

GATEKEEPER

SOUTHERN MUTUAL CHURCH INSURANCE



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Churches meet challenges of unprecedented crisis



Churches are about bringing people together. But what do you do when bringing people together *physically* is challenging?

Here's what some of our policyholders did:

- **At Silas United Methodist Church** in Eutawville, SC, "It was chaotic at first," said the Pastor, Reverend Dr. Whittaker Middleton.

But then they started presenting live and recorded services on Facebook. They were full but abbreviated services, including a sermon. There was no singing because there was no choir. The online services have been drawing between 40 and 50 people each week. It's not as many as the 90 to 135 that would come to the sanctuary before the crisis, but "It's growing," said Dr. Middleton.

"We're hearing from people who have moved to other parts of the country, and they're overjoyed." That includes people from as far away as Boston and Miami. "They still call it their church."

- **Old Samaria Baptist Church** in Batesburg, SC, last had "normal" services on March 15. Then there was a week with none at all.

But the next week the church set up for a drive-in movie-style service. "We set some speakers up outside, and folks just drove up in their car,"

said Pastor Barry Anderson. Everyone was able to maintain social distance "in the comfort and safety of their car." It drew larger congregations than usual.

Now services are again held inside – with precautions in place. They are in the Fellowship Hall rather than the sanctuary, because it's roomier. Chairs are about seven feet apart, and attendees are expected to wear masks.

- **Lake Murray Presbyterian Church** in Chapin, SC, had already been working to set up Facebook, YouTube and Livestream of services before the pandemic started closing churches.

"We got it working just in time," remembers the Pastor, Dr. Ben Sloan Sr. The response was extraordinary. "Instead of having 450 in worship, now we're having about 1,700."

The church also started doing a drive-in service at 10:30. People could stay in their cars and listen in with their car radios as the service was broadcast through an FM transmitter with a range of about 500 feet.

On May 26, the church had an in-person gathering at 8:30 – as an alternative to the online experience. "We had about 30," as opposed to just under 100 back before the crisis. "People were excited." Plenty of precautions were taken.

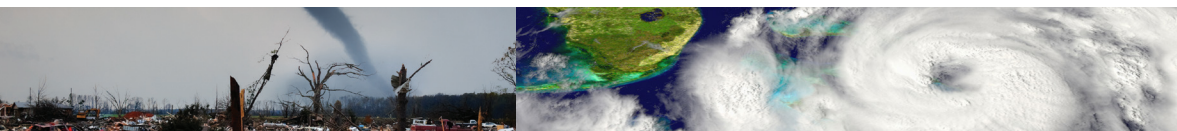
There are differences in the approaches taken by different congregations, but in one way they are all the same: No one at any of these churches will ever forget what happened during the pandemic of 2020, and how they as communities of faith responded.

What sets us apart? Our 3-year rate guarantee

If 2020 has shown us one thing, it is that the world is full of surprises. But with Southern Mutual Church Insurance, you won't be surprised by our rates.

This is a big difference, and a big deal. This is our commitment to you: For three years, you will know that when you receive your renewal notice, it will be for the amount for which you budgeted.

This is nothing new. We've been doing it for more than 50 years. It's an essential expression of the values of this company, and our devotion to serving you. *A lot has changed in 50 years. But our commitment to the three-year rate guarantee has not wavered.*



Disaster can strike whether you are ready or not

Hurricane season has started, and it is forecast to be an active one. We were not a week into it before the Southeast had seen its third named storm of the season – something that has never been recorded before.

But that is not the only kind of weather threat the region has had to deal with in 2020. Right in the middle of the coronavirus shutdown, tornadoes struck across the Southeast. Churches insured by Southern Mutual Church Insurance suffered particularly heavy damage in Tennessee and South Carolina.

McBrooms Chapel Church of Christ in Cookeville, TN, suffered damage that Senior Claims Examiner David Gardiner called “the worst I’ve seen in 38 years as an adjuster.”

Seneca, SC was subject to similar destruction.

“Oh, man, we had an F3 tornado that came through the city of Seneca and destroyed everything,” said Bishop Rico Aiken, Pastor of Destiny Christian Center.

The tornado hit the BorgWarner plant directly across from the church, killing a security guard. Then, “It came across the street and hit our church head-on, destroying the sanctuary altogether,” said Bishop Aiken.

With coverage from SMCI, the church is rebuilding and hopes to have the new sanctuary ready by the start of the new year. Meanwhile, the church is presenting services live on Facebook every Sunday morning. In that way, the coronavirus had set the stage for the church to carry on: “God had already prepared us,” said Bishop Aiken.

Still, “I don’t think anyone is ever prepared for an event like that tornado,” he said. “It’s something that you don’t ever want to experience again.”

Fortunately, no members of the church lost their homes and “The church is still going strong.”

Stewart Fowler of Fowler Preferred Insurance, the agency that handles the insurance for Destiny, said it’s one of the worst cases of damage from a tornado he’s seen in the 55 years his family has been in the church insurance business. He is particularly pleased that the church plans to be in the new building by the end of the year “with the Lord’s blessing and excellent claims service that Southern Mutual Church provides.”

SMCI stands ready to help your church. While you might not be able to prevent a loss from a tornado or other catastrophic event, we can help you be ready to recover from it.



Finding a contractor you can trust

Have you had recent weather-related damage at your church? You are not alone. Quite a few of our friends at churches across the Southeast have needed the services of reliable contractors lately.

