

Children's Pastor Arrested in Human Trafficking Sting

A church terminated its children pastor after he was caught in a human trafficking sting.

Jason Kennedy of Grace Baptist Church was one of two pastors arrested in the operation that netted 32 men and women last week. The other, Zubin Parakh, was reportedly a volunteer creative pastor for Lifehouse Church outside Knoxville, Tennessee.

"I was devastated, I was totally shocked. It is something you can not anticipate, in fact I speak about it constantly," Grace Baptist Church Ron Stewart says. "I have nine other pastors and I speak to them constantly, 'We are held to a higher standard and what someone else may do and be accepted is not accepted and anything you do will be magnified and we understand much is given, much is required.' It goes with being a pastor."

Parakh reportedly expected to meet a 17-year-old girl and to pay \$100 for a half-hour of sex. Court records report Kennedy negotiated a \$100 fee for a half-hour of sex with a 15 and 18-year-old girl.

"We are saddened today as a result of information relating Zubin Parakh who was a volunteer worker at our church. Our church and its leaders were not aware of any alleged misconduct regarding Mr. Parakh. However, we are praying for all parties involved," LifeHouse posted in a statement. "We both ask for and hope our church family's privacy will be respected throughout this process."

Grace Baptist Church also asked for prayer as the congregation moves forward after Kennedy's arrest and subsequent firing:

We are deeply saddened by the recent events affecting our church family. The children's pastor of Grace Baptist Church has been terminated as a result of his arrest which is in violation of the statement of ethics that he signed and church standards of moral conduct.

The actions of the children's pastor for which he has been arrested were part of his life outside the church, and we have received no questions or concerns related to his conduct within the church or its ministries.

The children's pastor was hired two-and-a-half years ago. The church's background check turned up no issues that indicate any previous problem. In fact, the children's pastor in his application affirmed that he had no issues in his background of a criminal or other nature.

We want to reassure our church family that we are committed to the safety and security of our members, and especially our children. Our security system includes 78 security cameras, electronic check-in, background checks of employees and volunteers, and security officers during gatherings at the church.

We are praying for the children's pastor's family and will continue to provide the services of our ministry to them.

The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) says the entire incident happened within 1,000 feet of yet another church.

"What so many people in our community don't quite understand is that human trafficking is a demand driven crime. And that demand comes from every single part of our society, including those parts that we'd all like to believe are not part of the problem," said Kate Trudell with the Community Coalition against Human Trafficking.