

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON POSTULANTS FOR ORDINATION

THE ACPO HANDBOOK

Revised Edition

April, 2012



Excerpts for Assessors and Candidates

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ACPO PROCESS

The ACPO Mandate

The Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination, ACPO, is responsible for a national discernment process advisory to bishops. At annual (some semi-annual) discernment conferences, held in each of the four Ecclesiastical Provinces across Canada, ACPO, at the Bishop's request, evaluates all persons discerning a call to be a postulant for ordination to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Canada and provides an evaluative report for bishops and those assessed. A typical ACPO report advises a bishop about the 'personal strengths and weaknesses of candidates, the nature of their personal faith, their present understanding and potential for Christian ministry, and their understanding of vocation.'

ACPO is one of the four arenas (parish, diocese, training institution/theological college, ACPO) of the discernment process used by candidates and their bishops. Each arena has a specific responsibility in the discernment process. It is the primary responsibility of ACPO to assess for the wider church on issues related to call, character, and charisms relative to priestly ministry. Responsibilities for ACPO also include:

- evaluating candidates in the areas of spirituality and church life, pastoral and social concern, and personal characteristics, using the national *Checklist of Indicators*
- screening candidates around issues of power, trust and sexual misconduct
- exploring with the candidates the areas of personal support, self-care, life balance, and spiritual direction
- identifying areas in which the candidate needs to grow
- offering advice regarding the pursuit of other forms of ministry where applicable

It is the responsibility of the bishop and training institution/theological college, in an intentional process, to make decisions about programmes of education and formation suitable both for the candidate and for the particular form of ministry for which s/he is preparing. This function is not part of an ACPO assessment.

While a national program of the House of Bishops, ACPO is organized on a Provincial basis and is held accountable to the House of Bishops through Provincial structures, e.g. the Metropolitan and Provincial House of Bishops. Each Province will appoint an ACPO Bishop and an ACPO Secretary, both of whom will hopefully have had some experience with the ACPO process.

Applicants to ACPO are required:

- 1) to fill out a comprehensive Candidate's Information Form supplied by the Provincial ACPO Secretary to each diocese;
- 2) to write two brief essays, one autobiographical, and the other laying out their understanding of baptismal ministry in general and priestly ministry in particular;
- 3) to supply name, address and telephone numbers of three referees who will complete a reference questionnaire sent out by the Provincial Secretary or the diocesan ACPO contact person;

- 4) if married or engaged, to provide a letter from their spouse or fiancé in support of the application to ACPO and reflecting on the applicant's call to priestly ministry;
- 5) to attend a residential assessment conference which typically runs from Friday late morning until Sunday early afternoon.

Assessors for each ACPO Conference are chosen by the Provincial Secretary from a list of nominees supplied by the diocesan bishops or their designate. Training for the assessment conference usually takes place on the Thursday afternoon/evening and Friday morning of the conference weekend. Training is designed to:

- 1) ensure assessors understand and are comfortable with the conference process;
- 2) provide an opportunity for assessors to explore and increase their understanding of priestly ministry in the contemporary context;
- 3) assist the 3-member panels of assessors to develop a comprehensive and consistent plan for the interviews with the candidates;
- 4) review guidelines and process for the writing of assessment reports;
- 5) provide an opportunity for the assessors to read their candidates files and discuss them with their team and the ACPO Secretary where necessary.

The Conference is an exercise in discernment of vocations to priestly ministry. Understandably, it is almost always a very intense and sometimes stressful time for the applicants and the assessors. With the involvement of the Provincial ACPO Bishop at the start of the conference, the caring leadership of the ACPO Secretary, and the support of a Chaplain who leads in worship planning and provides pastoral care, an atmosphere of genuine care and support for the candidates will be the goal of the assessment conference.

Safe Church practices will be the standard for ACPO Conferences. The Church has spiritual, moral, legal and societal obligations to ensure a safe environment for all ACPO participants. To that end, no form of harassment (i.e. repeated subtle or overt action, which cause the recipient to feel attacked, demeaned, intimidated or manipulated) in general, or sexual harassment in particular, will be tolerated. Doors to interview rooms will be left open or have a clear glass window through which activity in the room can be seen. No interview room will ever be locked during interviews. Personal boundaries of candidates, assessors and ACPO staff are to be respected at all times.

ACPO PERSONNEL AND THEIR ROLES

THE ROLE OF THE BISHOPS

The Provincial House of Bishops in each Ecclesiastical Province is responsible for approving a Provincial ACPO Secretary who will receive a letter of appointment from the Metropolitan.

Diocesan Bishops or their designates are to review annually, using the *Checklist of Qualities For Assessors For Bishops to Complete*, a list of potential assessors from their diocese who are willing to serve at a Provincial ACPO Conference. This list is then to be sent to the Provincial ACPO Secretary. Along with the list of nominees, it is helpful to receive a brief note about each, in which their gifts or particular areas of expertise are indicated. The list of nominees should include clergy and laity, women and men, young and old, and persons of various ethnic backgrounds. The names of experienced assessors should be included but it is important to regularly bring new people into the process as well.

