

## Resources for Churches

### Policies for Registered Sex Offenders

*Developed December 2023*



Ministry to those who are on a registered sex offender (RSO) list is a unique pastoral opportunity for elders and children's ministry leaders. A congregation's policy is highly contextual based on the makeup of the congregation and the state laws by which a church must operate. Below are some guidelines to consider, as well as an example of a policy developed by a PCA church. Because of the highly contextual nature of these pastoral situations, CDM can not recommend a policy; instead, we invite you to consider the material below and work with local authorities and legal counsel to develop a policy that best fits your unique context.

### **Advice from Church Consultant Steve Collins**

Former Director of *Adults Protecting Children, Inc.*, Flowery Branch, GA

Member at Christ the King PC, Braselton, GA.

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It is such a complicated issue, and unfortunately, what I have found is that a church will seek out another church that has a policy on this topic and adopt it. That policy was likely adopted from another church. However, this is an issue where how you make the decision is maybe more important than the decision of allowing or not allowing sex offenders to attend. Any church that makes this decision without involving survivors of child sexual abuse is making a big mistake (in my opinion). The problem is that church leadership probably doesn't know how many survivors of child sexual abuse are attending every week because most of them have not found the church to be a safe place to tell their stories. And when a session makes the decision to allow a sex offender to attend and they learn about it, there are often unintended consequences for these victims. There is the potential that church, for them, becomes even more unsafe, yet leadership may not even be aware of what is taking place.

My own church, Christ the King in Braselton, GA will start the process of writing a policy in January 2024. I anticipate it will take us at least 8 months or more to have a document that the session can approve. We will include those women we know are survivors from the beginning. We also have to have counseling resources available for women who will be triggered by these discussions and for any woman who is secretly carrying the wound of abuse and who connects with a survivor in the process and finds the courage to begin therapy. We have to give all these women time to process this. That is just one reason it will take so long.

The question isn't whether or not a sex offender will want to attend. The question is when it happens, will the church be prepared?

### **Policy Statement of Christ the King PC, Cambridge, MA.**

Ms. Dana Russell, Children's Ministry Director

*Statement in the congregation's child protection policy:*

Sexual Offenders: [church] may allow a person known to be a sexual offender to remain or become a member of the congregation but they must adhere to specific guidelines:

1. A registered sexual offender cannot participate in any of the child or youth programs in any way;
2. While participating in church-related activities, a known sexual offender must comply with any requirements set out by the Session which may include the need to report in and be accompanied by another adult.
3. [church] reserves the right to disclose the identity of the sexual offender to the congregation.

Nothing above shall limit the Session from imposing additional requirements on a registered sexual offender nor from imposing similar requirements on a known sexual offender.

## **Child Protection Policy Manual, Covenant PC, Harrisonburg, VA**

Ms. Lisa Updike, Director of Children's Ministries

### **COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH POLICY FOR REGISTERED SEX OFFENDERS**

#### **Approval Process for Registered Sex Offenders**

1. When church leaders become aware that a registered sex offender (RSO) is attending or desires to attend Covenant Presbyterian Church (CPC), they shall inform the RSO Shepherding Committee (this committee includes at least the Executive Pastor, the Director of Congregational Care and Counseling, and a Ruling Elder).
2. The RSO Shepherding Committee will pursue an initial meeting with the RSO to discuss the RSO's criminal history, to document that history, and to explain our requirements necessary for him/her to attend CPC.
  - As part of this process, a RSO Shepherding Plan will be crafted for each individual RSO. This plan will be overseen by the RSO Shepherding Committee, list the details of the agreement between the church and the RSO including what is expected of the RSO, what events he/she can attend, where in the building he/she can be, and what accountability looks like within this agreement. The RSO Shepherding Committee may amend the RSO Shepherding Plan at its discretion, and will notify the RSO of those changes. Notification will include a signature acknowledgement on the amended plan document.
  - The RSO Shepherding Committee will obtain the RSO's signature on the Registered Sex Offender Agreement.
3. If the RSO would like to move forward in the process, the RSO Shepherding committee will hold a second meeting with the RSO to obtain the documents and waivers necessary for the RSO's shepherding plan should he/she be approved. The following information and/or items will be required and discussed at this meeting:
  - The nature of the RSO's conviction(s) and complete criminal history
  - The charge and charge(s) in the case of a conviction
  - Ages and locations of the victims of these crimes and their families (at the time of the crime). If one or more of the victims is a member or regular attender of CPC, then the RSO forfeits the privilege of being on CPC property or any CPC events.
  - Other incidences of inappropriate sexual behavior, regardless of arrest or conviction

