

The Church's Responsibility for Ministering to Sexual Offenders

Position and Policy

11/18/2011

This document represents the understanding and position of the Elders and Pastors of Fellowship Church concerning the issue of the presence of sexual offenders in the church. It is intended to be used as a guide in the handling of all such matters that arise in our body that are a result of this issue. This policy in no way relieves an offender from following all laws, guidelines, and restrictions placed upon them by their rules of probation, sex offender statutes, or community supervision for life requirements. FEFC and its staff will at all times comply with the laws of the state and federal governments including mandatory abuse reporting laws.

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The Church's Responsibility for Ministering to Sexual Offenders

Over the past few years the elders and pastors of Fellowship Church have become increasingly aware of the reality of sex offenders in the church. Today's church may have convicted sex offenders who come forward to make the leadership aware of their presence or it may have those who have committed sexual offenses in the past but are afraid to come forward. There may be those who have been caught but not officially charged. Some may be recovering sex offenders but are not believers. Others may profess a new relationship with Christ. What, if any, responsibility does the Body of Christ have toward repentant sex offenders; what responsibility does it have to protect the members and visitors and what responsibility does it have toward those who may have been a victim of sexual abuse?

This is no small issue or problem. Sexual perversion, and the acting out of it, is at an all-time high in our society. The statistics are staggering, such as these from Family Watchdog:

- 1 of 5 girls will be sexually molested before her 18th birthday
- 1 of 6 boys will be sexually molested before his 18th birthday
- 2 of 3 sexual abuses are perpetrated against teenagers or younger children.
- 90% of sexual assaults are committed against someone the perpetrator knows.
- There are 400,000 new victims of sexual assault every year in the US.
- There are over 550,000 registered sex offenders in the US.
- There are over 100,000 sex offenders that fail to register in the US.

Although it would be easier to ignore the issue, the reality is sexual offense has touched the lives of a very high percentage of our attendees. Integrity demands that we protect our congregants from the evil intent of sexual predators or even first time offenders that succumb to temptation. The leadership of Fellowship Church intends, as best we can, to deal with this issue in the most Christ honoring way we can. To be sure, any policy will be a living document that will be amended as needed as we learn and grow. Our goal is to present Christ to a sick and dying world by: protecting, as best we can, the congregation in our care; ministering to those who have been sexually victimized; ministering to the repentant sexual offender - " that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." (1 Corinthians 12:25)

What constitutes a sexual offence and who is a sexual offender vary somewhat from state to state. Appendix 'A' contains excerpts from the Tennessee Code. For the purposes of this paper and all future dealings with the subject at Fellowship Church, the following definition will be used:

"Whether they have been legally convicted or not, a sex offender is a person who has committed one or more sexual offenses against another person with or without their knowledge. Sexual offenses are acts that are performed for the sexual gratification of the offender that involve elements of forced contact of the victim(s) and/or the lack of consent of the victim(s). Such acts are clearly forbidden and condemned by the Bible (1 Cor.6:13; 1 Cor. 6:18; Lev. 18:6-17; Lev. 20:9-20; Mat. 5:27-29). The victims may be either adults or children. For the purpose of this definition; any sexual act committed with or

against a child (anyone under 18 years of age), including viewing and/or possessing child pornography, will be considered "without consent" of the victim and will be considered a sexual offense."

Biblical principles that guide us as we deal with sex offenders.

1. Fear not.

Understandably, sexual abuse and sex offenders are topics that are infused with emotion. To those who have been abused the subject can evoke a flood of emotions from fear to grief and shame. For others, disgust and anger. The church should be a safe place. But scripture warns us of wolves that will come in (Acts 20:29) not sparing the flock and that the devil, like a lion, is seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Nevertheless we are not to respond to these dangers from a place of fear. We are to submit to God, and resist the devil. Submitting to God requires doing things God's way; treating each other as the Word teaches us to do. It means taking measures to protect the flock from danger, binding up the injured and bringing back those who have strayed (Ezekiel 34:4, 34:22; Proverbs 22:3).

- Philippians 4:6"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God".
- 2 Timothy 1:7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.
- 1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

2. We are all sinners saved by grace - "And such were some of you"

We need to understand and accept that in present times the Body of Christ will have repentant, redeemed and reconciled to the Father, sex offenders in its ranks. It is also reasonable to expect that some of these will come to our church looking for a place to worship and grow. As we can see from scripture, receiving repentant sinners with sordid pasts into the fellowship has been going on from the beginning of the Church in the book of Acts. Paul, speaking to believers, tells them that the sexually immoral, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards and a long list of other sinful life styles, will not inherit the kingdom of God. And then he says "*And such were some of you*" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). In Colossians 3:5-11 he says "*In these you too once walked*" and again in Ephesians 2:2 "*in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience*". The Church has always been comprised of forgiven sinners from every imaginable walk of life.

- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor

adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you.

- Colossians 3:5-11 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. *Here* there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

3. We must receive those whom Christ receives; God shows no partiality

In submitting to God, we must receive those whom Christ receives. *"11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." "* (Romans 10:11-13). We can, by God's grace, receive repentant sex offenders and provide for them fellowship, teaching and spiritual growth opportunities including service, while keeping our children and congregants safe. We also can, by God's grace, help those in our body that have been sexually abused to heal, grow and be restored - taking care to be sensitive to the fear or discomfort they might experience knowing that there are sex offenders in the church. The kingdom of God must mean the same things to all believers no matter what their past has been. The church should be a place where all repentant sinners find: forgiveness, acceptance, love, encouragement, fellowship, teaching, and being an integral and vital member of the Body who serves and is being served. This does not mean that everyone's experience of the Church will necessarily be exactly the same. Whereas forgiveness for the repentant soul is unconditional, life in the Body of Christ can be affected by the consequences of our sins. It is incumbent on the believer to forgive as he has been forgiven but where trust has been broken –as it has with sex offenders – trust will need to be regained, though there are some areas of broken trust where certain activities or service opportunities may have been forfeited for a lifetime.

- Romans 2:11 For God shows no partiality.
- 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 "that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together".
- 2 Corinthians 2:5-8 For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

- Jude 21-23 And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.
- Rom 15:1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

4. **Every other sin a person commits is outside the body**

Scripture indicates that sexual sin is different than other types of sin; it would seem, according to Paul, that it has a more grievous and devastating effect on our bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:18). For this reason, the manner in which we deal with the issue, and the restrictions and precautions we take with sex offenders will be different than might be taken in dealing with other kinds of sin.

- 1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

5. **Protecting the flock**

A. **From known sexual offenders**

Although we must receive whom Christ receives, we are still required to exercise Godly wisdom. And although we are required to forgive we are not necessarily required to trust. Even though a sexual offender may have paid their “debt” to society they lose to differing degrees the common trust that society gives to each member. In doing so, they lose some of the common freedoms other congregants enjoy, such as moving about the church building freely. Appendix ‘B’ lists categories of sexual offenders that the leadership of Fellowship Church will use to help determine what level of restriction a known sexual offender may be required to abide by.

There are other types of sexual offenders that our leadership must also make special provision for... those who, although possibly not convicted of a crime, have a reputation or repeated instances of inappropriate touching or behavior that consistently make the receiving parties uncomfortable; those who may be “womanizers” (a man who consistently tries to develop as many relationships with women as he can to stroke his ego and ultimately to seduce them) and other similar types of behavior.

The specific measures that will be taken with known sex offenders – both believers and those, whose spiritual state is unsure – are outlined below:

- 1) **Risk Assessment Panel:** Requests from sex offenders to participate in our church will be reviewed by this panel. Each case must be assessed individually. Some sex offenders are more likely to re-offend than others. Some offenses may have been viewing offenses, such as downloading pictures or videos, other offenses may have involved actual contact with

victims. It will be the panel's responsibility to meet with the offender and when necessary others who can help us understand all the dynamics of the case i.e., their probation officer, social worker, and local police, to make the determination of the gravity of the offense and to get a better sense of whether or not we should allow the offender to participate in our church body, and to what extent. They will gather pertinent public records from the government agencies that arrested and prosecuted the individual. They will also verify with probation and treatment providers that the registered offender is meeting all probation and treatment expectations. If the offender is allowed to participate and enter into a relationship with the church, this verification will be an ongoing responsibility of the Risk Assessment Panel (RAP). Registered sex offenders who have entered into a relationship with the church will always be subject to monitoring and guidelines for their behavior, no matter how long they have attended.

Whenever the Risk Assessment Panel becomes aware of the fact that there are one or more victims within our church of a sex offender who has asked to participate in our church, the panel will make every effort to address any concerns or objections the victim(s) may have before permission is granted to the offender to participate in any aspect of our church.

2) **Creation of a Covenant of Accountability:**

This is a list of expectations for sex offenders to follow and expectations for church leaders to provide support and guidance.

