

**NCDVD GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATES FOR  
DIOCESAN PRIESTHOOD**

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## I. Preface

A. Recognizing the need of many vocation personnel for guidance in the assessment of candidates for diocesan priesthood we have sought to assemble and organize information and suggestions to that end.<sup>1</sup> The gathering and organization of this material was done in order to provide vocation personnel with a starting place in seeking information and advice on the assessment of candidates. A reminder that the initial assessment of candidates for entrance into seminary formation is different from the assessment prior to ordination to the priesthood.

B. As is often said, the selection of high quality candidates begins with knowing what you are looking for. Therefore, these guidelines begin with a look at criteria. An effort has been made to be comprehensive, though we do not lay claim to having presented an exhaustive list. It is also important to bear in mind that not all qualities or limitations carry the same weight. Each diocese must determine for itself what qualities make for a successful life and ministry in its context. The assessment process should look for the presence of positive skills for ministry not just the absence thereof.

C. A brief look at the methods used to assess the criteria enumerated comes next. This is followed by a sample of components of an assessment process.

D. Next is a description of the evaluation and decision-making process followed by a statement on the communication of the decision and the proper handling of the information and documents that have been gathered.

E. A good deal of helpful and more detailed information is contained in a collection of appendices treating in greater depth such things as psychological testing, sample questions, admission boards, ethical conduct, and professional responsibility.

F. While great efforts are being made to bring the tools of psychology and the human sciences to the task of assessment, it bears remembering that authentic discernment and prayer continue to be the model and context in which these guidelines are exercised.

## II. Acquiring the Information

### A. Criteria

#### 1. General

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<sup>1</sup> The material presented here is largely a compilation from diverse sources including ideas from Rev. Raymond Carey, Ph.D., and the publications of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors (NCDVD), and National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC).

a) When a candidate discerns that his particular vocation seems to be the diocesan priesthood, the bishop himself or his delegate, evaluates the prospective candidate's physical, psychological, spiritual, and intellectual qualities.

b) The criteria by which this evaluation is made should be carefully determined and should include such things as: religious development, spirituality, psychological maturity, healthy psychosexual integration appropriate to the age of the candidate, adequate academic background and talent for the level of training the candidate wishes to enter, knowledge and practice of the Roman Catholic faith, commitment to social justice, adaptability for a variety of service in the Church, adequate physical health for priesthood, and canonical freedom to enter the priesthood.<sup>2</sup>

c) "This screening should be done from the perspective of accepting candidates who show a real potential for being diocesan priests."<sup>3</sup> Each diocese should communicate its criteria to the candidate early in the process, including what may be considered obstacles or impediments to acceptance.

d) If in the screening process the potential candidate does not meet the diocesan criteria, the decision to proceed should be communicated without delay, and care should be taken to explain the reasons appropriately.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Canonical<sup>5</sup>

a) Canon law presents various potential impediments to the reception of holy orders that by extension preclude admittance to seminary formation. Still other factors may bear on a candidate's readiness for formation, including recent conversion to the faith. It is important to determine early in the process that a candidate is free from the more common canonical impediments that require dispensation.<sup>6</sup> The canonical impediments include:

- (1) Insanity
- (2) Apostasy, heresy, schism
- (3) Existing bond, e.g., marriage
- (4) Voluntary homicide, abortion
- (5) Attempted suicide or mutilation
- (6) Impersonating a person in orders

## 3. National

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<sup>2</sup>*Guidelines for Diocesan Vocation Offices, Third Edition Revised and Updated*, NCCB, 1998, pg. 14

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 14

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 15.

