

WHY Background Checks?

Having a policy of background checks for all adults who work with children and youth in our churches – lay & ordained, paid & volunteer is important in today’s world. In addition to our promise to live out our Baptismal Covenant (BCP p. 304), here’s why:

And you will have confidence, because there is hope; you will be protected and take your rest in safety. Job 11:18

Loving young people and wanting to work with them is the reason we are all involved in ministries with children and youth. That does not make us or anyone else a child molester. But in order to create the safest possible environment for our love and affection, it is important that we act as role models and leaders in our churches and communities.

And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you. Psalm 9:10

Our churches are trusting environments that have not traditionally been a place where adults were carefully screened and monitored. But the world has changed, and when we are involved in children and youth ministry, our programs are representing the church. For children and youth – this often represents their image of God.

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. 2 Timothy 2:1-2

Volunteers must understand that part of their responsibility is to help keep children safe. Training and background checks make a difference. And those who attend training are glad they did.

After they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. Acts of the Apostles 14:23

It is essential to check criminal histories of applicants who wish to work with children because we cannot allow the church to become the only place an individual with a criminal record can find access to children. Most organizations already conduct background checks for employees and volunteers: Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Big Brothers & Big Sisters and Little League. School systems are also requiring parents to have background checks in order to volunteer in a classroom or chaperone a field trip. Newcomers to our churches often assume that all our parishes are already conducting background checks. Many dioceses in the Episcopal Church do this already.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

It is important that we all agree on positive ways to show affection and that we avoid affection that can be misunderstood by children and other adults. This is one of the many skills learned at the diocesan sponsored Safe Church Training. Over 55 parishes sent volunteers who work with children and youth to diocesan Safe Church Training. Those who have seen the video “Safe Guarding God’s Children” no longer ask, “Why do we have to do this training?” but “How can we protect our children and youth more?”

When you gain friends, gain them through testing, and do not trust them hastily. Ecclesiasticus 6:7

The statistics that one in four females and one of eight males will be abused (sexually by physical contact) before they are eighteen cannot be ignored.

- 10% of abuse is perpetrated by strangers
- 30% is perpetrated by family members
- 60% is perpetrated by others who are known to the child and their families

For the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew, complying with your commands, so that your children might be kept unharmed. Wisdom of Solomon 19:6

Steps we must take to keep our ministries safe include:

Screening Interacting Monitoring Training Responding

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. John 17:11