



Personal Safety Advice Factsheet

National Churchwatch provides free seminars for church workers and clergy on:

- Personal Safety for Clergy
- Personal Safety for church volunteers
- Church Security

On Wednesday 14th March 2007 Father Paul Bennett was murdered next to his vicarage in Trecynon, near Aberdare. Father Paul was the fifth member of the clergy to be murdered in recent years. There have been many very serious incidents where clergy and churchworkers have been attacked causing injury, terror and fear in church communities. Often these incidents are not reported to the police, or if they are, the people involved are not given appropriate support or, perhaps most importantly, training on how to tackle future incidents.

National Churchwatch was set up in April 2000 to provide training and advice to Places of Worship to try and reduce the incidence of crime. Sponsored by Ecclesiastical Insurance the group has gone from strength to strength and is now the foremost specialists in providing personal safety training for clergy and churchworkers.

Clergy have a unique position within a community which does, on occasion, make them vulnerable. They have a responsibility to ensure their own safety and the safety of the people who support them, including their immediate family and the wider church family. If a violent incident occurs in a church, then the publicity and the fear generated can have a significant effect, not only on the victim (whose vocation is often severely affected) but also on the whole community (who no longer feel safe).

National Churchwatch has developed specialist personal safety training which gives clergy and churchworkers the confidence to deal with some of the difficult situations they will inevitably face, but also, it enables them to recognise when a difficult situation has become a dangerous situation.

All seminars are provided free of charge, thanks to the sponsorship of Ecclesiastical Insurance. The training is supported by the Home Office, the Church of England, the Church in Wales and the other Christian denominations.

So what can Clergy do to ensure that they remain safe whilst following their vocations?
Here are the Top Ten Tips for Clergy and Churchworkers.

1. **Trust your instincts** – If you are feeling uncomfortable in a situation, then something is wrong. This is your body's way of saying, "*Danger! Danger! Danger!*" Listen to your instincts, and become more aware of the situation you are in.
2. **Know your limitations** – Perhaps when you were twenty you could have physically dealt with someone attacking you. The reality is that if someone is hitting you they are either drunk, drugged, angry, fearful, medically ill or mentally ill. You probably won't be able to defend yourself very well so learn to leave situations where you feel at physical risk.

3. **Always report incidents**, no matter how minor they may seem – making a record is vital because the person who has threatened you or who has attacked you will almost certainly be known to the police and will probably have attacked other people in the past. It is vital that the police know what has happened so that they can apply resources to the problem if it is affecting a particular area.
4. **Keep calm** – Always ensure you are in control of your situation. Someone who begins to lose control put themselves at risk because they often lose awareness of what is going on around them
5. **Plan ahead** – Know where the exits are, let someone know where you are going. If required take someone with you. Confidentiality is important but so is your safety. Violence often happens at the time you least expect it. Ensure you have planned ahead and know what you are likely to be confronting. There are many good pieces of technology that can help you.
6. **Report any area of your work that puts you at risk** – talk to someone if you have a particular local problem. It could be that youths gather in your church porch, or that you are called out regularly late at night and there are a lot of drug addicts around. Talk things through with colleagues, your church council or the police to see whether anything can be done to improve your safety.
7. **Know what the rules are, not what you think they are** – A lot of conflict can happen when you have to apply the rules of the church. If someone is being difficult, ensure that you are right and can prove it! A lot of conflict can occur at the strangest of times – for example when agreeing the words on the headstone of a grave.
8. **Never be afraid to run away** – If you really feel at risk, then walk away. Do not stay in a situation just because you feel you ought to, or you are embarrassed to walk away. Leaving a situation early, even if just for a couple of minutes, can often calm things down.
9. **No item of property or building is worth your life** – Property can be replaced, you can't. If someone is damaging something, then they probably have a problem! Call the police to deal with it. They get paid to deal with people who are potentially violent.
10. **Be aware, don't be paranoid** – personal safety is all about being safe. You have to follow your vocation which on occasion will take you into situations where you will be at risk. That is ok. But please be aware of where you are and what is going on.

National Churchwatch encourages everyone to take responsibility for their own personal safety. The first step is to attend training which will allow you to make informed choices about the way you follow your vocation. If you are in a position of responsibility in a Diocese or Deanery then think about running a personal safety seminar. Remember, all seminars are provided completely free of charge.

If you need any further information, visit the National Churchwatch website at www.nationalchurchwatch.com

To book a seminar or to for any other information then ring Nick Tolson (*National Churchwatch Co-ordinator*) on **07931 353395**, or email him on nick@tolson.com