

BACKGROUND SCREENING RECOMMENDATIONS

“Investigations of a person’s past as well as an assessment of his or her suitability and potential fitness for public church leadership are tasks of the ELCA Candidacy Committees. Background checks are a component of this process, as the church does everything possible to screen out people who might use their position as a pastor or lay rostered leader in damaging or illegal ways.”¹

This piece from the ELCA Candidacy Manual states clearly the need for background screening in order to protect Christ’s church. This is not only applicable to candidates preparing for leadership, but for present rostered leaders as well. The Upstate New York Synod recommends that a congregation in a call process run a background screening for a candidate before issuing a call. Candidates should be aware that this is part of our standard call process. Call Committees are given the responsibility to check personal references. The Congregation Council is responsible for background screening candidates recommended to them by the Call Committee. Criminal Records and Motor Vehicle screening should be done through a reputable agency.

There are many possible components to a background screening. The Upstate New York Synod recommends the following:

National Criminal Records Check
County Criminal Records Check (for all counties where the individual has resided.)
Motor Vehicle Report

In order for this to happen in a timely manner, The Congregation Council will need to:

1. Select a screening company
2. Set up an account with them.
3. Determine what kinds of checks they wish to have completed.
4. Decide who will actually receive the report as well as understand who sees the report. These reports also need to be kept locked in a safe place as they are highly confidential.

Once the account is set up, the agencies will set up an on-line form which the candidate completes to start the screening process. The charges for all this

¹ Candidacy Manual, January 2005, Division for Ministry, ELCA

and the detail of the work vary from company to company. The ELCA has set up discounted rates with two companies:

1. Oxford Document Management Company – Go to www.oxforddoc.com
You will see a box called “New Client Registration”. Click on it and the screens will walk you through setting up and account. This agency is the one we are currently using for Candidacy. They have a long history in working with various denominations for screening. If you have any questions their telephone number is 1-800-801-9114.

2. Choice Point’s VolunteerSelect Plus Program – Go to:

www.volunteersselectplus.com

Click on the “Sign Up Now” button in menu box. Complete the application and make sure to include the correct promotional code that waives set up fee and applies 15% discount. This promotional code is ELCA2. You will receive confirmation and account number and password in 1-3 business days. Then you can start processing reports. This agency is an established company that is particularly good for lay volunteers.

Other companies that have been explored by pastors in the synod are:

Groups Volunteer Central - \$99/Year for membership - \$17.00/per Screening includes - US criminal checks, Sexual Offender Data Base, DMV
Screening is performed through Kroll Background America. Go to www.churchvolunteercentral.com to begin the process. Note: This does not include county criminal history.

If you have any questions, talk to your synod staff or for technical help contact Mitchell Woite at the Syracuse Synod Office, by phone 315-299-4955 or by e-mail at mwoite@upstatenysynod.org.