

Tips for keeping empty church buildings safe

by [Heather Hahn](#) in the [May 20, 2020](#) issue

Even if your church building is seeing little use these days, the property still faces risk. Jeff Koch, the president and chief executive officer of United Methodist Insurance, offers five tips for US churches to make the best use of buildings with limited visits.

1. Talk to your insurance agent

For most churches, giving is down and money is tight. Koch suggests a church contact its insurance agent to discuss what coverage it has and what happens if a church needs to miss a payment. “It’s best to start with your agent,” Koch said. “But if you feel like you are not getting a good answer from your agent or you are looking for the latest information on grace periods on cancellations, [states’ websites] are the place to check.”

2. Know who is visiting your building

While services are suspended, Koch recommends scheduling routine visits by designated people who visit individually or maintain safe distances using personal protective equipment. He also urges having someone designated to check for damage or roof leaks after a storm, which many churches have experienced in recent weeks. Church leaders also need to know who has keys to the property and where those keys are, Koch said.

3. Secure your facility

Those who check on the church should ensure that security systems are armed and operational. Secure doors and windows and put valuable items out of view. Whenever possible, Koch recommends moving exterior furniture and equipment inside. The designated visitors should check for broken glass and other evidence of break-ins, vandalism, theft, or water leaks, Koch said. They should also make sure battery backup systems are working and that smoke detector batteries are fresh.

“Ask your local law enforcement to drive by periodically, or invite officers to use your parking to stop and do paperwork or watch a traffic light,” he said.

4. Take preventive measures

To prevent fires and save money in the process, turn off any electrical equipment. Koch also recommends churches consider turning off their water during an extended absence. He encourages churches to use a property sensor—such as Roost Smart Water Leak and Freeze Detector—which can notify a person’s smartphone that there has been a rise in moisture near the water heater.

5. Follow public health advice

The same health advice people have heard throughout this crisis still applies: wash your hands and keep your distance. “If you do have to go into the church, wash your hands before you leave the house and wash your hands when you get there,” he said. “Clean off whatever you touch and wash your hands when you go home. Do what you learned in kindergarten.” —United Methodist News Service