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**CRIME ALERT      CRIME ALERT      CRIME ALERT      CRIME ALERT**

## **Church Phone Scams**

The Essex Police Department has received several complaints recently from church officials about on going phone scams directed at multi-denominational churches and church official.

The first scam involved a suspect calling a church and pretended to be a long time parishioner of the church on a long distance vacation. The suspect reports that their money had been stolen and they needed the church to send them money so they could get home. The suspect explained that they would pay the church back as soon as they got back from vacation the next week. The suspect not only knew the church officials name, but the parishioner's name and the correct fact that the real parishioner was in fact on vacation. The church official wanting to assist their parishioner sent money via Western Union to the suspect. The suspect was even bold enough to call back the church official to tell they that he had received the money and would be paying the church back as soon as they got home.....I think you know the ending.

A second scam just weeks later was close to the first scam. In this scam the suspect called the church because he knew the church was looking for a new leader (Minster, priest, rabbi, etc.) and looking to do some fund raising. The suspect offered to come to the church to help them through the selection process and help them raise money. The suspect contacted church officials on the day he was suppose to fly from Montreal Canada into a local airport and reported that his personnel belongings had just been stolen including his ticket. The suspect asked the church official to send money for a new plane ticket for he and his wife and they would repay him as soon as they arrived at the local airport. Somewhat suspicious the church official contacted the local airline that confirmed that the suspect and his wife were booked on a flight from Montreal to the local airport. Feeling more confident with this information, the church official sent a large sum of money to the suspect in Montreal. The plane landed but to the church officials' surprise, the suspect and his wife did not get off the plane.

Contact with area church officials indicates that this type of fraud is occurring regularly.

Please use extreme caution with all phone solicitations for money.