COM Policy: Background Checks

The Presbytery of Baltimore
Committee on Ministry

The Sexual Misconduct Policy requires that background checks will be conducted for all new minister members of Presbytery and all members of the Presbytery who receive a new call or appointment to a church of the Presbytery. This policy desires to provide increased protection for churches and their members from those who have a history of criminal activity. Ministers seeking membership in the Presbytery of Baltimore will contact the office for instruction on how to authorize the Background Checks

1. Background Checks
    Background checks occur in four ways.
    a. The Personal Information Form provides one way in which sexual misconduct is disclosed and shared between Presbyteries.
    b. In the Executive-to-Executive reference check, knowledge of criminal misconduct is shared between Executives.
    c. A self-disclosure form is filled out as part of the admission procedures for ministers coming in the Presbytery.
    d. Background checks: We will conduct a Social Security Trace, County and State-wide Criminal History checks as well as a verification of the educational credentials. When a member's Terms of Call include a loan a Credit Report will be requested. In the future the COM will consider whether to extend the Credit Report to all new members as well as a Motor Vehicle Record check. Statewide reports will be requested for all states in which the individual has lived during the preceding five years. Employing agencies and calling churches may request that the Presbytery conduct Credit Report and Motor Vehicle Record checks on their behalf, subject to the agreement of the individual.

2. Persons Who Will Receive Background Checks.   The Presbytery will work to conduct all checks before a call is issued or employment begins.
    a. All clergy members new to the Presbytery.
    b. All clergy members of the Presbytery who receive a new call or appointment as Supply Pastor or Interim Pastor, if the time interval since the last background check is four or more years.
    c. All laypersons who chaperone the Presbytery of Baltimore events for children. These will have only the Criminal History checks conducted.
    d. All staff of the Presbytery of Baltimore will have a Criminal History check and those who handle money will also have a Credit Report requested.
    e. Honorably Retired Ministers who become members of the Presbytery will not have any checks conducted unless they take up active ministry.

3. Who Pays

a. The cost for clergy members will be shared equally by the Presbytery and the calling church or employing agency. When the employing agency will not pay, then the individual seeking admission is responsible for that share.
b. The Presbytery will pay for all checks conducted on its staff and lay volunteers.

4. Where the Reports are Held and who has Access to them.
   a. All reports will be held by Oxford Document Management Company for 20 years.   Reports that result in restrictions or have negative information that results in actions related to 5c will be kept in a separate locked file in the Presbytery of Baltimore.
   b. Clergy, staff, and volunteers have access through the General Presbyter to their own reports.
   c. Reports are not shared with any other governing body. For those who receive only a "clear" status, only the Presbytery of Baltimore will retain the Final Report Cover Sheet in the minister member's file after employment begins.

5. How the Information in the Reports will be used.
   a. The General Presbyter will review the Reports.
   b. Upon receipt of negative information that would negatively affect the Executive's Reference for the minister, the General Presbyter will contact the individual to discuss the matter.
   c. If the General Presbyter is not satisfied by the individual's explanation, the concern will be referred to a group consisting of the General Presbyter and the two most recent and available chairs of the Committee on Ministry. This group will meet with the individual to discuss the concern.
   d. If concerns are not satisfied this group will recommend to the Committee on Ministry restrictions without sharing the information upon which the decision was made. The individual may appeal these restrictions to the full Committee on Ministry. The Committee on Ministry will then been given the reports and meet with the individual.
   e. The General Presbyter will file a report in the minister member's file in the Presbytery of Baltimore if any restrictions where set for the individual.