

# **Guidelines for Ministry to Convicted Sexual Offenders**

## **An Introduction:**

Concern has arisen among clergy and their worshipping communities regarding the question of ministry to individuals who have been convicted of criminal sexual offenses with children and others. In its efforts to provide a safe and healthy environment for all who make the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic's parishes their spiritual homes or participate in any of its programs we offer the following guidance on this most serious matter.

This issue may arise in light of a sexual offender who has been released from incarceration and desires to engage in the life of faith in a church community. Presently, this concern is being considered in light of the more than 60 percent of 800,000-plus registered sex offenders in the United States who are presently under some type of post incarceration supervision; many of whom may be seeking to engage in the life of a church community.

In this regard there are certain facts that must be considered.

1. Be absolutely sure that any individual at question is in fact a convicted sexual offender. This may be accomplished by contacting local police or probation authorities or consulting the State Sexual Offenders Registry that is published by state governments.
2. Presently, within the various states there exists some form of what is historically known as a "Megan's Law." This law, in part, provides specific legal guidelines and requirements governing the life and activity of individuals who are convicted sexual offenders and who may have been released from incarceration at the completion of their sentence or have been released on probation.
3. In the various states sexual offenders upon release from incarceration are required, under the law, to register with appropriate police/probation authorities and be listed on the State's Sexual Offenders Registry. At the time of their

registration they will be advised of the particular limitations imposed upon them as registered sexual offenders.

Such State laws specifically prohibit such convicted individuals from residing within particular distance of schools, youth centers or places where children gather. This restriction may specifically limit convicted individuals from attending church services and participating in church activities or place very particular limitations upon any possible participation.

### **Our Eparchial Response:**

The Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic recognizes its mission and obligation to proclaim the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ to all people, even those who may have strayed from the path of God's love. It also recognizes its obligation to provide for the safety and wellbeing of all who make our parishes their spiritual homes or who participate in eparchial/parochial programs of the Eparchy.

To this end, as regards the matter of individuals who have been convicted of crimes of the sexual abuse of children, young people or adults, the Eparchy recognizes its responsibility to be proactive in addressing this unique aspect of possible ministry and addresses the following.

1. Should it come to the attention of the parish clergy that a person convicted of a sexual crime is attending the liturgy and worship of the church, the parish Pastor/Administrator should confirm the accuracy of that knowledge by respectfully speaking to the person in question with two trusted members of the parish present.
2. The Pastor/Administrator should immediately contact the Office for a Safe Environment in Ministry to advise it of this concern.
3. The Pastor/Administrator should immediately contact appropriate local police/probation authorities to confirm with them that this individual is in fact listed on the State Sexual Offenders Registry.



4. Seek guidance from police/probation with regard to any and all limitations placed upon the particular individual and the manner in which the parish can deal with the issue, i.e. contact with the state probation department.
5. It would be important to establish with the individual the parameters of any future ministry that might be possible with him/her.
6. Should such an individual be restricted from attendance at public worship the clergy may provide spiritual support for him/her if so desired by means of technology and/or the live-streaming of services as is common for many parishes.
7. The Pastor/Administrator might provide guidance by the way of spiritual direction and the recommendation of spiritual texts and prayer manuals to assist in a regimen of personal prayer that would be of great assistance. The Pastor/Administrator might encourage the individual to continue or seek professional treatment by way of counseling/therapy as they strive to live a life of grace.
8. Periodically, the Pastor/Administrator could arrange, with the co-operation of a trusted member of the parish community to accompany him, for a brief visit to bring the individual the Eucharist and allow the opportunity for the other sacraments.
9. In those states where such a person might be allowed to attend the public worship of a church the state regulations governing such attendance (i.e. State of Virginia) usually demand that such a person be accompanied by a prudent companion who will accept responsibility to supervise the individual at all times. Such a supervisory companion must insure that when present on the property and during the service the individual in question will be supervised by them and leave the service and property immediately upon conclusion of the worship.
10. If for some reason such a convicted person has no obligation under the law and there are no legal limitations imposed upon him/her the following would be vitally important to any continued participation in the life of the parish.

A: It would be most important for the Pastor/Administrator to have full knowledge of the case and with the agreement of the individual involved, be authorized to speak with probation or police authorities.

B: Also it would be important to establish clear and reasonable boundaries with the individual if they intend on attending the parish and its services of worship. Such might include, but are not limited to the following:

- Not to sit with minors during liturgy.
- Never be alone with minors on church property.
- Not to participate in programs which involve minors.
- Understand and accept other limitations that may be necessary.
- Breaches of such agreements would prohibit any future attendance

As the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic is comprised of many parishes in a number of states on the East Coast, it must be remember that regulations governing sexual offenders and related registries may vary. When such concerns arise it is advisable to contact local police and/or probation authorities and the Office for a Safe Environment in Ministry for guidance.

Office for a Safe Environment in Ministry  
The Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Passaic

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Dormition of the Theotokos