



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

July 11, 2016
Blessed Princess Olga
No. 112

To all Rectors and Priests-in-Charge in the Diocese of the Midwest

Dear Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,

Christ is in our midst!

I am writing to introduce the third and last phase of the implementation of the Policies and Procedures of Sexual Misconduct for the Orthodox Church in America; the development of a parish/mission volunteer screening program to work with youth. Thus far we have obtained background checks on all Priests and Deacons in the Diocese (phase 1). We have also obtained background checks on readers and sub-deacons (phase 2). It is hard to know what percent compliance we have here with the minor orders, as there is no past list of minor orders to compare with. To enforce this, as I visit parishes in the diocese, I will approach the priest of the mission/parish and inquire further into the issue and direct that background checks be done for those who still need one. Plus no reader or sub-deacon will be tonsured or ordained until a background check has been done. I think cooperation among our parishes for phase two has been good.

I would like to now discuss phase three. Parishes are to develop a screening program for working with youth. This would partly involve having an application form that includes, personal and work history information, references to be contacted, and a background check to be done among other things. The OCA has provided an example of a youth application form that is available on the web page of the OCA by clicking on the following link:

<http://oca.org/PDF/sexual-misconduct/2015-0818-youth-protection-packet.pdf>

This is a very detailed packet that contains all necessary items to run a screening program. Modifications may be made only with my blessing. These forms can be reformatted to include parish letterhead if so desired.

Anyone 18 or older who has an ongoing supervisory role with minors in a church setting would need to fill out this application. This would include church schoolteachers, adults supervising minors who serve in the altar, and any youth group advisors/leaders. (The issue of overnight church camps needs to be addressed separately.) There are a number of comments I wish to make on phase 3.

- The parish would do the background checks and not the diocese; so all information related to screenings (application, background check, reference check, interview summaries) is to be kept in a secure location in the parish office.
- For those who have worked with youth in the parish for two years or longer, the

rector/priest-in-charge can sign an exemption letter for that person. A sample of that letter is found in the OCA youth packet cited above. That letter would exempt the person from needing to fill out the application and anything related to that. However a background check would still be required.

- Each rector/priest-in-charge needs to appoint a Compliance Officer who would oversee all tasks related to compliance with the Sexual Misconduct Policy. For example, background checks are required every three years, references need to be contacted etc. All records need to be properly maintained in a secure location in the parish office. It is not realistic for the parish priest to be responsible for this. However any background checks that are obtained can only be viewed by the rector/priest-in-charge.
- To further assist our parishes with phase 3, Fr. Benjamin Tucci of St. Mary's Cathedral in Minneapolis will be giving a presentation on developing a parish-screening program for youth at the Diocesan Assembly in October of this year.
- There is also the need for volunteer youth workers to receive training in understanding and recognizing behaviors relating to sexual abuse/misconduct. I have recruited (with the Deans' help) one person from each Deanery to receive specialized training on this topic where they could be made available to parishes in their Deanery to actually do the teaching/training sessions. I am still working on that in conjunction with Cindy Heise of ORSMA.
- Finally I want to formally introduce the Yearly Compliance form that all parishes/missions are required to fill out. This gives us an idea of where parishes are at in being fully compliant with the Policies and Procedures. This form can be found on the Diocese of the Midwest website by accessing this link:
<http://domoca.org/files/DOCUMENTS/psp/PSP-Checklist.pdf>
The report can be sent in with your September parish report you remit to the diocese or it can be submitted by the end of the calendar year. The purpose of the form is to give us a clearer picture of how parishes are doing and what still needs to be worked on. So be honest. If there are areas where you are not in compliance; our desire is to help you and not to punish because of noncompliance.

I think this phase is the most difficult one to address and will take some time. My expectation is that by the summer of 2017, we will be able to say that as a diocese, we are fully compliant with the Policies and Procedures of Sexual Misconduct for the Orthodox Church in America. I wish to thank you for your cooperation and for being patient with me, and with this difficult topic that impacts on parish life in our diocese. Don't hesitate to contact your dean and if need be myself concerning this last phase of implementation.

With love in Christ, the unworthy



Paul
Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest

Cc.: Cindy Heise, ORSMA
Priest Benjamin Tucci