

RUL 26-03 | REMOVING SAFE GATHERINGS FROM BACKGROUND CHECK POLICY

Purpose: To enact a decision made by the Conference Board of Trustees after the 2025 Annual Conference.

Effect:

- Confirms Philadelphia Insurance's strong preference for Ministry Safe over Safe Gatherings.
- As Safe Gatherings' background checks expire, please transfer to Ministry Safe.
- Clergy may be reimbursed for background checks. Contact your District Office.
- Clergy going to new appointments can contact the Ministry Safe Help Desk to have records transferred. support@ministrysafe.com

2025 SECTION I CONFERENCE POLICIES BACKGROUND CHECK, ABUSE PREVENTION, AND BOUNDARY TRAINING PROCESS FOR CLERGY, DECLARED CANDIDATES, AND LAY PERSONS ASSIGNED

A. Applicability of policy, and frequency of background checks and trainings:

1. A background check is required every three years for clergy and lay persons assigned under episcopal appointment, and as part of the application process for provisional membership or transfer into conference membership. In addition to the background check, all clergy under episcopal appointment, including those transferring into conference membership, lay persons assigned, elders appointed to extension ministries, and deacons appointed beyond the local church, must complete online training through ~~either the Ministry Safe or Safe Gatherings~~ abuse-prevention program. In addition, declared candidates for ordained ministry are subject to this policy. Under these programs, the background check and the online training are initiated simultaneously. Retired clergy who are appointed to serve a church must undergo a background check and training through the Ministry Safe ~~or Safe Gatherings~~ program at the time of the appointment. In addition to the online training and electronic background check obtained through Ministry Safe ~~or Safe Gatherings~~, clergy in all classifications listed above who are appointed to churches, or to Conference staff in positions serving youth, are required to obtain a criminal background check via a Live Scan fingerprint search.
2. The boundaries and sexual ethics training is required every three years for clergy and lay persons assigned under episcopal appointment and as part of the application process for provisional membership or transfer into conference membership. This includes clergy serving under appointment, lay persons assigned, those transferring into conference membership, elders appointed to extension ministries, deacons appointed beyond the local church, and retired clergy serving under appointment.

B. Disqualifying offenses and handling of unsatisfactory background check results:

- 1.a. A person who is not a clergy member in full connection may be denied examination, eligibility, or appointment when he or she has made a false statement of any material fact or attempted any deception or fraud in any part of the selection process.
- 1.b. A clergy member in full connection who has made a false statement of any material fact or attempted any deception or fraud in any part of the selection process is subject to the complaint procedure in the Book of Discipline, ¶362. (2020/2024)
2. A person convicted of a crime of child abuse, sexual assault, child neglect, murder, voluntary manslaughter, felony assault, arson, robbery, burglary, indecent exposure, public lewdness, terrorist threat, offenses against a minor, kidnapping, or a felony violation of the Controlled

1 Substance Act may be disqualified and prohibited from serving as a representative of the
2 California-Pacific Conference. From Background Screening Guide for Religious
3 Institutions, Philadelphia Indemnity Insurance Company.

- 4 3. Unsatisfactory background check results will be reviewed by the Bishop and handled under
5 the complaint procedures outlined in the Book of Discipline, ¶362
- 6 4. Other factors that will be considered:
 - 7 a. The nature and seriousness of the offense;
 - 8 b. The circumstances under which the offense occurred;
 - 9 c. The age of the person at the time of the offense;
 - 10 d. Societal conditions that may have contributed to the nature of the offense;
 - 11 e. The probability that the person will repeat the offense;
 - 12 f. The person's commitment to rehabilitation (if rehabilitation is called for).
 - 13 g. *The Book of Discipline* in the Social Principles also affirms "the right of individuals to
14 dissent when acting under the constraint of conscience and, after having exhausted all
15 legal recourse, to resist or disobey laws that they deem to be unjust or that are
16 discriminately enforced," and this would also be considered in evaluating background
17 check reports.
 - 18 h. According to the guidelines of the Legal Manual of the General Council of Finance and
19 Administration, "If reference and background checks reveal previous incidents of sexual
20 misconduct, Richard Hammar's Pastor, Church and Law recommends that the following
21 factors be considered before hiring the person: "(a) the nature and severity of the
22 previous misconduct; (b) the frequency of the previous misconduct; (c) how long ago the
23 misconduct occurred; (d) whether the minister received counseling; (e) the competency
24 and effectiveness of any counseling received; (f) the likelihood that the minister will
25 repeat the same type of misconduct now; (g) the possibility of legal liability if a jury
26 concludes, on the basis of all evidence, that the church [organization] was negligent in
27 hiring the minister." [GCFA Legal Manual – 2005-2012 Edition, Personnel, Section 1,
28 p. 16.]

30 C. Processing background check results and training:

- 31 1. **Declared Candidates for Ministry:** The Administrative Assistant of each district is
32 designated as a Ministry Safe Administrator ~~and Safe Gatherings Regional Administrator~~ for
33 declared candidates, and receives information about new declared candidates from the
34 District Committee on Ordained Ministry (DCOM). The Administrative Assistant receives
35 notification from Ministry Safe ~~and Safe Gatherings~~ regarding the background check and
36 training completion. If a report presents concern about a declared candidate, as reported to
37 the District Administrative Assistant, the Administrative Assistant forwards the information
38 to the DCOM Chair, the DCOM Registrar, and the District Superintendent for review and
39 handling. In keeping with Book of Discipline requirements, a credit report will be obtained
40 for declared candidates as part of the approval for the candidacy process.
- 41 2. **Candidates for Provisional Membership:** The Associate Director of Lay and Clergy
42 Credentialing and Development reviews current compliance for those who applied to the
43 Board of Ordained Ministry for provisional membership, and refers to the District Office for
44 initiation of background check if needed. The District Administrative Assistant provides
45 results to the Associate Director of Lay and Clergy Credentialing and Development, who
46 reports the information to the Provisional Registrar of the Board.

- 1 3. **Clergy:** Background checks and training for all classifications referenced in section A
2 [Applicability section] are conducted through the Ministry ~~Safe and Safe Gatherings~~ systems.
3 Actual results and reports are confidential and are not available to or shared with anyone
4 outside the District or Episcopal Office. If a questionable or unsatisfactory background check
5 is received, the District Office Administrative Assistant provides a copy to the District
6 Superintendent, who processes it to the Bishop for handling, as outlined in section B.3 of
7 this policy.
- 8 4. All persons under episcopal appointment: The boundaries and sexual ethics training is
9 provided by the Conference. Records of successful completion of this training is monitored
10 and held by the Cabinet.
- 11 5. Waivers: A background check, or review of a background check previously conducted, will
12 not be required for clergy of our Annual Conference appointed to United Methodist General
13 Boards and Agencies who are required to submit to background checks as a condition of
14 their employment/appointment with the agency.

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16 **D. Background check storage:**

17 Electronic background check results and reports are stored online in the Ministry ~~Safe and Safe~~
18 ~~Gatherings~~ systems, and are accessible by administrators at the District and Conference Offices.