Each diocese is responsible for its own pre-ACPO selection process and testing/screening of candidates, the assembling of candidates' files (4 copies of the Candidate's Information Form, spousal/fiancé letter if applicable, autobiographical essay, essay on ministry, parish commendation and previous ACPO Report if applicable) and inviting candidates to attend the Provincial ACPO Conference.

Bishops should pay particular attention to the covering Bishop's Information Form which spells out for the assessment teams any concerns or questions which a bishop may have about a candidate. This help can be invaluable, both for the bishop and the assessors. It is particularly important for assessors to know from the bishop what kind of ministry is being sought by the candidate (i.e. stipendiary or non-stipendiary, parish or other forms of full or part-time ministry).

After the ACPO Conference, it is assumed that the bishop, or his/her designate, will personally discuss the ACPO report with each candidate, and where deemed appropriate, follow-up on any recommendations contained in the report. The report will be shared with the appropriate theological college or training program only at the discretion of the bishop. At the bishop's discretion, the candidate may be admitted as a postulant. The bishop will want to stress that **admission as a postulant does not imply any guarantee or promise of ordination.**

Should bishops have any questions, complaints or criticisms about ACPO reports or practices, they should be directed to their Provincial ACPO Secretary. It would be inappropriate for a bishop to contact any ACPO assessor directly.

THE ROLE OF THE PROVINCIAL ACPO BISHOP

The Provincial ACPO Bishop is appointed by the Metropolitan of each Province. The Bishop provides a liaison between the National ACPO Chair and the Provincial ACPO Secretary, may report on Provincial ACPO matters to the National House of Bishops, provides episcopal support for the Provincial ACPO Secretary and attends the triennial National Coordinating Committee meeting.

The Provincial ACPO Bishop should be in attendance at the opening of each Provincial ACPO conference to welcome candidates and assessors, speak to current issues for ministry from the National House of Bishops, preside at the opening Eucharist, share the first lunch with assessors and candidates, and then meet briefly with the assessors to thank them for their contribution to the process and listen to any concerns they may have. To avoid putting any constraints on candidates or assessors from their Diocese, and to avoid any potential conflict of interest, it is expected that the Provincial ACPO Bishop will leave the conference at this point, but remain available to the ACPO Secretary by phone or electronic means for the duration of the conference.

THE ROLE OF THE PROVINCIAL SECRETARY

The Provincial ACPO Secretary, appointed by the Metropolitan, is accountable to the Metropolitan, to the Provincial House of Bishops, to the Provincial ACPO Bishop, and to the National Coordinating Committee.

The Provincial Secretary is responsible for maintaining a pool of names of potential assessors on nomination of diocesan bishops. The assessor pool needs to be diverse, including individuals representative of and/or sensitive to the varieties of cultures present in the province, and familiar with the diverse forms of priestly ministry present and evolving with the province. They should also represent a variety of personal, professional and ecclesiastical backgrounds, with concern both for continuity and rotation within the pool of assessors.

The Provincial Secretary implements ACPO policy and takes responsibility for recruiting a Chaplain and computer resource person, selecting and training assessors, for planning, organizing and facilitating the annual (or semi-annual) ACPO Conference, and for ensuring final ACPO reports are sent, immediately after each conference, to the bishops sponsoring candidates to an ACPO Conference.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES

*** It is crucial that each applicant to ACPO have had a conversation with their Bishop about ordination requirements before candidates are sent to a provincial ACPO Conference. ***

Each Provincial Secretary will establish their own timeline for the application process which will ensure that all the required documentation has been submitted well in advance of the Conference date. No candidate whose file is incomplete will be accepted to a provincial assessment Conference. Sufficient time should be allowed for diocesan pre-ACPO testing/screening results to inform the application process.

Each applicant completes and signs the Candidate's Information Form, attaches a spousal/fiancée letter where applicable, the required essays, and a copy of a previous ACPO Report where applicable, (all copied on yellow, pink and blue paper to provide four complete sets) and returns this complete file to the Bishop for his/her signature.

The Provincial Secretary sets a date by which the Bishops will have supplied the following material for each applicant:

- 1) a signed 'Bishop's Information Form' indicating
 - a) the kind of ordained ministry sought
 - b) the programme to be undertaken
 - c) areas to which assessors should pay particular attention
- 2) the four sets of the applicant's file
- 3) the Parish Commendation

If a diocese does not meet this deadline, the candidate's place may be forfeited.

The Provincial Secretary, Diocesan Bishop, or their designate sends **confidential** Reference Questionnaires to the referees named by the applicants and adds them to the files made available to the assessors at the provincial Conference. It is the responsibility of the applicants to provide accurate information about how referees may be contacted.

The Provincial Secretary acknowledges to each applicant receipt of their file and its completeness and supplies details about the Conference and how to get there. A brief description of what can be expected at the Conference should be given. It is helpful to let candidates know the 'dress code' and to suggest that they bring musical instruments, games, sporting equipment, etc. if such facilities are available. Some provinces make provision to invite the spouse of a married applicant to attend the conference. Candidates are responsible for their own travel costs, subject to any diocesan assistance, but not for the costs of Conference meals or accommodation.

