

E-News
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Just by Chance

Last week I was on vacation in Tennessee attending Boy Scout Camp with my son. I've served as a leader for his scouting unit for the last seven years and as part of that I had to get a criminal background check and take a 90-minute training course on the youth protection practices of the BSA. I had to retake that training every two years to continue to serve. The BSA now has some of the best child protection practices I've seen with things like "two-deep leadership" and "no one-on-one contact" ingrained into my consciousness. But it was not always so. When I was a youth the practices of the BSA were not so robust. Those were the days of "stranger danger" when we presumed that the real threat to children was from strange men in trench coats with panel vans and not your neighbor Tim or Uncle John. In those days, we presumed that if we knew someone, we'd know if they were dangerous or not. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We all could have benefited from a stern dose of Calvinism and the doctrine of Total Depravity to remind us that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Crime statistics show that most children who are abused are abused by someone they know—a teacher, a coach, a family member, etc. Which means that the child protection practices of the scouts in those days were woefully insufficient, and a lot of kids got hurt. It breaks my heart to know that the same program that did so much good in my life—teaching me important life skills, helping me develop as a leader, and instilling in me a sense of discipline—is the same program that also did so much harm for other kids like me. That is what is at the core of the BSA's bankruptcy settlement over the last few years: paying for the sins of the past, putting measures in place so that it does not happen again, and ensuring that the core mission to instill in young people a "duty to God and country" continues.

Being a scout leader for my son has taught me a lot about the Church as well. I've come to understand that scouting and the Church have a lot in common. Both are values-based organizations that leverage the work of volunteers to instill those values and improve the world. They share many of the same goals and they struggle with many of the same issues. Sadly, lacks in child protection is one of them. That is why the General Assembly recommended, and the presbyteries have now agreed, to add new requirements to the Book of Order concerning these issues. The Book of Order already required that every council have a Child & Youth Protection Policy but starting in July those councils will also need to be able to show that every member of a council has received training in those policies at least every 36 months. That means that every member of presbytery (minister member, ruling elder enrolled as an officer, or Commissioned Pastor) will need to take that training. It also means that every session member will need to be trained as well. Moderators and Clerks of Session will note that a question about this will be added to the annual minutes review and sessions can accomplish this by making children protection training part of their annual officer preparation process. However, for some of our congregations the first step will be to have a policy at all; some congregations do not have a policy and others have not reviewed and updated them recently. While this process can seem cumbersome and the requirements of these policies often go

against our instincts (we're having a hard enough time getting someone to watch the nurse what if doing a background check scares them away?), let us remember that the cost to the Boy Scouts of America was \$2.4 billion not to mention the hit to their reputation of violating their own core values of being "trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly.. etc." More importantly, this is not the witness of the Gospel. Jesus teaches us that "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me, for the least among all of you is the greatest" (Luke 9:48). How we welcome a child is how we welcome Jesus himself. What kind of welcome will you give?

If you need help developing or updating your policy, I recommend that you speak with your insurance provider as most have tools to help you think about these issues as well. Finally, please feel free to reach out to the presbytery for guidance. [The presbytery's policy can be found here](#). Please note that each congregation will need to consider issues specific to their ministry that may not be covered by simply copying someone else's policy (pre-schools, building layout, mission trips, etc.). Eastminster Presbytery is also happy to run background checks for our congregations to help you implement these important safety measures.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,
Barry