- a. **On the church's part:** Based on the individual's risk assessment, the RAP will formulate a plan to present to the offender on what he/she can expect the church to provide in the way of support, worship and spiritual growth opportunities and accountability. This would include to what level the church is willing to allow the offender to participate in the activities of the church and execution of which will be assigned to an ongoing Accountability Team (defined below).
- b. **On the offender's part:** The panel would create a **Covenant of Behavior** that the offender would be willing to sign and abide by that is designed to help them manage their behavior and avoid situations that provide opportunities for further offense. A **Covenant of Behavior** may include, but not be limited to, the following:

COVENANT OF BEHAVIOR

(Example Only)

- I will faithfully commit to a spiritual growth and accountability plan designed and administered by the Accountability Team.
- I waive any claim of confidentiality of communications between myself and my probation officer(s).

- I will never allow myself to be in a situation where I am alone with children under the age of 18.
 - I will attend meetings/small groups as directed by the Accountability Team.
 - I will sit where directed in the church and will not place myself in the vicinity of children and young people under the age of 18.
 - I will not enter certain parts of the building designated by the Accountability Team, or any area where children's activities are in progress.
 - I will decline invitations of hospitality where there are children under the age of 18 in the home.
 - I accept that persons 'x' and 'y' will sit with me during church activities, accompanying me when I need to use other facilities. They will know that I am a sex offender and will understand the importance of all aspects of this Covenant of Behavior.
 - I accept that person 'z' will provide me with pastoral care.
 - I accept that there are certain people who will need to be told of my circumstances in order for them to protect the children/young people for whom they care.
 - I accept that contact will need to be made with my probation officer, who will meet with church leaders or members of the Accountability Team as and when necessary.
 - I understand that if I do not keep to these conditions, then I may be banned from attending the church, and in such circumstances the church leaders may choose to inform the statutory agencies (e.g. probation and social services) and any other relevant organization, and the church congregation.
 - I understand that any other concerns will be taken seriously and reported
 - I understand that this contract will be reviewed regularly every [*to be determined by the covenant*] months and will remain for an indefinite period.
- 3) On acceptance of the **Covenant of Accountability** and signing of the **Covenant of Behavior a Risk Management/Accountability Team** will be created by the **Risk Assessment Panel**. This team will be responsible for the care, oversight and management of the sex offender including his spiritual growth. Each team member will be trained in regard to their particular duties and responsibilities with the SO. It is important to verify the desire and spiritual growth of the individual to make sure, as much as possible, that his purpose in wanting to be in church has to do with his relationship with God. This team would consist of three to five individuals.

B. From unknown sexual offenders

The steps taken to protect the congregation, especially the children, are included in the church's Kid Safe policy. Having a strong 'Kid Safe' policy with high visibility, that is encouraged and valued by the leadership and promoted to the congregation, will be one of the best ways to protect our children from unknown sexual offenders.

- Ezekiel 34:22 I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey.

- Ezekiel 34:4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought (English Standard Version)
- Proverbs 22:3 The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.
- Luke 17:2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.
- Lev 18:6 “None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD.”

6. Shepherding the flock:

A. **When to tell the church about the presence of a sex offender?**

The decision to disclose to the congregation the presence of known sex offenders will be made on a case by case basis, requiring much prayer and discussion among the elders and pastors. Communicating the participation of a sex offender should always be done in consultation with appropriate legal counsel. Offenders, as well as victims, have a right to privacy that we are legally bound to respect. Under certain circumstances we may reserve the right to disclose this to the whole congregation. There are many aspects to consider when making the decision – some of which are:

- A sex offender requesting to come and participate in the church may not want his past to be made known or their spouse may not want it known.
- Pastoral staff, especially those engaged in childcare, need to know about the presence and identity of a sex offender.
- There are many benefits to the congregation being aware that known sex offenders may be allowed to attend, or even join, the church. Not least of these would be inadvertently allowing contact between the individual and children. Discussing the issue can promote understanding and support. Choosing how and when to inform is preferable to people finding out on hearsay and spreading the knowledge in fearful rumor.
- Disadvantages would include the very real possibility that the person, or couples, spiritual growth could be hindered by rejection or worse. The reaction by those in the congregation that have been sexually abused themselves, may be very strong and evoke in them fear, anger, revulsion and the stirring up of memories that may require pastoral attention.
- Communicating the participation of a registered sex offender should always be done in consultation with appropriate legal counsel. Offenders, as well as victims, have a right to privacy that we are legally bound to respect.

