

Reading the Disclosure Form and Criminal Background Check A Guide for Search Committees in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Ministers are required to submit a **Disclosure Form** regarding their professional and ethical behavior and complete a **Criminal Background Check** as a prerequisite for entering Search and Call. The material on the Disclosure Form should be consistent with any information that is revealed on the Criminal Background Check. Any discrepancy between the two should be a serious concern. Search Committees should be advised to treat this and all ministerial information as strictly confidential.

Care in Calling of a Minister

Care in the calling of a minister requires that calling bodies take reasonable steps to determine whether or not individuals they call have a history of misconduct. As the “calling body,” the local church must acknowledge its responsibility for care in calling, while remaining fair and just to candidates.

The purpose of the Disclosure Form and Criminal Background Check is to provide candidates with an opportunity and a means to share information with Search Committees. The purpose is NOT to provide Search Committees with an automatic way of dismissing candidates from consideration. Such presumptive rejection may be based upon inadequate information and is, therefore, unfair to candidates.

A Search Committee should seek to match the future needs of the calling body with the faith, character, skills, and abilities of the candidates whose profiles are being reviewed. Presumptive elimination of candidates on the basis of background information could end up denying Search Committees an opportunity to take a closer look at someone who could be the very one who is best prepared to fulfill this ministry. A person’s demonstration of having overcome a past difficulty and a committee’s considered awareness of that strength promotes care in calling and provides an opportunity for an individual to continue in ministry in faithful and fruitful ways.

Consultation with your Regional or Area staff person is very important if your committee wishes to seek clarification on information in the Disclosure Form or Criminal Background Check. Isolate the piece of information you want to have clarified, and be direct about your questions.

Reading the Criminal Background Check

The presence of a conviction in a candidate’s history should not result in automatic rejection of a candidate. Just as the absence of criminal history does not automatically make a candidate fit for a specific call to ministry, neither does the existence of criminal history automatically make a candidate unfit for such a call. The evaluation of criminal history should include:

- the nature and seriousness of the offense
- the circumstances under which the offense occurred
- the relationship of the criminal behavior to the responsibilities of the position sought
- the passage of time since the offense and the absence or presence of other criminal behavior
- evidence that the individual has addressed the issue through counseling, restitution, or other appropriate means
- the probability that the candidate will repeat harmful behavior associated with the offense
- other evidence of the person’s fitness for ministry

The determination of whether a particular criminal offense is serious enough to result in a decision not to extend a call is at the sole discretion of the calling body. Calling bodies should have reservations about a candidate who makes false statement of any material fact or attempts any deception or fraud with respect to the candidate’s criminal history.

General Commission on Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), August 2007
(adapted from the United Church of Christ manual on Search and Call)