<sup>5</sup> "A draft of guidelines for assessing freedom from impediments to all the orders has been prepared by Fr. Scott Bullock for NCDVD entitled "Assessment of a Candidate's Freedom from Canonical Irregularities and Impediments of the Reception of Holy Orders"; *NCDVD News*, Summer 2000, p. 4-5

See also, "Canon Law Impediments and Prohibitions"; David M. Hynous, OP; published in *Horizon: Journal of the National Religious Vocation Conference*, Winter 1993, v 18:2; p. 25-27)

<sup>6</sup> Cf. The Code of Canon Law, cc. 1040-1049

- a) The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops may establish from time to time norms for admission applicable to all U.S. dioceses.
- b) In considering candidates with prior experience in a formation program, the norms set forth by the USCCB should be followed.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. Intellectual Formation and Cognitive Functioning**

- a) The candidate must demonstrate the capacity to successfully complete a college degree and graduate level studies.
- b) This competency for academic formation may be evident in the candidate's styles of thinking, thought organization and cognitive controls.
- c) Several other intellectual competencies to look for include: logic, creativity, flexibility, social awareness, problem solving and language abilities. In contrast, areas that may preclude a candidate from being accepted include: below average intelligence, low level of academic curiosity, dullness, lack of insight.

#### **5. Human Formation**

Sometimes this is described in terms of a candidate's level of development, maturation or integration. These criteria give a diocese a view of a person's own life skills and limitations.

##### **a) Growth Potential**

- (1) Throughout the assessment of the strengths and limitations of a candidate, it is important to evaluate not only his needs for growth but also his potential for responding to those needs by engaging the formation process. While considering the criteria below, a diocese needs to evaluate the candidate's capacity for change and commitment to personal growth.
- (2) One concrete sign of a candidate's ability to embrace formation is the capacity for receiving feedback from others and using this constructively in personal growth.
- (3) In contrast, a candidate's resistance to constructive feedback or his repeated inability to learn from mistakes serves as a sign that the potential for real growth is minimal.

##### **b) Psychological Health**

- (1) While psychological health is more than the absence of mental illness, all mental health conditions should be closely evaluated for their potential interference with seminary formation or priestly ministry.
- (2) The presence of certain mental conditions are, of themselves, cause for serious concern or even exclusion from consideration. These include: personality and neurological disorders including schizoid personality, borderline personality, narcissism, bi-polar disorder, the clinical manifestation of depression, anxiety and panic

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Appendix 5

disorders; and debilitating addictions or compulsions such as gambling, drinking and eating disorders.<sup>8</sup>

**c) Personality Features, Personal Dynamics and Life Skills**

(1) Some personality features, personal dynamics, and patterns of living, while not constituting ‘mental illness,’ are maladaptive or problematic in the context of the demands of the ministry of many diocesan priests. Therefore, consideration should be given to how the following areas impact the effectiveness of seminary formation and priestly ministry.

(2) A candidate should possess a strong sense of self, a good knowledge of himself, and positive self-esteem. His self-perception should be based on reality, lacking self-preoccupation and narcissism. Low ego-awareness and negative self-esteem are problematic signs in a candidate for priesthood.

(3) A candidate should demonstrate personal openness and the ability to ask for and receive feedback. He should have a comfort with himself and his personal and family history. He should be able to reveal the depths of himself appropriately and with relative ease. In contrast, resistance to self-revelation can be a problematic sign.

(4) A candidate should possess appropriate skills for independent and autonomous living. He should have the capacity for self-care, including the ability to recognize and meet his own changing needs. Adaptation and flexibility to a variety of life situations are important characteristics for good candidates as well. In contrast, problematic signs include neediness, relational over-dependencies, low frustration levels, regressive tendencies, and lack of differentiation from his family.

(5) A candidate must be able to deal with and work under stress, pressure, and multiple responsibilities. He should have adequate and appropriate defenses, coping mechanisms and strategies.

(6) Additional personal and life skills to consider include: the quality and quantity of physical and emotional energy available to the individual, time management abilities, promptness, as well as the ability to balance work, play and relationships.

(7) In contrast, problematic signs include: family dynamics affected by trauma or unresolved conflict; presence of alcoholism or abuse in the family system; rigidity used as a

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<sup>8</sup> If a candidate is in recovery or treatment it will be important to assess the status of his recovery/treatment and what he does to maintain it.

means of maintaining control over personality conflicts; an overly defensive posture, and a basic lack of a desire to change, or enter the dynamics of growth.