But how do you find a contractor you can trust to do the job? Here are some guidelines to consider:

- **First, contact your insurer.** File your claim and let your insurer verify what repairs are necessary. Remember, an insurance advisor or intermediary, while perhaps adept at recognizing risk and recommending ways to reduce it, does not engage in the practice of law. Always seek qualified legal counsel before entering into any significant contract.
- **Make sure the contractor is insured.** Don't sign a contract without proof of the contractor's insurance, which must be underwritten by a financially secure insurer; provide limits adequate for worst-case injury or damage; be broad enough to cover all of the operations to be performed; and directly protect your organization as an Additional Insured.
- **Don't work with "traveling roofers" passing through your area after a storm.** That is a recipe for trouble. Your church is going to stay right where it is, so you should find a contractor who will do the same. Remember, reputable contractors do not solicit business by going door-to-door.
- **Do your homework.** Check your local Better Business Bureau or your state's Attorney General to see if complaints have been filed against the contractor.
- **Get three bids & check references.** Get three written estimates for the work and compare the bids. Require the contractor you choose to give three local references. Be sure to contact them to make sure the work was done on time and up to code.
- **Get a written contract.** And don't let anyone rush you into signing it. Always get a detailed written document that clearly states everything the contractor will do, including prices for labor and materials. Make sure the contract includes clean-up procedures and estimated start and finish dates. Never sign a contract with blanks that can be filled in later by the contractor.
- **Don't pay with cash.** A contractor asking you to do that is a red flag. A check or credit card creates a record of your payment. Verify that the work was done and done right before paying all the invoices.



Church thefts are on the rise

We have been seeing something sad at too many of our churches – a sharp rise in theft. Being unoccupied much of the week, churches present a tempting target to thieves, and many of them have apparently found that temptation too great to resist.

This is driven to a great extent – although not entirely – by the sharp increase in catalytic converter thefts. Those rose dramatically last year, and so far 2020 has been even worse.

But that is not the only problem. Claims Manager John Rentiers of Southern Mutual Church Insurance says all sorts of things of value are regularly stolen from churches.

“Churches don’t keep a lot of money in their buildings,” he said. But thieves break in and take many other things of value – musical instruments, computers, and sophisticated sound equipment. Pretty much anything that can be “taken out of state and sold pretty easily.”

As for catalytic converters, we warned about this problem several months ago on our website. Remember a few years back when people were destroying and stealing the copper out of church air conditioners because the metal was so valuable? This new trend has a similar cause, although it plagues vehicles rather than buildings.

The catalytic converter has been an essential element in vehicles since 1974. It plays an important role in protecting the environment and public health. This exhaust emission control device reduces toxic gases and pollutants in your vehicle’s engine into less-toxic pollutants.

And they are very easy to steal.

Catalytic converters contain three expensive metals – platinum, rhodium, and palladium. Thieves can sell the converters to scrap yards for as much as \$200 apiece. But it can cost you more than \$2,000 to replace, and there is no going without it. Your car won’t run right, and it is illegal for vehicles not to have one.

And the copper thefts we mentioned that were so prevalent several years ago? They’re a problem again. Rentiers notes that those thefts had slowed down a lot, but “in the last six months, started picking back up.” That means thieves tearing up expensive air-conditioning units to steal the copper coils from inside. “We had one case where they stole seven units at one church.”



[smcins.com](https://www.smcins.com)

Check out our website for more information on the catalytic converter problem and how to avoid it. You may also contact one of our professionals at Southern Mutual Church Insurance to see how we can help guard against theft losses.



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

This has been a year of challenges.

First, there's the one that every church we serve has had to contend with: how to fulfill the mission in the face of the coronavirus.

We've been inspired by the creativity, determination and faith that the churches we serve have displayed in continuing worship. So we're particularly happy to share some of their stories in this edition of the Gatekeeper.

As for Southern Mutual Church Insurance itself, we are financially and operationally strong and still managing risk for churches across the Southeast, just as we've done for more than 90 years. Like so many, we've had to adapt and innovate. Some of our employees have been working from home. Like churches and so many workplaces, we've adapted to continue the mission.

That mission includes protecting churches from other threats. COVID isn't the only way nature has offered challenges this year. We've seen some of our churches destroyed by tornadoes – as you can also read about in this edition – and we've just embarked on what is predicted to be a particularly active hurricane season.

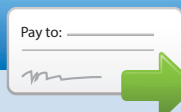
Unfortunately, thefts have also been a problem for many churches this year. From the pricey metals in catalytic converters and air-conditioning units to items thieves can simply pick up and walk away with from sanctuaries and offices. It's becoming all too common, and we've offered advice on how congregations can protect themselves.

We stand ready to help as always in your time of need. Whatever kind of coverage you need, please think of us. I urge you to call us at 1-800-922-5332, or visit us at www.smcins.com.

Robert Bates, CPCU, CRM, CIC, AIS

President & CEO, Southern Mutual Church Insurance Company

Turn to SMCI for Growing Needs



Southern Mutual Church Insurance pledges to be there for policyholders in their time of need whether they are recovering from a fire or expanding to meet a growing congregation's needs.

That is why we are happy to offer mortgage loans of up to \$400,000 for expansion, renovation or remodeling. We offer competitive rates and we can have the check in your hands in less than six weeks.

Call 1-800-922-5332 and talk with Phil Frazier in our Mortgage Loan Department to learn more.

Connect to our online resources

Visit the Resources section of our website to find helpful information about the issues facing churches today. We have created informative articles, videos and handouts about topics such as church security, child protection, cyber security, theft and more. You will also find the latest edition of the Gatekeeper. Visit www.smcins.com and click on Resources.

Payment Is A Click Away



At Southern Mutual Church, we like to make things easier for our churches. That is why we offer a simple, online payment system for policies that will transfer the money directly from your church's checking account.

Simply go to our home page, www.smcins.com, and click on "Make A Payment." The instructions on that page will walk you through the process.



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