



IMMANUEL
BAPTIST CHURCH

For the Gospel, For the City, For the World

Immanuel Family,

At the time of this email, we are told that power will not be restored to the church campus tonight. Regrettably, we will not be able to meet tonight. While it is a poor substitute, let me communicate to you by email what I intended to communicate in person.

This week I have been reflecting on John 17. Jesus told the Father that he “kept” His disciples, meaning that he both “fed” them with the word, and “guarded” them. As your pastor, it is my opportunity and duty to both feed you and protect you. I speak to you, now, out of duty.

In 2020, a 23-year-old volunteer in our student ministry had an inappropriate texting relationship with one of our high school IBC students. The boy’s parents discovered the texts on their son’s cell phone. It was eventually reported to me. We inquired and were told at that time, by both the woman and the boy, that the relationship was not physical. There was no basis on which to report this to the authorities. We removed her from helping in the student ministry, required counseling for her, offered counseling for the boy (which was accepted), and assigned an accountability partner to her.

Recently, she came to me and told me that there had been physical contact between her and the boy when he was 16. Upon learning this, I reported the matter to the police and to the woman’s employer, since she is a teacher. As now with you, I made these reports out of duty. I was told by the police that this would not be a criminal matter since the reported level of physical contact did not rise to the level of criminal assault or abuse. At this point, she has wisely withdrawn from involvement the church, is seeking godly counsel, and is showing initial signs of repentance. The boy and his family have been offered counseling at our expense. We praise God there appears to be spiritual movement with both parties.

I am telling you about his situation with the permission of the boy’s parents. I am being direct with you because I want all to know this is how I intend to proceed in such matters; we must report it. This is an opportunity to press upon all Immanuel families the need to be vigilant in talking openly about the potential for abuse, sadly, even at church. It is also a reminder of the danger of unmonitored cell phone use by our children and teens. While we have taken steps to implement protocols to protect our children, we know that no group – no church congregation – is above something like this happening. This is also a reminder of why we require background checks for all who work with children and youth – volunteers and employees alike.

Our congregation has adopted the MinistrySafe protocols for all our programs and services for minors. Part of our protocol is to involve parents in the reporting process. Thus, I am letting you know what has happened and we are inviting you to inquire of your children and teens, as you think best. If, in that regard, you want to talk to me further about this, I am available. Just call the church office and ask to speak to me.

As well, if you have questions, we will have a brief meeting in the choir room after the second service on Sunday. While I do not intend to comment further on the specifics of this situation, I do want everyone to have the opportunity to ask any questions about our policies and processes to protect our kids.

We serve a God who can restore us. Restoration is possible once things are brought to light.

Thank you for praying for the family and for all those involved in this.

Blessings,

Steven Smith