**d) Social Effectiveness Factors, Interpersonal Relationship Skills and Psychosexual Development<sup>9</sup>**

The qualities and limitations listed below describe a candidate's emotional or affective competence, his ability to form and sustain healthy relationships and interact socially in appropriate and effective ways.

(1) A candidate should have an awareness of his emotional life, an ability to identify, integrate and respond to his own emotions and those of others, and the ability to express emotions appropriately and selectively.<sup>10</sup> The diocese can explore the patterns a candidate uses in dealing with his emotions.

(2) A candidate must possess the capacity for empathy, a compassion for the highs and lows in the lives and relationships of others.

(3) He must be able to establish and maintain healthy and personally satisfying relationships. This can be identified through his ability to identify specific current friendships, his capacity to give and receive love and support, his capacity for commitment in relationships, and his ability to trust and to be trustworthy.

(4) A candidate must be able to set, maintain and respect boundaries. He should have the capacity for meeting intimacy needs and for nourishing intimacy within appropriate moral boundaries.

(5) In contrast, there are a variety of problematic signs that may demonstrate a man would not be a candidate for priesthood. These include: lack of connection to people on an emotional level, isolation, a sense that he simply does not care about others, evidence that he does not maintain appropriate boundaries personally or professionally, emotional neediness, a sense that he uses or manipulates others in relationships for his own gain, and the presence of debilitating anxiety, rage or significant authority issues. Other behaviors that are cause for concern include: excessively effeminate manners and behaviors, sexually suggestive speech, highly sexualized behaviors, e.g. "campy" behaviors.

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<sup>9</sup> "Given the legitimate need of the Church to ascertain that candidates are indeed capable of living celibacy in a mature and authentic manner, a sponsoring diocese and seminaries do have a right to ask specific questions about an applicant's sexual history. It is our understanding that this does not necessarily require a 'manifestation of conscience'." Letter: Secretariat for Vocations and Priestly Formation April 30, 1999

<sup>10</sup> NCDVD Institute for Diocesan Vocation Personnel; Center for Continuing Formation, St. Mary's Seminary and University; January 14-19, 2001

(6) A candidate must have an awareness, acceptance and integration of his own sexuality and sexual orientation. He must demonstrate stability in chaste celibacy for a substantial period of time and have the capacity to live a life of genital abstinence. He must show comfort with his sexuality and with relationships with men and women of various ages.

(7) Problematic signs to a person's candidacy relative to psycho-sexual maturity and development include: sexual ambivalence, asexuality, unaddressed history as a survivor of sexual abuse, sexual harassment or sexual exploitation by others, addictive sexual behavior, use of pornography including internet pornography, and promiscuity.

(8) A candidate should possess a healthy sense of humor that recognizes joy and the incongruities of life that is neither cynical nor hurtful towards others.

**e) Motivation**

(1) Motivation can be described both in terms of one having proper motivation for the pursuit of priesthood and of the degree of motivation or the drive a candidate has to pursue and achieve goals.

(2) Some proper motivations for priesthood would include: a desire to serve others in their spiritual lives, a zeal for the love of God and the Church, a mission to bring Christ to people and people to Christ, and hope that his ministry will further the reign of God.

(3) The candidate should also have a good match of interests and skills with those who are happy and successful in ministry. He should likely have experienced at least a few different ministries in the Church through involvement within a parish setting.

(4) In contrast, those who have improper motivation for priesthood may evidence the following: a desire for status, clericalism, a desire to escape a difficult family situation or some aspect of his own sexuality, psychological issues, or some other adverse life situation. Some may have an ambition that is far beyond their intellectual or emotional capacity, a desire to cling to others or dependency on a system of support. Some may inappropriately approach priesthood with a sense of shame, guilt, or fear. Candidates must be free of undue influence by others (e.g. parents).

