

**Enews for 3/13/2024**  
**Registered Sex Offenders in the Church**

*Just by Chance*

In the last few months, I've had people from four different churches contact me with concerns about a registered sex offender who was or who might be coming to worship. Cases like these put our belief in grace, our commitment to justice, and our obligation to protect the vulnerable in tension with one another. I lived in that tension in my first call where I was the pastor to 25 adults with intellectual disabilities AND I was called upon to visit a man who was in prison for abusing someone like them. I was pastor to all of them, but I realized that when he was paroled, I would have a problem—how can I minister to both in the same small church? How can the session turn away someone who is expressing a desire to turn his life over to Jesus Christ while also protecting the vulnerable people who already called our congregation home? In the end, I was called to serve a new congregation before he was paroled so that question was left for others to discern. However, I carried that question with me to my new congregation as we began to write a child and youth protection policy that sought to keep everyone safe while we held weekly classes for children and youth, Vacation Bible School, a drama camp, and a trip to Montreat Youth Conference every summer. With the help of our insurance company and the local Child Advocacy Center with whom we partnered, we added windows to the doors in our Sunday School rooms, set rules for proper adult supervision, and required background checks. We also developed a policy for how we would work with a registered sex offender who wanted to worship with us. I've shared this policy with those congregations who have already called me, and I shared it here in case your congregation needs to think about this too.

The *Book of Order* has required that all councils have a child & youth protection policy for many years now (G-3.0107). Many sessions adopted the presbytery's policy as their own to satisfy this requirement. That is a good start; however, I counsel sessions to think about the kinds of ministries that congregations have that the presbytery does not: weekly worship service with childcare provided, camps, VBS, mission trips, after-school tutoring programs, scout troops, and pre-schools to name a few. For some congregations, the presbytery's policy is enough but for others you may need to expand upon that policy to reflect the different kinds of ministry that you are doing. Last year we amended the *Book of Order* to require not only that councils have a child & youth protection policy but that each member of the council receive training on that policy at least every 36 months. The best way to accomplish this is to include your policy as part of the training new officers receive when they begin a term on session (G-2.0402). Beyond that, however, I encourage sessions to put review of their current policy on the agenda once a year. Regular review of the policy has the advantage of helping the session notice when practices are not being followed and can lead to updates when the session approves a new ministry or an existing ministry faces an issue that was not foreseen. If you need help with this process, please let me know.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,  
Barry

[Registered Sex Offender Policy - Sample](#)