

COPC Policy: Dealing with Convicted Sex Offender

This policy relates to a situation in which a congregation learns that a convicted sex offender has been attending its services or activities.

1. Be certain that the individual is a convicted sex offender. Check the National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW) at <http://www.nsopw.gov> for verification.
2. Check with local police about local restrictions about whether they prohibit an offender from having any contact with minors or being anywhere that children congregate.
3. Meet with the Offender. When the congregation becomes aware of the presence of a sex offender, the session of COPC should schedule a meeting with the individual. Such a meeting serves several purposes, including the following:
 - Informs the person that the session is aware of his/her background;
 - Affords an opportunity for the session to provide and explain its policy;
 - Provides an opportunity to discuss ministry needs of the individual;
 - Allows for signing an authorization for a background check and release of probation/parole information to COPC; and
 - Session will inform the adult offender that the congregation will be made aware of his legal record.

If the individual will not agree to the guidelines, or is prohibited by the terms of his or her probation or parole from going where children congregate, by default the individual will be excluded from participation in the congregation's services and activities.

4. If the session and trustees decide that the known offender may attend worship services, they will establish clear requirements for that attendance, in writing.
5. In order to protect church members, the known offender's deviation from this policy will result in exclusion from public meetings.

Safeguarding Children is Key

While the precautions mentioned in this Policy may seem extreme to some, there is little margin of error for the church. If an incident were to occur a second time, a church with knowledge of an individual's past sexual misbehaviors with children will face enormous legal liability if it provided the setting for a later crime. In the delicate balance between ministering to the needs of an offender and providing for the safety of the church's children, it is better to err on the side of the children.