

Presbytery of the James Background Check Policy

COM Approved: January 15, 2026

POJ Approved: February 21, 2026

Purpose

The Presbytery of the James (“POJ”) affirms its responsibility to ensure safe, trustworthy, and transparent ministry in all settings where its leaders serve. This policy establishes consistent standards for background checks for all Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs), and Certified Christian Educators (CCEs) who serve within or hold membership in the presbytery.

This policy supports the Presbytery’s commitment to safeguarding children, youth, and vulnerable adults; supporting congregations; and fulfilling responsibilities outlined in the Book of Order (G-3.0106).

Scope

This policy applies to all individuals serving in ministries validated, authorized, or overseen by the Presbytery, including:

- Ministers of Word and Sacrament seeking membership in POJ
- Installed pastors (including associate pastors)
- Designated pastors
- Temporary Positions: Interim/Transitional, Covenant and Bridge pastors (including associate pastors)
- Parish Associates
- Ministers validated in non-congregational ministries
- Ministers At Large
- Certified Christian Educators (CCEs) serving within or validated by POJ
- Commissioned Ruling Elders (CREs)
- Retired ministers returning to active service

When Background Checks Are Required

1. Entrance Into the Presbytery

A background check is required for any minister, CRE, or CCE seeking membership or validation within POJ.

2. New Calls/New Covenants

A background check is required when entering any of the following:

- Installed positions
- Temporary positions
- Validated ministries

- Parish associate agreements
- CCE or CRE ministry positions
- Any new covenant or commission under POJ authority

3. Renewal Cycle (Every Five Years)

A background check is required every five (5) years for all clergy, CREs, and CCEs who are actively engaged in any form of validated, covenantal, or authorized ministry within the Presbytery.

4. Return to Service

Retired clergy, CREs, or CCEs must complete a background check before entering any new service or ministry relationship under POJ authority.

Components of the Background Check

At a minimum, the background check will include:

- National criminal background search
- National sex offender registry search
- Federal district court search
- Social Security number verification
- Identity verification
- Motor vehicle record

Results must be completed before a call, covenant, commission, or validation is finalized.

Vendor and Cost

The Presbytery will maintain a relationship with an approved background-check vendor.

Costs may be:

- Paid by the Presbytery, or
- Shared with the employing congregation or ministry, or
- Paid by the individual, depending on Presbytery policy

Confidentiality

- Results are reviewed only by the Stated Clerk and COM Chair.
- The Presbytery will retain only a record of completion, not the full report.
- Full reports remain securely stored by the vendor.
- If concerns arise, COM will meet with the individual and determine next steps.

Failure to Comply

Individuals who decline or fail to complete required background checks may not begin ministry service, renew covenants, be validated, be included on the COM supply list, or be approved for presbytery membership until compliance is achieved.