

# Congregational Safety

While we might expect our church property to be a true “sanctuary”, a place of rest and safety, this is not always the case. As many communities of faith have experienced, our buildings and worship services can become targets of vandalism, hate crimes and protests because of our values, beliefs and ministries. Hateful graffiti on the church walls, destruction of pride flags and property, written, verbal and physical assaults are a reality that we cannot ignore. While we cannot anticipate or prevent all attacks against our communities of faith, there are some best practices which can help prepare and protect your community of faith.

## Prevention:

- ✚ Consider installing security cameras and upgraded locks. Watch for details about the Ontario Anti-Hate Security and Prevention Grant for 2024-2025 <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-anti-hate-security-and-prevention-grant>  
There may also be a Federal Government program in the coming year. Check here for details <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/fndng-prgrms/sct-nfrstrctr-prgrm/index-en.aspx>
- ✚ Create a security plan. Keep all outside doors locked except during public events. Use a doorbell or intercom.
- ✚ To prevent theft from coat rooms during public events, advise people to not leave valuables in their pockets, and consider having ushers check these areas during public events.
- ✚ Review The Affirm Network Pride Safety Guide. This information can be adapted for a variety of situations. <https://hfrucc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PRIDE-SAFETY-GUIDE-printable-colour-version.pdf>
- ✚ Know the law. It is against the law for someone to interrupt a service of worship. If someone is outspoken at a worship service you can invite them to join the congregation and worship peacefully. If they do not comply or there are any concerns, dial 911 immediately. Here the link to the Criminal Code of Canada [https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-176.html#:~:text=\(2\)%20Every%20one%20who%20wilfully,offence%20punishable%20on%20summary%20conviction](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-176.html#:~:text=(2)%20Every%20one%20who%20wilfully,offence%20punishable%20on%20summary%20conviction)

## Response When Something Has Happened:

Hate mail, emails or comments on your Facebook page or website

- ✚ Do not engage or respond

- ✚ Remove the comments from Facebook or website and block the sender
- ✚ Do not use any computer drives sent to you
- ✚ Do not click on any links
- ✚ Take photos of the items sent by mail or posted on-line
- ✚ Report to the police
- ✚ Contact your regional council Minister for Congregational Support and Minister for Social Justice

#### Damage to Property and/or theft

- ✚ If the building is unlocked or open when you arrive, DO NOT enter alone as someone could be inside the building
- ✚ Call police
- ✚ Take photos
- ✚ Contact your insurance provider if necessary
- ✚ Be aware of how this has impacted members of the community of faith and surrounding community and offer support
- ✚ Contact your regional council Minister for Congregational Support and Minister for Social Justice

#### Someone Acting Aggressively

- ✚ Do not engage them if possible
- ✚ Find a safe place and call police
- ✚ When safe to do so contact your regional council Executive Minister, Minister for Congregational Support and Minister for Social Justice
- ✚ If staff have been directly involved, Contact Micol Cottrell, Pastoral Relations Minister [MCottrell@united-church.ca](mailto:MCottrell@united-church.ca)

#### Additional Steps:

In some situations, the community of faith may require additional support and resources.

- ✚ Ask the police writing the incident report for the Case Number so it can be followed by your legal representatives
- ✚ Contact Nicol Treskler Legal Counsel for The United Church of Canada if legal assistance is needed [NTreskler@united-church.ca](mailto:NTreskler@united-church.ca)
- ✚ If media are covering the incident consult with General Council staff for assistance writing a statement. Note that it is important to be careful about what is said to prevent jeopardizing the investigation. Rhonda Parkes, Director of Communications [RParkes@united-church.ca](mailto:RParkes@united-church.ca) or Lori-Ann Livingston, Press and Public Relations Lead [LLivingston@united-church.ca](mailto:LLivingston@united-church.ca)

- ✚ If staff have been directly involved, Contact Micol Cottrell, Pastoral Relations Minister  
[MCottrell@united-church.ca](mailto:MCottrell@united-church.ca)
- ✚ Contact EFAP for support for staff and volunteers affected by the incident

Resources:

Mind Beacon online/phone counselling service provided through employment benefits 1 877-252-6707 <https://www.mindbeacon.com/>

Telus Health administers the UCC Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) and offers critical incident counselling either in person or by phone at no cost. Phone [1-844-880-9142](tel:1-844-880-9142) and explain that you are a volunteer working in a church leadership capacity. On the automated directory select critical incidents to begin the process.