**f) Decision-making Skills**

(1) A candidate must have the ability to generate alternative options and foresee consequences of choices. His discernment of priesthood should demonstrate consideration of vocation alternatives and a healthy mix of

intellectual, emotional and spiritual factors involved in his decision.

(2) In contrast, decision making that is solely based on emotional factors or intense spiritual experiences may be signs of a lack of adequate decision-making abilities.

Likewise, a lack of impulse control will be problematic in a man's candidacy for priesthood.

## **6. Spiritual and Moral Formation**

These aspects are sometimes described in terms of Faith Development, Spiritual Maturity, and Moral Integration or Moral Character.

- a) A candidate's faith relationship with Christ must be the priority and foundation of his life. All other aspects of his vocation and life must be centered around this relationship. He must be a man of prayer.
- b) A candidate must be a Roman Catholic in good standing with the Church who demonstrates a good Christian lifestyle.
- c) He must have demonstrated a desire to deepen his spiritual life and a commitment to ongoing discernment. He should have the capacity to both differentiate and integrate his relationship with God, the Church and faith. He should have a personal spiritual competence and an integrated religious life.
- d) The candidate should understand that pursuing God's will includes freedom of choice. His spiritual life ought to evidence flexibility, not be threatened by doubt, and be capable of maturing.
- e) He should be able to identify the major precepts by which he lives. He should be able to freely discuss his social views and attitudes. His behavior should evidence that he lives these out with integrity and honesty.
- f) In contrast, problems may arise with a candidate who: sees ministry as a human endeavor disconnected from faith, possesses a spirituality that is threatened by other kinds of spiritualities and thus is judgmental towards them, understands faith primarily as rules and regulations, and avoids questioning the Church and faith life in a healthy and constructive way. Likewise, a lack of integrity and honesty in living out appropriate Catholic values will be problematic to a man's candidacy.

## **7. Physical Health and Physical Demeanor**

- a) In considering a candidate's physical health, all physical problems should be closely evaluated for their potential to interfere with seminary formation or priestly ministry.<sup>11</sup>
- b) A candidate should be comfortable with his physical being and his physical appearance. He should demonstrate good care for his health, evidencing healthy eating and exercise habits and regular

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<sup>11</sup> Each diocese should determine and make known at the outset of application any illnesses or physical conditions that would prevent him from being accepted.

medical examinations. He should have a good sense of his physical self-image and presentation to others.

c) In contrast, problems may arise with a candidate who is grossly overweight, has a debilitating or life-threatening illness, or has disregard for his physical wellness and appearance.

#### 8. **Pastoral and Ministerial**<sup>12</sup>

These criteria will impact the candidate's ability to live and minister effectively as a priest.

a) Since priesthood is a life commitment, a candidate must possess the skills for making a permanent commitment in a church vocation.

b) To be effective in ministry to others, he must possess adequate relational and social skills and have the capacity for healthy intimacy, trust, and interdependence.

c) The candidate must possess strong leadership capabilities.

d) He must be a man of communion, possessing competency in working with groups, bringing people together, and have the desire to collaborate with laymen and women in the context of ministry. Skills for collaborative ministry with women are particularly important. In addition, he should have a desire and ability to relate well with other priests.

e) Since the lifestyle of the priest varies over the course of a priest's ministry, candidates should be comfortable either living with others or living alone.

f) He must have an appropriate respect for both the authority of others and for that which he might be given.

g) A candidate should demonstrate a willingness and ability to minister in a variety of parochial (urban, suburban, rural) and non-parochial contexts. Similarly, he should be willing to minister to the people of a diocese in the diversity of their age, culture, language, financial standing and level of faith development. He should have openness to ecumenical and inter-religious activities.

#### 9. **Financial**

a) Debts for which the candidate is legally or morally responsible should be sufficiently satisfied prior to admission by a diocese, bearing in mind that some student loans may be deferred while in seminary.

