

CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS

In the Congregation



1. With the introduction of freely accessible information about registered sex offenders in neighborhoods, churches are considered negligent if they fail to check the registry (www.meganslaw.ca.gov) for anyone attending who regularly participates in church activities or worship. “Regularly” is usually considered to be three or more times a year. The easiest way to check the registry is for the person who is most likely to recognize the names of church participants (usually a staff person who maintains the church directory database) to use the zip codes of church members to scan for names, at least once a quarter. New members and regular visitors’ names can be checked specifically. This gentle scanning should not provoke any upset from church members because the information is in public domain. It is better that church leaders discover who might have a criminal record of sex abuse than for something to happen because of the church’s refusal to check the registry.

2. If a name on the registry is recognized as a church participant, please call Kyros if you are unsure how to proceed with the policy recommended below and/or how best to disclose the information to those who need to know of the offender’s presence at church.

3. Recently pastors have learned that certain church members are convicted sex offenders, but not listed on the public registry. Conviction records are public, but not as easy to access as those of registered sex offenders. Once the actual conviction records are received from the appropriate county’s district attorney, church leaders can determine the best response (and are welcomed to call Kyros for advice).

SAMPLE POLICY TEXT BELOW



Convicted Sex Offenders in the Congregation: Balancing Radical Hospitality with Sanctuary

A Registered Sex Offender is any person who has been convicted of a sexual offense and is now required to register his/her whereabouts with local law enforcement. Megan’s Law allows the public to have information about the whereabouts of certain Registered Sex Offenders and the information about particular high-risk offenders is easily accessible via www.meganslaw.ca.gov (California) or www.nsopw.gov (for other states). This policy also covers anyone who was convicted on a sexual abuse charge, even if the names of these persons does not appear on the on-line registry, and anyone who may not be required to register because they pled down their offense to a misdemeanor.

St. Sanctuary is a welcoming church that both nurtures and protects its members and visitors. In the event that a known sex offender is a visitor, constituent, or member in the life of the congregation, the following policy will be used.

1. If the convicted sexual offense involves a member of the congregation, the convicted Sex Offender may be asked to leave the membership.
2. There will be consultation among the Staff-Parish-Pastor Relations Committee (SPPRC), appropriate staff, and key volunteers about the specific policy regarding the convicted Sex Offender.
3. The specific policy will address ways of limiting the exposure of the convicted Sex Offender to vulnerable populations.
4. The senior pastor, chair of SPPRC, lay leader, and the district superintendent (and others as thought appropriate) will meet with the convicted sex offender to inform him or her of the specifics of the policy.
5. The senior pastor, chair of SPPRC, lay leader, and the district superintendent will enter into a covenant with each convicted sex offender. This covenant will document the convicted sex offender's conviction and will outline the policy specific to his or her conviction history and be attentive to the safety needs of St. Sanctuary Church.
6. The spouse or significant other of the offender may also be asked to enter into and sign a covenant of behavior.
7. The convicted sex offender may be restricted from access to the church campus and may be barred from all congregational activities if he or she refuses to sign the covenant, if he or she refuses to comply with its stipulations, or if in the judgment of the pastor, the convicted sex offender's behavior threatens the safety of any member of St. Sanctuary Church.
8. The convicted sex offender's participation in worship may be limited to exclude positions of authority, or assumed authority, such as ushering or any position of real or assumed authority over children or dependent adults.
9. There will be consultation with congregants who need to know (families of children or youth, etc.) about the status of the convicted sex offender and the congregation's policy and covenants regarding this person (and potentially the spouse/partner).
10. This policy is designed to avoid temptation, not to punish the convicted sex offender.
11. The convicted sex offender may be offered counseling and support by staff and/or volunteers in the congregation. He or she may also be given information about supportive services and counseling outside the congregation.
12. The congregation may make any other provisions deemed necessary to appropriately protect and care for members of the congregation.