

# Caller at the Vicarage

Guidance for keeping safe whilst serving and living in the Diocese of Liverpool



February 2014



Diocese of  
Liverpool

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# Preface

Most of us who have experienced Parish Ministry have stories to share about callers at the vicarage.

In many cases we may be able to hope that we have made a difference and often we make ourselves available willingly. However, as with all pastoral ministry, we need to be aware of the risks we take.

This helpful booklet sets out some of those risks and how our own behaviour may increase them.

It does not seek to be exhaustive but I hope the booklet will raise the awareness of all who live in parsonage housing that we need to pay attention to the safety and security of ourselves and our families.

There are some very useful tips to be found in the 'Dos and Don'ts' which I especially commend as essential reading.

There is a lovely house blessing that I hope you will use regularly in your prayers.

*+Richard*

# Introduction to Caller at the Door

It was tea-time one Sunday evening and there was a knock at our front door. I opened it to discover John and Jean, (fictional names), not dressed for the weather, asking for my husband.

After some time I joined in the conversation with John and Jean. Claiming to have arrived on our doorstep by train, via a friends' house in a village a good few miles away, they were now in need of the train fare home. (Trains from our local station are about two an hour during rush hour, the chances of John and Jean catching a train home one winter Sunday tea-time were minimal.)

John and Jean's story was elaborate and changed frequently. They claimed to have no money for gas or electric, neither could read and John was due back at the residential home in which he lived, they hadn't eaten all day but didn't want a "food bag". We felt uncomfortable having John and Jean in our own home. Finally my husband and a colleague agreed to take John and Jean to the railway station to allow them to arrange their journey home with the station staff.

Having shared this experience at Bishops Team Meeting all present agreed that fresh guidelines needed to be drawn up for clergy and church workers who find themselves in the similar position of welcoming strangers to their home. The result is this booklet, which I, and the rest of the Working Party, hope and pray you will find useful in your ministry. It is not an exhaustive guide in how to deal with "Vicarage Callers" but hopefully offers some practical information as well as some pointers for help if needed and links to the Diocese of Liverpool website.

My thanks go to all who have contributed to this work and also to John and Jean, wherever they are now. Without their knock at our front door that chilly, wet, dark November evening this booklet would never even have been conceived.

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in...whatever you do for the least of these brothers of mine you do for me..." Matthew 25:35

*Reverend Nicola Milford - February 2014*

# DO'S

- Install a mechanism that allows you to see out of the front door or have verbal contact with the caller without having to open the door, for example CCTV, spy hole, intercom
- Install one way glass, or a curtain over the window of the front door, so that you can see out but the caller cannot see in
- Install a chain on the front door and use it if you are unsure when answering the door
- Have somewhere to sit outside or in the porch, i.e. a bench, so as to avoid inviting people in
- Have a log to record visitors and callers. This is so you can see who frequently asks for advice and would also be useful for the police in the case of an attack to refer back to, to see who was in the building (see pages 8 and 9)
- Consider installing a smoke detector by the front door and a letterbox guard in the case of a burning object being posted through the letterbox or being aimed at the front door
- Carry a personal alarm
- Store food and clothes by the front door to give to callers so as to avoid having to invite them into the vicarage
- When answering the door carry a mobile phone in your pocket for your own safety and also for callers who request to make a phone call to use on the doorstep so as to avoid to invite them into the vicarage
- Before a scheduled appointment with a visitor carry out a risk assessment
- Plan ahead when a visitor is scheduled to visit, try to envisage anything you will need
- Look out for changes in the body language of callers. This could be a sign of increased agitation which could precede an attack
- Be firm with callers but take a relaxed approach too. Put them at ease but do not be afraid of saying no and exerting your authority
- Listen to callers. People feel better when listened to
- Be aware of your vulnerability when alone in the Vicarage. It is advisable to arrange for someone else to be in the Vicarage with you when you anticipate someone unknown to you calling
- Get to know your local Police Community Safety Officers, (PCSO's), they are the eyes and ears of your community and can inform you of situations you ought to be aware of. They are a valuable resource. Also have the local police telephone number to hand