#### 10. **Consideration of International Applicants:**<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> It may be assumed that particular pastoral skills would be acquired or refined during formation. Nevertheless, experiences should be investigated for evidence of ministerial or pastoral competencies.

<sup>13</sup> Further information on international applicants may be found in "*Guidelines for Receiving Pastoral Ministers*" published by USCCB 1999.

Experience suggest that the following considerations are essential to creating an effective environment for pastoral ministers from other countries serving in the United States:

International Applicants -

- a) predeparture orientation to American society and culture
- b) Time to adjust to American society and culture (at least 2 to 3 months) before beginning in the United States
- c) Should reside in the diocese for a significant amount of time before application may be considered
- d) Possession of the required qualifications to serve

Applicants whose primary language is other than English –

- a) Should have English proficiency such as to succeed in seminary studies.
- b) May be asked to indicate their current level of English proficiency by including transcripts of English courses or programs completed, if applicable; and by taking the TOEFL, if requested.
- c) Otherwise, they must be qualified to attend a seminary of which the diocese approves which educates and forms the candidate in a language of his proficiency.

#### **11. Some Criteria of Particular Dioceses**

- a) Each diocese should determine policies regarding the maximum age limit for considering a candidate, the minimum time period a person must be Catholic after conversion to the Catholic faith (c.1041), the minimum time period a person must live chaste celibacy.
- b) Each diocese should also have policies for considering candidates from outside their diocese that describe how long a man must be a resident of the diocese before acceptance and what connection with the diocese is needed. Further policies should be determined for candidates from outside the country that include handling immigration status difficulties, language proficiency, background checks, references, academic background, and cultural adaptation.
- c) Some candidates who present themselves for priesthood have been previously married. If the man is widowed, the diocese may consider questions regarding the time between the death of the spouse, the application for priesthood, and the status of any children that the candidate may be responsible for.
- d) If the man is divorced and has had the marriage annulled, the diocese may consider questions regarding the public knowledge of the divorce, the residence of the former spouse and any children, the time between the annulment and application, the status of any children that he may be responsible for, and the reason for the divorce and annulment. The diocese, with consent of the candidate, should ask the tribunal granting the annulment about

any evidence that might impact the candidate's ability to live or minister as a priest.

## **B. Methodology**

### **1. Rationale for Behavior-Based Assessment**

a) The assessment of a candidate in relation to the above criteria is taken primarily from the person's own behavior, past and present. While a person's thoughts, beliefs or stated values may have some value in the assessment, it is believed that the best predictor of a candidate's future behavior is his own past behavior. Therefore, the primary areas to assess include the following.

- (1) Family Information and Background, including any history of traumatic events (experiences of loss, violence, abuse), addictions or mental disorders in the family
- (2) Interpersonal Relations and Psychosexual Development history including looking at group membership and roles.
- (3) Religious/faith history
- (4) Educational/Academic history
- (5) Employment history
- (6) Physical, Medical history including drug and medication history.
- (7) Military/Armed Service information

### **2. Methods**

a) There are various methods of gathering the information from these areas. The list below is one way of categorizing these methods.

- (1) Self-Reporting (e.g. Autobiography, Interviews, Application Forms)
- (2) Testing (e.g. Physical exam, Psychological tests<sup>14</sup>)
- (3) Observation (e.g. Home Visitation, Interviews)
- (4) Authenticated Records/Official Documents (Academic transcripts, Sacramental records)
- (5) References (Letters of Recommendation, Reference forms)

### **3. Types of Questions<sup>15</sup>**

- a) Objective Questions seek to answer matters of fact or to obtain objective responses.
- b) Subjective Questions seek answers which are descriptive and that are filtered through the respondent's subjective interpretation.
- c) These questions may take the form of close-ended questions, short answer questions or open-ended questions that may elicit story telling.

## **C. A Sample of Assessment Process Components**

The following is a sample of the documents and information that many diocesan vocation offices and seminaries require in order to make an

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix 1

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 2

informed decision on the admission of a candidate.<sup>16</sup> The assessment process need not follow this particular order and should be adapted to local circumstances.

