

LifeWay offers background checks discount

By: Brooklyn Noel Lowery

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Good guys don't wear superhero capes, and bad guys don't always have shifty eyes and devious-sounding chuckles.

In real life, discerning the heroes from the villains often requires more than a visual assessment. That means you can't know whether someone is "good" or "bad" by looking at them when they walk through the front door of your church and volunteer to serve.

That's why LifeWay Christian Resources entered an agreement with backgroundchecks.com to provide discounted screenings for churches.

"It is so important in this day and time to run these checks," said Barbara Strong, church secretary at Jubilee Worship Center in Westmoreland, Tenn. Strong runs the checks for the church, which began using backgroundchecks.com about a year ago. "We just don't know who is coming into our church. We'd like to think everyone is a good Christian, but we can't know that."

About 450 churches have requested more than 5,000 background checks on volunteers and prospective employees since LifeWay began offering the service in 2008, according to data from backgroundchecks.com. Most of those searches returned clean records or minor traffic-related offenses, but 80 screenings uncovered serious felony offenses, and more than 600 people had some type of criminal history that may have disqualified them from volunteering or working at a church.

First Baptist Church in Estero, Fla., has had to turn away a few volunteers due to the information uncovered by backgroundchecks.com. Associate Pastor Wayne Rogers runs the checks.

"It's important that we let new folks know we will be running checks [if they volunteer]," Rogers said, adding that the church stresses the confidentiality and necessity of the process. "When we have a negative screening result, we deal with it in a loving way. We know that people make mistakes, and we know we've been made new creations in Christ."

He added that, as much as possible, church leadership tries to minimize embarrassment in these cases, but that specific people -- directors of the children's or youth areas, for instance -- must be informed that a particular person should not be permitted around children.

"Children are our precious commodity," Rogers said. "They've been entrusted to us, and we have to protect them at any cost."

Greg Young is a buyer for LifeWay Christian Stores, but he also serves as the minister of education at Cedar Hill Baptist Church in Cedar Hill, Tenn. Cedar Hill began using the screening service about a year ago and has so far screened 50-60 people. Young said all church staff members and all volunteers who will be working with individuals 18 years old and younger are required to submit to the screening.

In spite of church budgets that are shrinking in the current economy, Young said his church did not even consider cutting back by nixing background checks.

"We're trying to make sure we provide the safest environment possible for youth and children," Young said. "Backgroundchecks.com helps us with our due diligence, and I think that's being a good steward."

For more information about background screenings, call 866-300-8524 or visit LifeWayStores.com/backgroundchecks.

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Brooklyn Noel Lowery is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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