

Whereas, the qualifications for elders and deacons include being “above reproach” (1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:7), “self-controlled” (1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:8), “not violent but gentle” (1 Tim. 3:3), “not ... quick-tempered” (Titus 1:7), and “prove themselves blameless” (1 Tim. 3:10); and

Whereas, the qualifications for elders includes being “well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim. 3:7); and

Whereas, the qualification of every believer is to “keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable” (1 Pet. 2:12); and

Whereas, our confession warns leaders against the “careless exposing, or leaving [those in their care] to wrong, temptation, and danger” (*WLC* 130); and

Whereas, under the *Book of Church Order* church courts are to perform “a careful examination” of church officers including as to their “personal character” (21-4.c; 24-1.a) and “Christian experience” (13-6); and

Whereas, the report of the Ad Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault to the ~~Forty-Ninth~~ 49th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (the “DASA Report”) implores that “Churches protect their members with policies that take into consideration the most vulnerable in the congregation,” including “Presbyteries enacting policies to require background checks and abuse training for all ordinands and transfers, and policies to protect whistleblowers against retribution” (*M49GA* [2022], 965, 965 n.11); and

Whereas, the DASA Report further recommends, “Candidates for the gospel ministry and others employed for spiritual oversight (Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, etc.) should be examined carefully to determine their godly character. Presbyteries and Sessions are encouraged to carefully investigate a candidate for leadership roles including but not limited to the candidate’s knowledge of theology. *Background checks*, social media checks, and careful reference checks should be used to screen for abusive leadership” (*ibid.*, 1183); and

Whereas, the 42nd General Assembly resolved that churches prevent types of abuse “by screening staff and volunteers” (*M42GA* [2014], 59); and

Whereas, the 42nd General Assembly resolved that churches “must cooperate with those authorities as they ‘bear the sword’ to punish those who do evil ‘in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered . . . to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever” (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14; *WCF* 23.3)” (*ibid.*); and

Whereas, our confession's instruction that "there are some circumstances concerning ... government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence" (WCF 1.6) includes the wisdom and prudence of background checks; and

Whereas, our confession does not require submission to unlawful or unbiblical standards (WCF 23.4) nor thereby require the government's involvement in the business of the church (WCF 23.3); and

Whereas, presbyteries and sessions of the PCA are called to order and conduct all trials and examinations of candidates for church office utilizing their own discretion and wisdom due to the authority and right of their office (BCO 13, 21, and 24);

Therefore, be it resolved that BCO 13-6 be amended by inserting the following at the end of the section:

13-6. . . .

A Presbytery shall order and review a background check on each candidate, administered under the specific rules and policies of the Presbytery, as part of its examination of the candidate's Christian experience (if seeking admission from another Presbytery in the Presbyterian Church in America) or acquaintance with experiential religion (if seeking admission from other denominations [see BCO 21-4.c.(1)(a)]). The candidate shall be permitted to address the content of the background check.

Be it further resolved that BCO 21-4.c.(1) be amended by inserting the following unnumbered paragraph at the end of the subsection:

21-4.c.(1) . . .

A Presbytery shall order and review a background check on each candidate, administered under the specific rules and policies of the Presbytery, as part of its examination of a candidate's experiential religion (BCO 21-4.c.(1)(a)). The candidate shall be permitted to address the content of the background check.

Be it further resolved that BCO 24-1 be amended by inserting the following unnumbered paragraph immediately after subsection e. and before the unnumbered paragraph that begins, "Notwithstanding the above . . .":

24-1.e. . . .

A Session shall order and review a background check on each candidate, administered under the specific rules and policies of the Session, as part of its examination of a candidate's Christian experience (BCO 24-1.a.). The candidate shall be permitted to address the content of the background check.

Be it further resolved that Presbyteries and Sessions are hereby encouraged to adopt policies for conducting mandatory background checks on every candidate for office. The following is an example of a policy that could be adopted or amended by a Presbytery to adhere with local laws and regulations:

Prior to any candidate coming before the Presbytery for examination for ordination or transfer of credentials, the [insert committee name] Committee shall order a background check on the candidate ordinarily at the cost of the Presbytery. The report of the background check shall only be received by the Committee in executive session. The candidate shall be furnished with a copy of the background check and given the opportunity to respond to any content in the background check. The Committee shall report to the Presbytery (1) that it has received the report of the background check, and no concerns were raised; (2) that it has received the report of the background check, and potential concerns were satisfactorily explained by the candidate without reflecting negatively on his *BCO* 13-6 or 21-4.c.(1)(a) examination; or (3) that it has received the report of the background check, and potential concerns should be weighed by the Presbytery in the candidate's *BCO* 13-6 or 21-4.c.(1)(a) examination. Any details of possible concerns found in the background check may be disclosed only to the Presbytery and/or the Session of the church calling the candidate when in executive session. Such details may be disclosed outside the Committee only at the Committee's discretion or upon the request of the Presbytery or Session properly seeking the information.

The following is an example of a policy that could be adopted by a Session:

Prior to any candidate coming before the Session for examination for the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon, the Session shall order a background check on the candidate at the cost of the Session. The report of the background check shall only be received by the Session in executive session. The candidate shall be furnished with a copy of the background check and given the opportunity to respond to any content in the background check. Information learned should ordinarily only be considered as part of the Session's examination of the candidate's personal character under *BCO* 24-1.a. and should not ordinarily be disclosed to the congregation.