

## Letter to the White Station Congregation

The recent child sex abuse scandal at Penn State has been a national news story that extends well beyond the sports world. This sad story brings out very intense and real emotions from people. When 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys are sexually abused before the age of 18, there is a good chance statistically that we know someone to whom this has happened or been a sexual abuse victim ourselves. This story has caused our nation to educate themselves about the issues of sexual abuse and engage in serious moral and spiritual introspection.

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, He was quick to respond, "Let the children come to me." Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibility for our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities as leaders, ministers, youth volunteers and as part of the family at White Station if we neglect to take adequate precautions against potential abuse occurring in our church.

Many churches naively assume that their church is a "safe haven" where abuse and exploitation would never take place. However, abuse often occurs in settings where children, youth or vulnerable adults should be able to feel safe, such as in their homes, schools, camps and yes, even the church. Aware of these facts, about two years ago the elders studied what church leaders should know about risk management and the protection of "vulnerable others." The elders at White Station formed a committee to study, create and implement a policy that protects the children, youth and the volunteers that serve them in ministry. That committee most recently includes Cindy Randolph, Courtney Garland, Theresa Jordan, George Welty and Charlie Michael.

The COCWS Children and Youth Protection Policy was announced to almost 200 children and youth volunteers on Sunday night, November 6, at a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner in their honor. Our children/youth volunteers do an amazing job of teaching, mentoring and caring for our 200+ kids that are a part of this vital ministry. Last Sunday, November 13, the new policy was presented to the parents of children and youth and today it is being announced to the entire congregation via this letter in the Server. The new protection policy requires all children/youth volunteers to submit an application, undergo a criminal background check and participate in sexual abuse awareness training. In addition, applicants are required to be a member at White Station for a minimum of 3 months and submit 2 reference letters in order to serve. The protection policy includes new supervision requirements and bathroom policies as well as specific reporting and response plans that meet community standards and Tennessee state law requirements. Every elder and minister at COCWS is committed to protecting the children that enter the doors of this church and have submitted their application in its entirety as outlined above.

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children, we will conduct all our activities and ministries in such a way that assures our neighborhood and city that White Station is a safe place for children to grow and learn. It is our intent to provide ministers and volunteers with policy, procedures and training to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us.

Copies of the new protection policy and a list of frequently asked questions are located at the help desk in the foyer of the auditorium and are available to anyone who is interested in additional information. Feel free to contact any of the committee members or elders with any questions or concerns you might have.