- Nature of criminal activity, particular areas of temptation, and known problems
  - Any pending legal or criminal charges in Virginia and any other jurisdiction
  - Necessary documents, contact information, and waivers to enable the RSO Shepherding Committee to contact probation officer, parole officer, compliance officer, investigator, counselors, and any other appropriate parties
  - RSO's agreement to be photographed so safety team, staff, and leadership of the church can identify the RSO as part of our ongoing communication with the congregation. *(Note: a key component of our policy is making the name and picture of the RSO known to the congregation if the RSO wishes to attend worship services at CPC.)*
  - RSO's agreement for a comprehensive background check
  - Rules and procedures as outlined in the RSO Shepherding plan that the RSO must follow in order to attend services at this church. If for any reason the RSO cannot adhere to the rules and procedures outlined in these procedures, then RSO forfeits the privilege of being on CPC property.
4. If on parole, probation or subject to compliance monitoring, RSO will provide the RSO Shepherding Committee with the following items in writing from parole, probation, or compliance officer and any necessary waivers to permit contact with such officers:
- Statement as to what actions would violate the offender's parole, probation or compliance requirements
  - Statement showing evidence of compliance with all restrictions placed upon him or her by the courts.
5. The RSO shall provide a detailed outline of his/her counseling program to the RSO Shepherding Committee and any necessary waivers to permit contact with such counselors (e.g., HIPAA waiver).
6. The RSO Shepherding Committee has authority to follow up with any of the appropriate parties (e.g., probation officer, parole officer, counselors, etc.) to ensure there was full disclosure.
7. The RSO Shepherding Committee will make a recommendation to the Session of CPC, and if approved, the Session will designate in writing which activities are appropriate and permissible for the RSO to attend on CPC property.
- The Session, at its discretion and at any time, can review or modify activities deemed appropriate or permissible.
  - RSO's will not be permitted to attend off-site CPC events except the events explicitly written in the RSO's shepherding plan.
8. The RSO Shepherding Committee has authority to designate Chaperones who volunteer to assist and chaperone according to the following guidelines:
- Cannot be a close family member, spouse, or close personal friend of the RSO. Must be over the age of 21 and of the same gender as the RSO.
  - Agrees to
    - a) remain with the RSO at all times while the RSO is on the property of CPC,
    - b) escort the RSO to his/her vehicle on or off of the property,
    - c) ensure the RSO does not enter areas of the facility designated for minors, and,

- d) report immediately to the RSO Shepherding Committee any violations to the RSO Agreement or other concerns related to RSO behavior that may pose a potential threat or danger to others.
- Assigned Chaperones and RSO must coordinate schedules such that a Chaperone is present at any time RSO is present on CPC property.

9. If approval is granted:

- Designated members of the RSO Shepherding Committee will meet with the RSO to notify him/her of approval, discuss rules and procedures.
- The RSO Shepherding Committee will notify the RSO's parole/probation officers, compliance officers and/or necessary counselors, and any other appropriate parties by providing them a copy of the signed RSO Agreement.
- The RSO Shepherding Committee, will in their discretion, notify any appropriate ministry leaders, security personnel, or necessary church members or staff of such approval before making it known to the congregation.
- The RSO Shepherding Committee will notify the RSO of the designated Chaperones who will assist and chaperone according to the guidelines stated above.
- The RSO will participate only in activities as approved by the Session.
- The Session may revoke or amend such approval in its discretion with or without cause and/or upon any violation by the RSO of the RSO Agreement.
- The congregation will be notified of the RSO's attendance and that public record of the RSO's offense is available for review in the office of the Director of Congregational Care and Counseling.

10. If approval is not granted:

- The RSO Shepherding Committee will notify the RSO in writing that the request has not been approved.
- The RSO Shepherding Committee will also send written notification to identified parole/probation officers, compliance officers, counselors, other appropriate parties including the safety team, the church staff, and the leadership of the church, that the request was not approved.