

Dear Congregation,

It is with heavy hearts that we write to you today about the sexual abuse uncovered at our church. We have spent a great deal of time wrestling with this and have received much counsel, and we are conscience-bound to give you more information.

Introduction

We believe that there is a real danger to the children in our church every single Sunday. We believe this congregation is largely unaware of the details of this threat. We cannot, in good conscience, continue to remain silent about these issues and feel obligated to share these things with you.

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” - James 4:17

Discovery

We believe the following information is necessary to understand the scope of the problem so that the proper level of concern is raised. Note that if we have erred we have tried to so toward the side of understating things. What is described should be taken as a *minimum* of what occurred.

Abuse Details

- The sex abuse was perpetrated against a range of children from very young children to pre-teens.
- Both boys and girls were victims.
- Manipulation (called grooming) was used by the abuser. This frequently leads victims feeling bound to keep silent, because they felt both somewhat responsible for the acts and that they were not victims.
- The crimes committed were serious and psychologically damaging acts of physical aggression against children. They are crimes which, if committed by an adult, would certainly have resulted in incarceration. We say this not to suggest any particular civil outcome but simply to indicate the grave nature of the crimes committed.

Settings / Location of Abuse:

- Church events at peoples homes
- Fellowship hall
- Basement
- Outside after church
- Being in public was not sufficient circumstance to prevent abuse as some of the crimes occurred with many adults present in open, crowded spaces.

Timeline of Abuse	
On or Before July 2019	Grooming by the abuser begins
July 2019 - November 2019	First known instances of sexual abuse in July, continued through November. (But not discovered)
November 2019	Sexual abuse proposition discovered by abuser's parents and one of the victim's parents. Sometime later, in response to this discovery, a safety plan was implemented that involved not allowing the abuser into the church basement and requiring constant oversight for the abuser.
November 2019 - March 2020	During this time there was continued sexual abuse.
March 2020	Last known instance of sexual abuse occurs because in-person services cease.
April 2020	New sexual abuse victims discovered. All session members were made aware that abuse had occurred.
July 2020	A request made by congregant to involve presbytery in handling this matter. In response, a presbytery committee formed to advise the session.
August 2020	New sexual abuse victims discovered.

Being abused and having to keep it a secret is an incredible burden for a child to bear . If you haven't already, please take the responsibility seriously to speak to your children, especially in regard to common grooming techniques. If you need expert help, you can contact Heartford House where a person who is trained in speaking to children will conduct an interview.

- <https://www.heartford.net/> (765) 420-9764

Current Safety

We are also concerned about the current safety of the church.

- The current safety plan for the abuser is that an individual will keep an eye on the abuser and they are not allowed in the basement or to have an unsupervised contact with children. This safety plan was put in place in April / May, but it largely resembles the

safety plan in place when the first abuse was discovered in November. Therefore it has already been shown to be insufficient.

- The abuser is attending Youth Group and parents are not aware.
 - Note the YG leaders *are* aware of the abuser's identity and the abuser is under the supervision of one leader.
- We are concerned about the safety plan in general at our church. There may be a false sense of security because:
 - The session asked the deacons to make a safety plan, but on November 10th the deacons responded that they did not have enough information to formulate such a plan.
 - The current general safety plan to our knowledge that the basement will be cleared and locked after Sunday school and an elder is assigned to ensure there are no unsupervised children in the basement or fellowship hall.

Legal Issues

We also want to make sure everyone is aware of Indiana Law regarding child sex abuse.

- Evidence or suspicion of any child sexual abuse for any child must (by law*) be reported to DCS immediately, imminent threats to children must be reported to law enforcement immediately. This report is required to be made with all expediency, even before speaking with leadership in the church or anyone else.
- Indiana law states that every person is a mandatory reporter and that those failing to report are committing a crime.
- The church courts are not designed to prosecute felonies or forcibly restrain criminals, reporting to elders evidence of abuse is not fulfilling your legal obligation to keep our kids safe.

Conclusion

We realize this is an incredibly heavy burden to bear. It is our hope that though these are weighty things, bringing light will serve to begin the process of healing for all involved and ultimately lead to a safer environment for all kids.

We bring this to light to **“speak up for those who cannot speak...”** *Proverbs 31:8-9* to **“Regard the weak in our church”** *Psalm 41:1*, **“to defend the weak”** *Psalm 82:3*, do these things for the **“least of these”** - *Matthew 25:40*,

We also want to encourage all those who receive this to resolve in their hearts to not use this information to sinfully condemn a child abuser who is still greatly in need of grace. Especially to those who know the identity of the abuser, we urge that you not allow these further details to create a heart of bitterness or unforgiveness, or to do anything but realize the level of care this child needs, both to protect others and themselves. The trappings of their own sin should cause us to reach out to them, but while we carefully maintain safety for other kids in the church.

Since the presbytery committee that was formed is advisory and not authoritative, a petition has been made to form a Judicial Commission from presbytery. However, we do not know when this commission will be created and we could not in good conscience allow another Sunday go by without sharing all of this with you.

This information herein represents the combined knowledge of all of the adult signers. By signing, we are affirming that we believe this information is true and must be shared with the congregation. We are praying fervently that God would be sending forth his light and his truth to this congregation of his people.

In Him,

