

Policy Coordinator's Report to the 2018 Archdiocesan Assembly

Summary

To ensure the Archdiocese's full compliance with the OCA's Policies, Standards, and Procedures (PSP) on Sexual Misconduct, the Policy Coordinator position was created last year. The coordinator initiates, manages, and maintains the state and national background checks for all diocesan lay workers and volunteers that have contact with minors, as well as all readers, subdeacons, deacons, and priests, using a convenient, comprehensive, secure, and centralized system that governs this process. Applications are typically initiated via an email invitation from Verified Volunteers and self-completed electronically using a four-step process that takes approximately 20-30 minutes. However, the coordinator is able and willing to conduct checks over the phone (see contact information below) to ensure 100% compliance.

Key Points

- His Eminence Archbishop MELCHISEDEK, in conjunction with the Archdiocesan Council, now requires that all clergy in major and minor orders, church employees, and lay volunteers that have possible contact with children be screened through our partner agency Verified Volunteers. This is also required under state governmental statute as well.
- In the past, verbal or written documentation of a successful criminal background check was sufficient for clergy to remain in good standing with the Archdiocese. However, because laws and requirements constantly change, and because both the OCA and the Archdiocese require the centralization of records and consistent methodologies, checks done by outside employers or sources are no longer being accepted.
- Failure to respond may prevent clergy and their parish delegations from being seated at this (or a future) Archdiocesan Assembly and may lead to disciplinary action by His Eminence.
- Verified Volunteers (VV) charges a one-time fee of \$20 per applicant. Those living and/or serving in Pennsylvania parishes are subject to PA Act 153 and must also complete the Pennsylvania Child Abuse Check, which adds \$12 to the payment collected by VV. Pennsylvania residents must complete step 4 of the process (which involves creating an account with the state of Pennsylvania) in order to be in compliance with state law.
- Not only does this fee include dedicated, in-person support for all applicants who need it, but Verified Volunteers also regularly scans national and state agencies to keep all applicants current and eligible on their checks.
- All that is needed to initiate the process is the applicant's name and email address. This information can be sent at any time to *policycoordinator@ocadwpa.org* or by calling (814) 321-4473.
- No sensitive information (Social Security Number, etc.) is communicated to the coordinator. The coordinator only sees the status of the background check.
- Please keep in mind that background checks are only the first step in maintaining a safe environment for children. Be sure to follow the "two-adult rule," which simply states that no fewer than two adults and two children must be present at all times at every service and event.

- While it is generally important to integrate newcomers into your parish ministries, your Parish Council should require that no one working with children may do so unless they have been in your parish for more than 6 months.
- Each parish is to “adopt” the OCA PSPs at a meeting of your parish council. This should be recorded in your minutes. And every member of your parish council is to receive a copy of the OCA PSPs and sign a document indicating they have received and read them. This too should be kept in your parish office. You will be asked annually if this has been done in the report you submit to the chancellor.
- In addition to complying with the Archdiocese’s child protection and background requirements, parishes and other institutions must also comply with requirements of applicable state laws.
- While dozens of people have been processed through VV this year, the Archdiocese is mandating 100% compliance. Thank you for your cooperation.
- As a reminder, to begin any application, only first name, last name, and email address are needed. You may email me your list of clergy, church employees, and lay volunteers that have contact with children at any time or bring this list to the Archdiocesan Assembly.
- Please contact *policycoordinator@ocadwpa.org* if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,
Deacon Alexander
Policy Coordinator