# DON'TS

- Give out money. This could encourage your caller and others to return. Use some form of alternative, for example food vouchers for a local cafe. Money could be used by vulnerable people for a variety of reasons and prevent them from seeking appropriate help.
- Invite someone in to your vicarage who you feel uneasy about
- Use aggressive body language, for example pointing, it could aggravate a situation and cause the caller to start mimicking your aggressive body language too
- Be afraid to call the police, your safety is paramount
- Be argumentative. Whilst at times this may be tempting it is important to remain calm. If you feel unable to control your emotions, remember it is within your rights to ask someone to leave your home
- Assume that a physical or verbal attack will never happen to you
- Forget that you should never be alone with vulnerable adults for your good and theirs, [www.liverpool.anglican.org/Vulnerable-Adults](http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/Vulnerable-Adults)
- Loose sight of the fact that this is your home if you don't want to open the door you don't have to
- Feel the need to advertise the name and address of the vicar on the notice board outside of church - a telephone number is sufficient
- Feel obliged that you have to have a sign saying 'vicarage' or 'rectory' outside your home

*With thanks to Nugent Care for giving permission for us to use their material Handbook for Priests*

**The caller committed a crime**

Phone 999 and report incident

and

Call your Area Dean (who will inform your Archdeacon)

Let other local clergy know the caller may be in the area and ask the Area Dean to disseminate the information

Call Clergy Housing and leave a message on their answer phone or e-mail  
claire.evans@liverpool.anglican.org

**The caller did not commit a crime**

Records of Callers Incident Form  
Who's who in SJH  
- see pages 8 and 9

Call your Area Dean to let him/her know of any concerns.

available from

<http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/index.php?p=147>

Let other local clergy know the caller may be in the area and ask the Area Dean to disseminate the information

# SECURITY

1. The Clergy Housing Committee takes security very seriously and will do its best within its budget to support improvements to items such as security alarms, lighting systems and CCTV systems, fencing etc. They will prioritise consideration of security issues on all DBF owned housing and improve any housing where there is considered to be a security risk.
2. An ongoing programme of window and door replacements with laminated glazing units and high security locking systems is in place. In 2013 approximately 10% of the clergy housing budget was spent on improvements and upgrades.
3. In extreme cases where security issues become impossible to live with the Clergy Housing Committee will consider re-housing either into appropriate rental accommodation or purchase of replacement housing.

## SECURITY INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish: \_\_\_\_\_ Number: \_\_\_\_\_

### Location of Incident

(Please tick appropriately)

Vicarage

Hall

Church

Outside

Inside

Car

### Type of Incident

Vandalism

Burglary

Attempted Burglary

Theft from outside property

Personal attack,  
physical and/or verbal

Theft from inside property

Personal injury to self

Injury to other persons

Personal injury to family

# SECURITY INCIDENT REPORT FORM

## Police

Were the Police informed? **YES / NO** If YES, which Police Force? \_\_\_\_\_  
999 or direct to the Station? \_\_\_\_\_

Did the Police respond? **YES / NO** Response time? \_\_\_\_\_

Name and Number of Officer(s) attending: \_\_\_\_\_

Crime Number, if known: \_\_\_\_\_

## Brief description of the Incident:

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## Description of the alleged offender(s), if known or seen:

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Will this incident be the subject of an Insurance claim? **YES / NO**

Have you contacted other local churches to warn them? **YES / NO**

If YES, does that include:

a) ecumenical partners **YES / NO** b) those of other faiths? **YES / NO**

Please send this form to:

The Ven R Panter,  
Archdeacon of Liverpool,  
St James House, 20 St James Road,  
Liverpool L1 7BY

OR Ven P Bradley,  
Archdeacon of Warrington,  
St James House, 20 St James Road,  
Liverpool L1 7BY

**Action taken or advised as a result** (For staff purposes):

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# CALLERS AT THE DOOR REPORT SHEET

The Vicarage Address: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Date and time</b>				
<b>Caller description (name if known)</b>				
<b>Caller request</b>				
<b>Action taken/ advice given</b>				
<b>Were the police Contacted</b>				
<b>Police incident number</b>				

Under data protection requirements any information recorded should be retained securely incase of future requirement.

# House Blessing

God Bless the Corners of this House

and be the Lintel Blessed

And Bless the Hearth

And Bless the Board

And Bless Each Place of Rest

Bless Each Door That Opens Wide To Strangers and to Kin

And Bless Each Crystal Windowpane

that lets the Sunshine In

And Bless the Roofree Overhead

And Every Sturdy Wall

The Peace of Man

The Peace of God

The Peace of Love to All



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