B. Shepherding the offender.

Along with the willingness of a congregation to offer the hand of fellowship to a repentant sex offender, there needs to be consistent, loving support and acceptance. This support needs to be informed, administered with understanding, and void of any sentimentality that might allow unsafe situations. The repentant sex offender needs a community of committed brothers and sisters that are aware of their struggles and willing to challenge behavior that might invite temptation. The church should be a place where the repentant sex offender can find encouragement, support, accountability and direction as they work on rebuilding their lives and walking out the Christ life. Involvement/engagement in the following areas has been shown to help sex offenders reduce the risk of reoffending:

- Completing treatment programs
- The support of family and friends after release
- Connection and involvement in a community
- Avoiding situations involving contact with children
- Involvement in an on-going treatment program(s)
- Agreeing to be monitored

The above, are areas where the church could play an important role in the lives sex offenders life through encouragement and accountability. Whenever possible, our church seeks to come alongside the repentant sex offender to help them put as many of these elements into place as is possible and/or necessary.

C. Shepherding the victim/survivor

As stated previously, the statistics regarding the number of people in the typical congregation that may have been sexually abused is staggering and of those that have reached adulthood many have not found healing from the emotional scars and whose lives, behaviors and relationships may be hindered and haunted by the abuse. We want to give as much attention to ministering to the victims of sexual abuse as we do ministering to sexual offenders. Some of the ways we as a church currently do this are:

- Awareness
- Small group support as need arises
- Counseling
- Referrals when more intensive, long term counseling is required

There are other ways as well. Our prayer would be that, through God's power and grace, those who find healing and freedom from the crippling pain of past abuse would be the ones who become the compassionate ministers best able to come alongside those who also have been abused.

D. Shepherding the general congregant

Dealing with the presence of sex offenders in our church may cause concerns and fears to surface. It is important that these are heard and addressed. The desire of the leadership at Fellowship church is to address the issues from a biblical perspective and respond from an informed and knowledgeable understanding of the risks and realities in ministering to the repentant sex offender and protecting the congregation, as best as possible, from sexual offenses. Some of the ways we as a church can do this are:

- Biblically based teaching concerning various aspects of the issue.
- Willingness to discuss various aspects of the issue.
- Faithfully executing the 'Kid's Safe' policy
- Firm leadership in dealing with all sexually inappropriate behaviors.

Appendix A

TENNESSEE CODE, 37-1-401, *et seq.*

What Constitutes Abuse

Any wound, injury, disability, or physical or mental condition which is of a nature as to reasonably indicate that it has been caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect; also includes sexual abuse

Mandatory Reporting Required By

Physician, chiropractor, hospital personnel, any other health or mental health professional, spiritual healing practitioner, school teacher/personnel, judge, social worker, day care center worker, foster care worker, law enforcement officer, neighbor, relative, friend, or any other person

Basis of Report of Abuse/neglect

Having knowledge or being called on to render aid to any child suffering from or sustaining a wound or injury which is of such a nature as to reasonably indicate or which on the basis of available information appears to indicate have been caused by brutality, abuse or neglect

To Whom Reported

Department of Children's Services

Penalty

Class A misdemeanor: false reporting of child sexual abuse: Class E felony

Appendix B

CATEGORIES OF SEX OFFENDERS:

RED ZONE
A sex offender of any kind who...

Exhibits these characteristics:

- non - remorseful
- refused to participate/complete treatment programs or follow-up
- Demonstrated an unwillingness /untrustworthiness in submitting to authority or boundaries

Participation level:

- No participation at all with any in this category.

ORANGE ZONE
Sex offender who committed sexually offensive acts with elements of forced contact who...

Generally exhibit these characteristics:

- Demonstrates sincere remorse/repentance
- Successfully completed relevant treatment programs and follow-up
- Demonstrates a willingness and trustworthiness at submitting to authority/boundaries

Participation level:

Severe Restrictions

- From campus or certain parts of campus
- Constant supervision while in church activities
- From many church activities/functions.

YELLOW ZONE
Sex offender who committed sexually offensive acts without elements of forced contact who...

Generally exhibit these characteristics:

- Demonstrates sincere remorse/repentance
- Successfully completed relevant treatment programs and follow-up
- Demonstrates a willingness and trustworthiness at submitting to authority/boundaries

Participation level:

Few to Moderate Restrictions

- from certain church activities/functions/service opportunities
- Ongoing monitoring, accountability, community