GUIDELINES ON BACKGROUND CHECKS
by THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS
Revised March 2017

As stated in the Policies, Standards, and Procedures (PSP) of the Orthodox Church in America on Sexual Misconduct, the screening of potential clergy, church employees, and volunteers is a requirement that ensures the safety of children in the church. Section 11.02 of the PSP, *Recruiting and Selecting Parish Volunteers Working with Youth*, outlines the screening process which includes an application, interview, references, criminal history background check, and training on sexual abuse prevention.

The following information is primarily concerned about the process of obtaining the "criminal history background check", hereafter referred to simply as "background check." Information on the details of the full screening process can be found in the Abbreviated PSP document on the OCA website.

A. **Who is required to receive a background check?**

Ordained clergy (Bishops, Priests and Deacons)

Minor Orders (Ordained and Blessed Subdeacons and Readers)

Youth Workers (Church School Teachers, camp counselors, youth advisors / mentors, etc.)

Paid Church employees

Seminary Applicants

Diaconal Program Applicants

Candidates for Ordination

B. **National Sex Offender Registry**

The following leadership positions are **not** required to undergo a full background check, however, they **must** be checked on the free National Sex Offender Registry (http://www.nsopw.gov). Anyone who appears on a sex offender registry **CANNOT** hold any position of leadership in the Church. These positions include but are not limited to:

Metropolitan Council Member*

Diocesan Council Member*

Parish Council Member*

Church Officer

Choir Director

Altar server (adult and teen)

*Council members who are nominated should be checked on the National Sex Offender Registry **prior to** the voting process so as to avoid removal after appointment should a negative finding be discovered.

NOTE: Some Dioceses or parishes may require a full background check on the above positions.

It is incumbent upon parish rectors to conduct this check for parish council members, church officers, choir directors, and altar servers. The diocesan administrator should verify for Diocesan Council members. And, the Office of the Metropolitan should ensure Metropolitan Council members are not on the sex offender registry.

C. **Who should obtain the background check?**

The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America approved in late 2016 the centralizing of the background check process. This transition will take place gradually over the next several months. Each diocese will designate an administrator* to process background checks for all ordained clergy, minor orders, youth volunteers, church employees and other volunteers. **Local parish rectors, however, will still be responsible for ensuring volunteers and employees fill out a paper application, checking references, and conducting interviews as necessary (see [Youth Volunteer Application Packet](#)).**

The diocesan background check administrator will work directly with parish rectors to obtain the names of all those required to have a background check. Once obtained, the applicant will receive instructions from the diocesan administrator on how to submit their personal information on a secure website. Prior to conducting a background check, permission will be obtained from the prospective employee or volunteer.

In cases of seminary and diaconal program **applicants**, the institution or program director shall obtain the check. In cases of seminarians who are petitioning for ordination **prior to graduation**, the OCA central administrator will obtain the background check with the approval of the institution. Once the seminarian has graduated and left seminary, however, and is seeking ordination, the Ruling Bishop/diocesan administrator must obtain the check.

The Office of the Metropolitan shall obtain the check on all heads of institutions (Deans and Chancellors) as well as stavropegial monasteries (Abbots).

*see table in section D

D. **Which company do we use to run a background check?**

By the end of 2017, all dioceses will have begun the transition to using the company [Protect My Ministry](#) (PMM). By December 2018, background checks for all OCA parishes will be processed through PMM via the diocesan administrator. Each Diocese will be introduced to the new system over the next several months. The schedule is as follows:

Diocese	Phase in date	Diocesan Administrator
Stavropegial	In process	Fr. Eric Tosi egtosi@oca.org

		Cindy Heise cheise@oca.org
Diocese of New England	Completed - December 2016	David Zavednak dzaved@comcast.net
Albanian Archdiocese	Completed - December 2016	Fr. Mark Doku mdoku123@gmail.com
Romanian Archdiocese*	Completed - December 2016	Fr. David Oancea doancea@roea.org
Diocese of the Midwest	Completed - February 2017	Philip Sokolov chancery@domoca.org
Diocese of NY/NJ	Completed - February 2017	Fr. Leonid Schmidt leonid.schmidt@christthesaviour.org
Archdiocese of Washington DC	April 2017	TBD
Diocese of Western Pennsylvania	May 2017	TBD
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania	June 2017	TBD
Bulgarian Diocese*	July 2017	TBD
Diocese of the South	August 2017	TBD
Diocese of the West	September 2017	Fr. Andrew Smith chancery@dowoca.org
Diocese of Alaska	November 2017	TBD
Archdiocese of Canada**		
Diocese of Mexico**		

*Parishes under the Romanian and Bulgarian Dioceses that are located in Canada will be an exception to using Protect My Ministry.

**The Dioceses of Canada and Mexico will likely remain exceptions to the centralizing of this process for geographical reasons. However, a process for ensuring compliance in those countries are in development.

E. Where should background check documents be stored?

Protect My Ministry provides electronic storage of background checks so it is no longer necessary to keep a hard copy on file.   However, other documents related to an individual's file (paper application, interview notes, reference checks, etc.) are to be stored **confidentially and securely** by the local rector at the parish.

F. How often are criminal history checks run?

A background check must be obtained, and renewed **every three years** for the required positions.

G. How long are background records kept on file?

Paper background check documents are to be kept on file for three years until the individual's next background check is conducted, at which point the original may be destroyed. Once the transition to Protect My Ministry is complete, background checks will be stored electronically.   All other documents associated with a file (original application, reference check, interview notes, etc.) must be retained as long as the clergyman/volunteer/employee is in his/her role and for 7 years after the individual has left his/her position.

H. How do I ensure private information stays private?

Personal information is inputted by the applicant directly online into Protect My Ministry's secure website, thus eliminating the need for rectors to obtain sensitive information.   Only Diocesan Bishops and background check administrators will have online access to the personal information contained in background checks for applicants *in their diocese only*. The central OCA administrator will have access to information for all dioceses. While inputting their information online, applicants may select to receive a copy of their background check. The diocesan administrator will inform the parish rector of the background check results.

I. Billing

The central office of the OCA will be billed directly by Protect My Ministry. The OCA Treasurer will in turn bill each diocese for the cost of the background checks that have been processed each month. Each Diocese will determine their own system of ensuring the payment of the background checks.   The diocesan administrator will then inform parishes what their responsibility is in covering the costs.

Further questions regarding background checks and the screening process should be directed to Cindy Heise at cheise@oca.org.

NOTE FOR PENNSYLVANIA RESIDENTS: In 2014, the Commonwealth passed ACT PA 153 which requires that anyone working with youth in any capacity in a church in PA must meet additional background check requirements which include PA State Police, Child Abuse Registry, and FBI fingerprinting (for those living outside of PA or who have not lived in PA for the last ten years). These are required every three years. PA State Police and Child Abuse Registry searches are provided by Protect My Ministry. However, FBI fingerprinting requires going to a registered location to complete. Please contact your diocesan administrator for more information.