



Ecclesiastical Insurance Office plc

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A SINGLE CANDLE SHUTS DOWN CONGREGATION

DATELINE TORONTO – On December 25, 2006, a single candle was left burning in a church after a Christmas Day service. The candle toppled into a flower display setting alight a plastic angel and nearby panelling. The church was closed for over ten weeks while black resinous deposit was cleaned from every surface and the organ dismantled and overhauled.

This church, insured by Ecclesiastical Insurance, was fortunate because candle fires can be devastating. Debbie Hastings, Claims Manager for Ecclesiastical Insurance Canada, is familiar with the aftermath of church fires, and warns that the increased use of candles during the holiday season is directly correlated to increased incidents of fire damage. She states that, “Fires resulting from unattended or improperly used candles can cause significant damage and leave a congregation without a place to worship for several months and potentially much longer.”

Safe Use of Candles

Candles are a traditional part of holiday celebrations, both in the home and in places of worship. It is vital to remain aware of the potential risk of fire and vigilant about preventative measures. This sample checklist provides basic safety measures that can be implemented by places of worship, not just during the holidays, but throughout the year.

1. Use good quality candles. Inexpensive candles burn down quickly leaving the flame dangerously close to nearby combustibles like ornaments, tablecloths, etc.
2. Collect extinguished candles immediately after a service or celebration. Place candles in metal container with a lid and store outside the building (e.g., in a shed).
3. Trim the wicks of short candles to avoid large flames, and dispose of any candle shorter than 2 inches in height.
4. Avoid leaving candles burning for long periods of time.
5. If using hand-held candles, use only purpose-made candles with drip trays. Drip trays help prevent ignition of nearby items and damage to skin and clothing from dripping wax.
6. Avoid processions that involve lit candles.

7. Place candles in metal holders on non-combustible surfaces, safely away from electrical equipment, ornaments, linens, and other combustible materials, and away from windows, vents, air ducts and sources of drafts.
8. Keep candles, matches, and lighters out of the reach of children, ideally in a secure metal container hidden from view.
9. Never place candles on Christmas trees.
10. Ensure that the building has adequate, working fire extinguishers and a fire blanket. A fire blanket is ideal for extinguishing burning clothing and hair during the “Stop Drop and Roll” manoeuvre.
11. Ensure adequate means of escape. Unlock all doors before a service and ensure they are easy to open. A steward, with access to all emergency contact numbers, should be stationed at each door. Dedicated individuals should be responsible for calling the fire department and for proper deployment of fire extinguishers. Whoever is leading a service or celebration should be aware of emergency procedures and should be prepared to ask everyone to leave the building in an orderly fashion.
12. Never leave lit candles unattended, and always check that all candles are extinguished before leaving the building.

Other Risk Management Issues

For more information on the safe use of candles and other risk management issues, visit our website at www.ecclesiastical.ca. Click on the Risk Management tab, then on “Click here to sign up now”. Complete the new user registration form and you will receive a return email confirming your password. Use your password and email address to access our risk management White Papers.

About Ecclesiastical Insurance

Ecclesiastical Insurance is the insurer of choice for Canada’s places of worship. The company was established in the United Kingdom in 1887 and opened in Canada in 1972. Ecclesiastical is owned by a charitable trust and is committed to serving the needs of its customers and the larger community. Group profits (other than funds required for business operations) are redistributed for the benefit of faith and charitable initiatives. Ecclesiastical is rated “A” by A.M. Best, and “A-“ by Standard and Poor’s.

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