



Venezuela's different kind of "Neighborhood Watch"

What do you do to secure your home against thieves breaking in and stealing everything? The responses from folks in Minnesota and here in Venezuela stand in stark contrast. Here's a representative sampling of those from Minnesota. Note the relatively low level of concern over home security.

"We just lock doors and hopefully remember to close the garage." "Just locking doors when we don't forget." "We lock our doors, and that's it. Sometimes I forget the keys are still in the car." "My son bought a house in South Minneapolis and asked for keys for the locks. They said they didn't have keys since they never locked their house." "We don't have any security system. Our cousins had an extra security system sticker, so we put that on the door." "A friend gave me an extra Custom Alarm sign that I have stuck in the ground near our front door." "The home we bought has a complete security system, but I never turn it on." It seems that lots of folks in Minnesota aren't particularly worried about home security and, as a result, take rather minimal precautions.

Lest some less-than-well-intentioned reader take the above as an invitation for relatively carefree acquisition with a "five-finger discount", some respondents do have motion detectors with lights, some with cameras that send pictures or place a call to their phones when anyone comes near. Many rely on what one called "the old fashioned kind of security we had as kids", by which he means attentive neighbors and dogs. "We live in a townhouse area. There is security in knowing we look out for each other. I text them about an open garage door, lights left on, or tools left out." Another responded, "Good neighbors. And our neighborhood dogs alert us to prowlers, raccoons, the local deer herd, the bunny-foraging owl, or the teen that comes in late."

Only one respondent, who lives out in the country with no neighbors nearby, recounted suffering break-ins. "They used a tire iron to break a window while we were at work. They left it on our bed, and a lot was taken. After that we installed a system with alarms, a glass break indicator and motion detectors up and down. A thief got in again, this time through a second floor window using a ladder, but fled when the alarm system kicked in."

As with many communities in Minnesota, there is a sort of "Neighborhood Watch" here in Venezuela, but the ones doing the watching are the thieves. "They forced the back door while I wasn't home and took a TV, a radio, and a VCR." "They stole all the steel rebar we had for adding onto the house." "They broke the door in and stole air conditioners, a microwave, a bed, the refrigerator, a computer and lots more. I was home alone and ran so they wouldn't grab me." "Six guys in two vehicles followed my sister home. When she entered the garage, they came at her with pistols and stole the car." "They came over the neighbor's wall into our patio and took a fan, car batteries, and a machine for grinding corn. We only realized what had happened when we woke up the next morning." "They stole all of my sister's and my gold jewelry." "They broke the lock and stole all our electronics, clothes, shoes, etc. We added more steel rods for additional protection." "They stole our gas canisters." "They stole a cluster of bananas growing in my yard and the electrical wiring to recycle the copper." "We always lock our doors, but they came in through the roof. Unfortunately, our fiercest dog had just died." These responses multiplied over and over are, unfortunately, the rule here rather than the exception.

The high incidence of theft can't be blamed on Venezuela's faltering economy. Back in the '90s, when the economy here was still strong, I asked people at Mass if they had suffered a break-in and robbery. Pretty much everyone raised their hand. In fact, the current economic woes may actually be resulting in a decrease in theft. A couple weeks ago, a lady from our parish was accosted at gunpoint in front of her house. She simply turned her bag upside down and let its contents fall to the street. "Take what you want," she told them. Seeing her calmness and the lack of anything of value, the youths turned and ran. "Just kids," she later told me. "The real thieves have left for the gold fields. They know that folks around here don't have much left worth stealing."

It's not hard to understand why, when Venezuelans see pictures of homes in Minnesota, they can't believe how unprotected they are. No concrete wall surrounding the property with broken bottles or spikes on top. No steel bars protecting the windows and glass patio doors. Bicycles and other stuff just left sitting out in yards. I don't know why things in Minnesota are the way they are, why we take so few precautions by comparison, but a life so relatively trusting and secure would be the makings of a dream for our Venezuelan people.

Points to ponder

What do you do for home security? Do you feel it is adequate? Have you ever had anything stolen?

These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year.