

Sexual Abuse Prevention Policy Coordinator Report

2023 Annual Assembly, Archdiocese of Western Pennsylvania

Latest Updates:

1. **Background Check Policy:** Our Archdiocese has established a comprehensive policy that mandates background checks once every three years for clergy in the major and minor orders, as well as for all laity who regularly interact with youth.
2. **Partnership with Sterling Volunteers:** In 2022, we entered the fourth year of our partnership with Sterling Volunteers. This meant that a significant number of candidates were due for background checks this year.
3. **Current Status:** As of October 2023, I am pleased to report that 100% of active clergy in the Major Orders have remained current on their background checks, demonstrating our commitment to safeguarding our community.
4. **Increased Processing:** Last year, we processed a record-breaking 227 individuals through the Sterling Volunteers system, reflecting the growing awareness and importance of our policies.
5. **Challenges with Renewal Applications:** However, we have encountered challenges in processing renewal applications for lay volunteers at the parish level. To address this, each parish priest with a church school program receives an annual report indicating the background check status of clergy, staff, and volunteers listed on their Parish Information Update Form. I humbly ask for each priest's assistance in reaching out to laity who have not responded to renewal invitations.
6. **Role of Rectors:** Rectors play a pivotal role in ensuring compliance with background checks within their parishes, acting as primary points of accountability. Thank you for your cooperation.
7. **Accessibility and Support:** I want to emphasize that clergy, staff, and volunteers can reach out to me directly at (814) 321-4473 for any inquiries about background checks, assistance in conducting checks over the phone, or to request email invitations. I am available to address any questions or concerns you may have.
8. **Importance of Due Diligence:** It is crucial to note that some individuals have indicated on Parish Information Update forms that certain background checks or policies are unnecessary because "their parish doesn't have any children." However, it is our shared responsibility to perform due diligence before children arrive at our parishes, as growth and God's blessings are closely tied to our commitment to safeguarding.

Reminder: Free Stewards of Children Online Training:

To further strengthen our commitment to prevention, the Archdiocese has partnered with the national nonprofit Stewards of Children. As a reminder, to comply with the OCA's annual requirements, parishes must implement "Youth Worker Training." To address this, the Archdiocese offers free online training for your parishioners.

- **Training Details:** This training takes approximately three hours to complete, and it does not need to be done in one sitting. It combines survivor stories, expert advice, and practical guidance to help prevent abuse.
- **Access Link:** You can access the training through this self-registration link created specifically for us:

<https://bit.ly/ocadwpa-training>.

- **Sensitive Content:** Please be aware that child sexual abuse is a sensitive topic. Some survivor stories contained within the training videos may be difficult to watch as they are based on real experiences.
- **Support and Resources:** In addition to certification from Stewards of Children, the training offers a National Resource Sheet with contact information for agencies that can help. The Darkness to Light helpline is also available at 1-866-FOR-LIGHT for any training-related inquiries or questions.

Conclusion:

Our Archdiocese's commitment to preventing sexual abuse remains unwavering. I appreciate your cooperation in this vital endeavor. If you have any questions or require assistance, do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,
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