Candidates should be sent a list of the names of the assessors scheduled for their conference and asked to notify the Provincial Secretary if for any reason they should not be assessed by any assessor (e.g. a prior significant relationship, conflict of interest, etc.).

THE SELECTION AND WORK OF ASSESSORS

Each year Diocesan Bishops are asked to review, with the Provincial Secretary, the names of both lay and clergy assessors from their diocese, and provide new names where applicable. These people are mature Anglican Christians whose experience in the Church has given them insight into the exercise of priestly ministry and the qualities desirable in those who practice it. The Secretaries will only use assessors approved by diocesan bishops.

Assessors are organized in teams of three members. It is imperative that at least one team member have ACPO Conference experience. At least one team should include a female priest. At least one team should include a male priest. In addition, the make-up of each team should satisfy the following criteria:

- i) a good mix of experience, expertise, men, women, lay and ordained in each panel*
- ii) no assessor is related to any applicant at the conference*
- iii) whenever possible, no assessor will interview a candidate from their diocese*

Assessors should be sent a list of the names of the candidates attending the conference and asked to notify the Provincial Secretary if for any reason they should not assess or do not wish to assess any applicant assigned to their group (e.g. a significant prior relationship, a conflict of interest, etc.).

ASSESSOR TRAINING

The Provincial Secretary is responsible for the training of assessors prior to every ACPO Conference. Outside trainers may be brought in for various components of the training at the discretion of the Provincial Secretary.

Training will focus on the nature of the work at hand. It is helpful to have some kind of small group work at the outset to allow all the assessors and team members to become comfortable with each other and to lay the foundation for effective teamwork. **The spiritual dimension of the conference should not be neglected, especially the discipline of prayer.** In order to foster common understandings of priestly ministry, assessors should discuss relevant criteria both in plenary and in their teams. The input of the Provincial ACPO Bishop can be very helpful in providing a bishop's view of the selection process leading to ordination.

Training session content/style may vary Province to Province, but each should include:

- 1) a clear outline of the ACPO process and its mandate to assess candidates on the basis of call, character and charisms for priestly ministry;
- 2) an exploration of the assumptions assessors bring to the task;
- 3) a conversation about the theology of priesthood as found in the ordinals;
- 4) in addition to material on priestly ministry, a component on Leadership qualities and skills;

- 5) discussion, where appropriate, to cultural sensitivity and particular ministries with the province;
- 6) a review of discernment skills and styles, including a clear review of the questions we can and cannot ask legally;
- 7) direction about identifying candidates who are mature adults with a mature Christian faith and a familiarity with, understanding of and commitment to an Anglican expression of that faith;
- 8) a specific review of Safe Church practices;
- 9) a clear statement about the confidential nature of the ACPO process and the inappropriateness of discussing candidates, deliberations re. candidates, or candidate's reports with anyone following an ACPO Conference, including their Diocesan Bishop.

The Provincial Secretary may choose to send information regarding interviewing techniques or the theology of priestly ministry to assessors for their perusal before the Conference. The document '*Checklist of Indicators of the Potential of Prospective Postulants*' may prove useful for stimulating thinking and discussion. Such resources will be shared and reviewed at the Provincial Secretaries annual meeting.

At the Conference the Provincial Secretary will review with the assessors both the Conference schedule and the process for writing and producing reports. Each panel will be responsible for assessing a **maximum of 3** applicants and for producing a succinct evaluative report on each. It is essential that the content of the report support clearly the recommendation that has been made, making reference only to what has been directly heard or observed at the conference.

Each report will be reviewed and consensually approved by the plenary of assessors and then signed by the Provincial Secretary. Upon receiving/reading their report, the candidate will be asked to sign it, indicating only that he or she has received the report at the conclusion of the ACPO process, not that they necessarily agree with the content.

The Provincial Secretary may wish to enlist the services of a computer resource person to assist in the production of the final reports (five copies). The Provincial Secretary keeps one copy for the ACPO files (with the blue copy of materials) and attaches the other copies to the four sets of applications which are sent to the Diocesan Bishop (pink and yellow) and the National Church Archives (white). All letters of reference are attached to the copy sent to the National Church Archives.

It is the responsibility of the Provincial Secretary to hold candidate's files and reports confidentially and securely for seven years and then to shred them.

THE ACPO CHAPLAIN

A Chaplain is appointed for each provincial Conference. He or she will work closely with the Secretary **but will not review the candidates' files or be involved in the assessment process.** The Chaplain serves as pastor to candidates, assessors, and the Secretary. The Chaplain's duties include:

- 1) provision of pastoral care and support to all who attend the provincial Conference, particularly to those who experience distress during the assessment process;*
- 2) to work with 'worship teams' to plan and facilitate the worship services throughout the Conference;*
- 3) to lead in the planning of the 'Chaplain's Evening' with the candidates on Saturday evening while the assessors are preparing reports;*
- 4) responsibility for the Sunday morning Eucharist.*
- 5) being available to be notified by the Provincial Secretary of the nature of the Report to be presented to each candidate Sunday morning. He or she will make themselves available to those who are not being recommended at this time, and be prepared to support them pastorally.*