

# Church Facility Self-Inspections

Much of the minor and even larger facility damage that churches experience could be prevented if only regular, documented inspections were performed. Doing so takes ownership. Someone has to be responsible for doing the inspection and making sure concerns are addressed.

Besides a daily, cursory examination, a general inspection of the inside and outside of the facility should be conducted at least monthly and documented. Further, to complete the process, an annual inspection by qualified experts should be conducted.

If leaders and members would take the time to specifically look for obvious hazards and areas of concern, much larger damage could be prevented. Here are those areas that should be a part of every inspection.

## Outside

**Roof.** Someone should carefully do a visual inspection of the roof. This may mean getting up on the roof or being in a position to at least view it up close. Look for cracks, puddles, missing shingles and rotten wood. Always work with another person, and a solid, appropriate ladder to complete the inspection.

**Gutters and downspouts.** While inspecting the roof, check for clogged gutters and downspouts. Make sure they are cleaned out, especially during seasons where leaves and twigs are more likely to clog them. Also check the downspouts and drains on the ground, making sure they are flowing correctly, aimed in the proper direction for safe water flow and not crushed or bent in an incorrect fashion.

**Drainage.** Look at the property, especially during a rainstorm. Determine if water is flowing toward or away from buildings. Any water moving toward the building is a problem.

**Walls and chimneys.** Take a close look at exterior walls and chimneys. Look for loose bricks, cracked or missing mortar and rotten wood. Also stand at different angles and see if the walls are bowing.

**Walking surfaces.** Walk the parking lots, sidewalks and stairs. Look for cracks, holes, chips and deterioration.

**Doors and windows.** Look around doors and windows for cracked or missing glass, deteriorating frames, or windows and doors that are no longer able to be secured.

**Trees and electrical service.** Look around the grounds for trees and branches that are dead. Not only do they pose an injury hazard, but also an electrical hazard if they are close to power lines. Do a cursory look at the electrical service into the building. Often it can become exposed or even be a roost for birds.

## Inside

**Entrances.** The first interior inspection should be at the entrances. They should be free from hazards and obstructions. Look also at floor surfaces and lighting.

**Hallways and stairwells.** All hallways and stairwells should be free of obstructions. Even lesser-used hallways should be clear, as they may be used for an emergency evacuation route. Make sure the steps and railings are safe and secure and that there is adequate lighting.

**Doors and windows.** Once again, this time from the inside, look for cracked and deteriorating windows and doors. Look for any signs of water entering through them. Make sure they can be secured, especially those at ground level. Also, make sure exit doors are marked and are not chained or locked to prevent proper exit.

**Storage areas.** Few churches have more storage space than they need. Further, many people in churches are reluctant to throw anything out. As a result, designated storage areas get cluttered, and other locations are used for storage. This will often pose a fire hazard. Inspections should also look at hazards such as flammable objects coming in contact with a heat or electrical source.

## Ministry Protection Memo

“MPM” is a series on various topics relative to Church and safety. Send your comments and interests to Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church’s Director of Risk Management.

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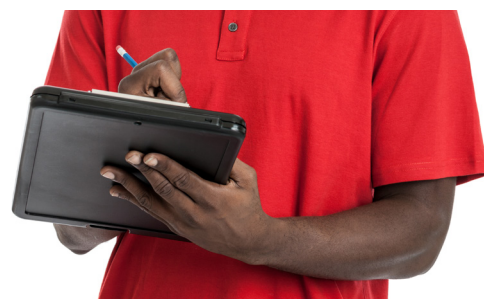
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**Furnace room.** The furnace room is often one of those “extra” storage areas. Ideally, nothing should be stored anywhere near the furnace. To help with this, yellow tape should be placed on the floor around the furnace with instructions that nothing be placed inside the yellow tape. Also, by looking for corrosion on the fittings, leakage, and knowing what the pressure setting should be, will help prevent unexpected leaks or damage.

**Plumbing.** The plumbing throughout the facility should be checked. Each restroom and water source (kitchens, nursery area, etc.) should be viewed to determine if there are any leaks. A small leak found and repaired early can prevent a more serious problem.

**Electrical.** All electrical outlets should be inspected. Look, not only for obvious damage, but also determine if too many items are plugged into an outlet. Use (but not overuse) of power strips or surge protection devices is advised.

Open all electrical panels in the facility. Look for obvious damage as well as any switches that have been taped open or rigged so they can't be shut off. If a switch is forced to be permanently on, the source of the electrical surge should be determined and corrected.

**Flammables.** Finally, all flammables (e.g., cleaning supplies, paint, paint remover, etc.) should be placed in a marked, metal cabinet away from heat sources. Proper ventilation is necessary to prevent heat or fume buildup. Make sure someone is responsible for proper elimination of old supplies.

## Conclusion

As mentioned previously, these intentional walk-around inspections should be conducted on a scheduled basis. Any documented concerns should be followed up with corrective action and date completed.

Leave the technical inspections to the experts. Annual inspections that include HVAC, electrical, and building contractors, will be money well spent. A combination of daily, monthly and annual inspections, done by the right people, can go a long way toward the prevention of floods, fires and serious damage.

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