It was Sunday morning at a Seventh-day Adventist church. Some members were organizing the
kitchen for an upcoming event. James and a friend were taking garbage to the trashcan outside when they noticed a woman walking out from behind the church. Since she was a stranger, they tried to follow her while calling out to her.

She walked faster and faster without looking back until she was off the church property. James and his friend thought that was very odd. Never seeing her before they wondered what she had been doing there. They went back in the direction the lady had come from and discovered she had been in the church’s basement because the door was open. When they entered the basement, they saw all the equipment, and furniture stored there still in place, but they were surprised that she had moved stuff away and made a bed with some blankets.

She was living there! James and his friend were curious to know who she was, why she was there, and for how long. James quickly discovered that the woman had left her purse behind when she exited the building so quickly.

Astonished that there was a lady living in their church’s basement, James could not get past how many risks the church members had taken not knowing she was living there. From her ID James learned she was a teacher at the University of Maryland. Why was she living there? Was she running from something? Was she hiding from someone?

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When the woman came back a few minutes later, James tried to talk to her. She refused to give her name or explain why she was living there or for how long. It was clear that she had been
there for a couple of months. She even admitted she had attended church programs, potluck, and other events. “People were very nice to me,” she said to James.

How can you not know there is a person living in a church without anyone noticing? What if she was running some type of business there? What if something happened to the woman and she died there? How would the church explain who she was and what she was doing there?

This story makes me think of how many risks we’ve taken in our churches. It is my church and its scares me to think, among all the questions above, how many kids run around, without supervision. What if that lady was there to kidnap one or abuse another?

Fortunately, in this story everything turned out well. But we live in a dangerous world. Although a church is God’s house, anything can happen because church members are just regular human beings.

Let’s be vigilant! When I heard this story I felt shocked, disheartened, and violated. With some simple procedures in place, something major like this can be avoided very easily. Three simple procedures that can be used to help protect your church, your home, and school include:

1. “Light it up!” Most crime related incidents take place at night when activities are hidden by darkness. Let your place be a beacon of light in your community. Not just in the spiritual sense, but also in the physical sense. Having a well-lit building and parking lot makes it a poor target for criminals.

2. Create a process so that the last person out of the house, church, or school checks all the windows and exits to be sure they are secured and locked. It doesn’t do much good to lock the front door if the back door is open!

Also, be sure to test the door when you leave to be sure it locked correctly

3. Rekey your locks. No matter how closely you guard your keys, they eventually get into more hands than you can accurately track and your risk increases. Keep a list of who has been given a key. Even if you have been careful and only given keys to a few trusted individuals, it is important to rekey every few years.

By following these tips—lighting, doing a last-person-out walkthrough, and regular rekeying you can lower your risk of experiencing a crime-related loss or an invasion to your property as well.
By Carina Franca,
Marketing Analyst at Adventist Risk Management, Inc.

http://www.adventistrisk.org/Prevention/SolutionsNewsletter/tabid/94/articleType/ArticleView/artId/270/Is-That-a-Stranger-In-The-Basement.aspx