**1. Initial inquiry:** Initial contact by the prospective candidate indicating an interest or intention to apply.

**2. Initial Meeting<sup>17</sup>:** An initial face to face conversation between the vocation director and potential candidate has several advantages:

- a) Helps to determine whether or not the application process is the appropriate next step for an individual. This meeting needs to include questions regarding obstacles or impediments to acceptance and conclude with an initial basic assessment.<sup>18</sup>
- b) Introduces to the applicant the issues and process of the application while providing early guidance on the process of self-disclosure. It is also necessary to share information about how confidential material will be handled and the meaning of informed consent.
- c) Helps establish the vocation director's role as public (external), and as an agent of the bishop / diocese while building trust with the potential applicant.
- d) Enables the vocation director to advise the individual about the availability of a spiritual director;
- e) A decision may be reached at this time to proceed or not to proceed with the application process, or to make some recommendations to the candidate before proceeding.

(1) Referrals: Those offices whose responsibilities are to promote only diocesan priesthood should refer other inquirers to the appropriate Church vocation offices.

**3. Informed Consent<sup>19</sup> Discussion and Release of Information Forms**

It needs to be clear what the vocation director is releasing and to whom.

- a) The nature and depth of assessment that is called for suggests that candidates be properly informed of the gravity of the inquiries that are part of the process.
- b) The candidate should read and sign a statement of informed consent provided by the vocation office before the application process continues.
- c) This statement should include a legal Release of Information Form, noting the information to be released and the persons who would have access to this information for the purpose of assessing the applicant.

**4. Application Forms<sup>20</sup>**

<sup>16</sup> Seminary admission criteria and processes are often independent from diocesan criteria. Therefore the application to become a candidate for a particular diocese is not to be confused with admission to a seminary, which must not be presumed and which normally follows application to a diocese.

<sup>17</sup> The initial inquiry differs from the initial meeting in that in the former the inquirer leads the conversation while in the latter it is the vocation minister who directs it.

<sup>18</sup> Reasons not to continue should be clear to both parties, and a record should be kept.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Appendix 7 for more information on Informed Consent.

a) Applicant forms provide basic information. This information can be developed in greater depth through probing questions during the interview. Basic background information should cover identity, residence, citizenship or legal status, family, health, education, military service, employment and service to the community, leadership, abilities and acquired skills, financial status, relationship history, religious practice, canonical status, and motivation for becoming a priest. Information concerning any and all dismissals or withdrawals of a candidate from another seminary or program of formation is also necessary.<sup>21</sup>

#### **5. Autobiography**

a) The candidate will submit a 5-10-page autobiography or personal life history including reasons for seeking the priesthood.<sup>22</sup>

#### **6. Interviews<sup>23</sup>**

a) The purpose of interviews by the vocation personnel is to gather comprehensive behavioral data that will further assess the suitability of the candidate. This will enable the Vocation Director to make a more informed decision regarding continuation of the application process.

#### **7. Visitation and Personal Interaction**

It is helpful to visit the homes of applicants. A clearer understanding of the family of origin will assist in determining whether a candidate is a worthy applicant.

#### **8. References<sup>24</sup>:** Input from those who know the candidate in various settings

a) This may take the form of Reference Questionnaires or Letters of Recommendation.

b) The candidate may solicit these letters or provide the vocation director with the names and addresses of people to contact for recommendations.

#### **9. Records**

a) Complete Academic Transcripts / Records from all colleges attended are sent directly from the registrar to the vocation office. High school transcripts (with SAT or ACT scores) are required for those candidates without a college degree.

b) Sacramental Records (Baptism and Confirmation Certificates): An official copy of sacramental papers or certification issued by

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Appendix 6 for more information on Application Forms.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Appendix 5 for more information regarding the norms for re-admission.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Appendix 6A for a sample autobiography form.

