat but clearly something is happening. For example if people are running into or past the building looking panicked, then the decision to lockdown or evacuate or to take no action can be made by the nominated person who should be alerted as soon as possible to come to the entrance and make a decision about what to do
- Should there be an incident going on nearby which the staff may have found out about through social media or other means then the nominated person should be informed immediately so they can make their way to the entrance and make the decision whether to lockdown or evacuate or to take no action. The nominated person may wish to wait for senior clergy/staff to arrive to make the decision, but they need to be near the entrance in case the situation changes quickly.

CONTROLLING THE INCIDENT

(Continued)

Locking down the rest of the building

There might be other areas of the church that may need to be locked down and consideration needs to be given as to how this should be done.

If the decision is taken to lock down the building then the priority is to shut and lock the public entrance.

There then needs to be a clear process for locking down other parts of the building. Offices, choir practice rooms etc will all need to be secured until it becomes clearer as to what is going on. This is especially important if there is a roaming multi-terrorist attack in progress where offenders are roaming around stabbing people randomly. The building needs to seal the perimeter and ensure all exits are closed, and then needs to create safe areas within the building. Key doors that need to be sealed should be identified. There should be a clear plan as to who is responsible for closing and sealing these areas. Much like a ship closing the watertight doors the same should be done in the church. Naturally visitors and others who are in the church will be very anxious and this is why communication is so important. In all of the recent terrorist attacks there is a period of time, which may be an hour or more, where it is not clear what is going on. It is vital that people are in a safe area, they are not removed to an area where people may be attacking people. When these incidents occur (and they don't have to be terrorist related) they are very confusing and worrying for staff and visitors alike.

A calm, well-rehearsed lockdown plan means that staff members know exactly what is going on with regard to the lockdown and can reassure people that this is part of a security plan and that they are safe. Visitors will feel reassured that 'someone' knows what is going on and be reassured that the lockdown will be cleared as soon as the police give the all clear.

CLOSING THE INCIDENT

Again, it is an important point that once the building is locked down it is the decision of the people in charge of the building to open the doors and return to normal. This is usually taken on the advice of the police or other authority. Visitors and others who are in the building during the lock-down may well be upset and disturbed by what has happened and it is vital that there is support made available immediately after an incident to assist people. This may be simple things like letting people charge their phones, allowing them to use the church phone to contact people or even just making a cup of tea. Keeping people informed of what is happening is absolutely vital and cannot be emphasised enough. Even if there is no information you need to be able to tell people regularly that there is no information and you are waiting for the advice of the police.

A lockdown may only last a few minutes or it may last for an extended period. Stewards should be trained not to open doors to let people out. If someone wishes to get out then the appropriate person makes the decision.

If the building has been evacuated then staff should be trained to not let people back into the building until permission is given from the nominated person. (usually the Security Officer). It is very important that there is a clear chain of command. It has been known that a fireman has stated that it is ok to open when the police have said that a church should remain closed. Be clear who can give permission to re-open.

Following an incident there should always be a debrief where everyone is allowed to give their view of how things worked. Make sure a record of the debrief is completed so that the people responsible for the church can read up about previous incidents and learn from them.

DAY TO DAY PERSONAL SAFETY FOR STAFF

Protecting your Volunteers and Staff day to day.

Sometimes, not even the most effective security measures can stop someone from entering a church and putting staff at risk. The chance of this being a terrorist attack is low, it is much more likely to be someone who is drunk, drugged or mentally unstable. However, if not treated seriously, the outcome can be the same.

If you are a volunteer, welcoming on the door and someone comes in who starts threatening you, your options are limited. In an ideal world you could turn around and walk away, but that is not always possible and, there are often visitors including children around who need protection.

You need the volunteer to be able to call for assistance, preferably without the person who is causing the problem to know that assistance has been called. Using a radio is a possibility but this may inflame the situation if violence is threatened rather than actually occurring.

The solution is to have a personal attack alarm that alerts the police when a button is pressed. The personal attack alarm we recommend looks like an ID card.



On the back of the card is a button that can be pressed if the holder feels at risk. When pressed the alarm automatically opens a phone line to a control room. The control room immediately listens to what is going on, and if they feel it is necessary then they will call the police. They have a direct line to the police which is quicker than going via 999. The ID card then vibrates like a mobile phone regularly so that the user knows that the police are on their way.



DAY TO DAY PERSONAL SAFETY FOR STAFF

Continued

The control room can also call nominated people (like the security officer) to inform them an alarm has been activated.

The ideal response time for the police to attend a violent incident is 8 minutes, which is a very long time if you are confronted by someone threatening you. The reality is that the police may take significantly longer to attend. Therefore the volunteers, as part of their training, should be encouraged to activate the alarm, before violence actually occurs, at the point that they feel at risk.

Staff also need to know what to do once the alarm has been activated. They should always back off and become a good witness rather than try and tackle any offender. If the offender walks into the church then they should be followed by the staff member at a distance so that the police know where to go when they arrive. However, the staff member should never put themselves at direct risk unless there is no other choice.

The choice is ultimately up to the staff member or volunteer but the advice by the church authorities should be absolutely clear. Sometimes staff can overestimate their ability to deal with people who are a threat. They either do not understand the actual risk to themselves, falling into the 'It'll never happen to me' group, or they forget that they are now older and they physically will not be able to deal with a threat.

If Staff and volunteers receive clear guidance on what to do when a problem occurs then they will feel more confident in dealing with an issue. It is very important to make sure that you do continuation training throughout the year with some practice scenarios and exercises. The more training you do, the more effective your response to a problem will be. I fully support the idea of 'train hard, fight easy.' In this case, 'fight easy' means a smooth response to a dangerous situation can be implemented.

SUMMARY

1. Take Security Seriously;
2. Increase your security if the security level increases;
3. Have a specific security budget;
4. Keep things simple;
5. Do not be afraid to plan for the worst;
6. Run regular exercises and scenarios to test your systems and response to an incident;
7. Encourage staff and volunteers to take security seriously, if they don't or won't, then let them go;
8. Make sure senior staff support and encourage security;
9. You have a duty to protect your staff and volunteers, do not neglect your duty.



National Churchwatch is an organisation that is dedicated to ensuring churches and other Places of Worship can operate safely in their communities.

National Churchwatch develops crime reduction techniques that assist churches to improve their security and reduce the risk of crime occurring.

National Churchwatch also develops personal safety techniques for churchworkers to reduce the risk of violence against them.

National Churchwatch also carries out research into Anti-Christian Hate Crime and other crimes against churches

SEMINARS & TRAINING

National Churchwatch runs various seminars which are tailored to the needs of the organisation. Day Seminars usually run from 10am to 3pm.

A typical Personal Safety Day Seminar for Clergy will cover;

- Risk Assessment;
- Conflict Management;
- Situational Clues;
- Parishioners (The Toxic Congregation)
- Visiting other people's homes;
- Church Premises (Lone Working)

Other seminars are available for Church Security.

Subjects include Clergy Personal Safety, Churchworkers Personal Safety, Church Security, All seminars are evidence based and are updated on a case by case basis to ensure the very latest advice is available.