<sup>23</sup> Variety exists regarding how many interviews take place, who interviews candidates (vocation personnel, seminary personnel, admission boards, others) and at what point in the process.

<sup>24</sup> References should be sought from among the following and should include the person's name, contact information, as well as the type and length of relationship: Pastor of current parish; other priests; most recent employer; a co-worker; a teacher or professor; a close friend; an adult sibling, parent or close relative; all bishops or vocation directors/ directors of seminarians if previously enrolled; and the rectors of all seminaries and/or religious houses previously attended.

the church of record within the last six months. Converts to the Catholic faith should also submit a certificate of Profession of Faith.

- c) Certificates of ministry of Acolyte, Reader or Admission to Candidacy (if received)
- d) Civil and Financial Records<sup>25</sup>
  - (1) Criminal Records
  - (2) Motor Vehicle Reports
  - (3) Credit Reports

#### **10. Testing**

- a) Physical examinations usually include vision and dental exams, as well as a full blood test that normally includes an HIV test, hepatitis, etc.
- b) Psychological Testing<sup>26</sup>
  - (1) A candidate is required to complete a battery<sup>27</sup> of standard psychological tests and a diagnostic clinical interview. He should receive an interpretive psychological report by a licensed psychologist competent to conduct psychological testing and assessment.

#### **11. Photographs**

- a) 2-4 recent Photographs for the Vocation Office files. Additional photographs need to be sent to the seminary to which the candidate is applying.

### **III. Evaluating the Information and Admission Decision-making<sup>28</sup>**

- A. Evaluation of the application should be consistent with those criteria set forth by the diocese that have been communicated to the applicant.
- B. Evaluation and decision - making often involve the person or persons responsible for gathering the information such as the diocesan vocation director and other vocation personnel. The bishop should be encouraged by the vocation director to be part of the decision-making process.
- C. Admission Boards/Committees<sup>29</sup> are also a component of many evaluation and decision - making efforts. Though great variety exists in their makeup, procedures and authority, it is generally agreed that the involvement of an objective and qualified board/committee offers many advantages and safeguards.
- D. Prayer and discernment on the part of the decision-makers is expected and fundamental throughout the process.

### **IV. Communicating the Decision and Sharing the Information**

#### **A. Communicating the decision to the candidate**

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<sup>25</sup> Due to the variety of jurisdictions several sources may need to be contacted, especially where candidates maintained residences in more than one jurisdiction during their adult life. A background check service is available through NCDVD with ACXIOM (formerly Trans Union Employment Screening Services).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Appendix 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ensure that the battery includes all tests required by the seminaries your diocese uses.

<sup>28</sup> Evaluation and decision-making are not chronologically separate but occur throughout the process of gathering information.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Appendix 3.

1. Care and respect should mark the manner in which the decision is communicated. This includes avoiding any undue delay in communicating the final decision regarding acceptance.
2. A written statement or letter should accompany the verbal communication of the decision.
3. In all cases, the communication of a negative decision should be done in a face-to-face conversation. The conversation should be direct and succinct. A letter of non-acceptance is also given to the applicant and should likewise be brief and general. Still, however brief or spare the conversation and letter, care should be taken to ensure that the candidate understands the reasons for the decision. Likewise, he should receive some suggestions or recommendations, even if his re-application at a future date is not foreseen.

**B. Disposition of records.**

1. The vocation office will send copies of the necessary documents to the appropriate seminary.<sup>30</sup> The original documents will remain part of the seminarian's file. The duration of the retention of these files should be determined in consultation with local legal processes.
2. If the application of the candidate is not accepted, a summary should be made of the application including an outline of the reasons for non-acceptance.

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<sup>30</sup> Information acquired in the admission process is important to the formation process and should be shared with the seminary rector and vice rector. Collaboration aids both the diocese and seminary in the formation process. The seminary however, must have a clear policy in place that stipulates how it will treat this information, both in the application process and after the candidate is granted or denied admission. Again, the applicant's right to privacy must be protected.