

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON POSTULANTS FOR ORDINATION

THE ACPO HANDBOOK
Revised Edition, 2001

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A BRIEF 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 bi-annual) discernment conferences, held in four provinces across Canada, ACPO evaluates all persons seeking acceptance as postulants for ordination to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Canada and provides a prescriptive 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 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 character, charisms and call to ordered 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*
- identifying areas in which the candidate needs to grow
- offering advice regarding the pursuit of other forms of ministry

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 no longer performed by ACPO.

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 has a coordinating committee which usually consists of a Bishop, Secretary and member-at-large. It is suggested that the Secretary and member-at-large be from different orders. All three members of the coordinating committee should have had some experience with the ACPO process.

Applicants to ACPO are required:

- 1) to fill out a comprehensive Information Form supplied by the diocese
- 2) to write a brief autobiography and two essays which develop an understanding of ministry in general and ordained 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

- 4) if married or engaged, to provide a letter from their spouse or fiancé(e) in support of the application to ACPO and the applicant's call to the ordained ministry
- 5) to attend a weekend assessment conference which runs from Friday noon until Sunday noon

Assessors are chosen by the ACPO Secretary from a list of nominees supplied by the diocesan bishops or their designates. Training for the assessment conference usually takes place on the Thursday afternoon/evening and Friday morning of the conference weekend. Training is designed to lead the 3-member panels of assessors to develop a set of criteria for the interviews with the applicants and to explore and increase their understanding of the ordained ministry. Training sessions may also include guidelines for writing the assessment reports.

The Conference is an exercise in discernment of vocations to the ordained ministry. It is almost always a very stressful time for the applicants and the assessors. With the support of the Chaplain who leads in worship planning and gives pastoral care, an atmosphere of genuine care can often be maintained throughout the weekend.

ACPO PERSONNEL AND THEIR ROLES

THE ROLE OF THE BISHOPS

The Provincial House of Bishops in each region is responsible for appointing the Secretary and member-at-large of the ACPO Coordinating group.

Diocesan Bishops or their designates are to nominate 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. It is helpful to receive along with the list of nominees a brief note about each, in which his or her gifts or particular areas of expertise are indicated. The list of nominees should include clergy and laity, women and men, young and old. The names of experienced assessors should be included but it is important to bring new people into the process.

Each diocese is responsible for its pre-ACPO selection process and testing, the assembling of candidates' files (4 copies of the information form, spouse's letter, essays on ministry, brief autobiography and parish commendation) and inviting candidates to attend the Provincial assessment conference.

Bishops should pay particular attention to the covering 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. It is particularly important for assessors to know from the bishop what kind of ministry is being sought by the candidate (e.g. stipendiary or non-stipendiary, parish or other forms of full or part-time ministry).

Bishops should feel free to direct any questions, complaints or criticisms about ACPO reports to the Provincial Secretary.

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL EPISCOPAL CHAIRPERSON

The National House of Bishops appoints the Chair from among the four Chairs of the Provincial ACPO Coordinating Committees. The Chair of the National Coordinating Committees chairs the annual national meeting of the Provincial ACPO Secretaries as well as the triennial meeting of the National Coordinating Committee, and reports on ACPO matters to the National House of Bishops.

THE ROLE OF THE PROVINCIAL EPISCOPAL CHAIRPERSON

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

attend the triennial National Coordinating Committee meeting.

The Chairperson should be in attendance at the Provincial assessment conferences and usually presides at its opening Eucharist. He or she also presides at meetings of the Provincial ACPO Coordinating group.

THE ROLE OF THE PROVINCIAL SECRETARY

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

The Secretary implements ACPO policy and takes responsibility, in consultation with the Provincial Coordinating Committee, for appointing assessors and in planning and directing the annual ACPO Conference.

THE ROLE OF THE MEMBER-AT-LARGE

The member-at-large, appointed by the Metropolitan and House of Bishops, provides advice, consultation and support to the Secretary. It is suggested that the member-at-large have particular expertise: as a trainer of assessors, as a Secretary-trainee, as a representative of the Provincial Ministry Committee, or represents an area of ministry important to the province.

TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

The Chairperson, Secretary and member-at-large are each appointed for a three year term. The position of Secretary usually rotates amongst the dioceses in each province. Normally, to provide continuity, there is a one year overlap in the terms of the Chairperson, the Secretary and the member-at-large (i.e. if the Chairperson's term is 1998-2000, the Secretary's term will be 1999-2001 and the member-at-large's term will be 2000-2003).

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

THE PROCESS FOR PROSPECTIVE POSTULANTS

*****It is crucial that each applicant to ACPO has received a copy of the booklet 'Ordination Prerequisites' (National House of Bishops Publication) and the current ACPO Guidelines. Diocesan bishops or their designates should ensure that applicants satisfy the requirements which are set out in those documents before candidates are sent to a provincial assessment Conference.*****

Each province should establish its 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 should be sponsored to a provincial assessment Conference. Sufficient time should be allowed for diocesan pre-ACPO testing results to inform the application process.

Each applicant completes the Information Form (copied on yellow, pink and blue paper to provide four sets), attaches 4 copies of the required essays and returns them all to the Bishop for signature.

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

- 1) The '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 attention (a current or potential problem of which the Bishop has been made aware by pre-ACPO testing)
- 2) The applicant's Information Form in quadruplicate (signed by the Bishop) and the set of essays
- 3) The Parish Commendation

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

The Provincial Secretary (or the Diocesan Bishop) 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 candidates to provide accurate information about how referees may be contacted.

The Secretary acknowledges to each applicant receipt of the 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 it a policy to invite the spouse of a married

applicant to attend the conference. Applicants are responsible for their own travel costs, subject to any diocesan assistance, but not for the costs of Conference meals or accommodation.

THE SELECTION AND WORK OF ASSESSORS

Each year Diocesan Bishops provide the Secretary with the names of both lay and clergy assessors for diocese. These people are mature Anglican Christians whose experience in the Church has given them insight into the exercise of ordained ministry and the qualities desirable in those who practice it. The Secretaries will only use assessors approved by diocesan bishops.

Assessors are deployed in panels of three members. It is imperative that at least one panel member have ACPO Conference experience. The make up of each panel 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*

At least one panel should include an ordained woman as the ordained member. At least one panel should include an ordained man as the ordained member. Assessors are asked to telephone the Secretary if for any reason they should not assess or do not wish to assess any applicant assigned to their group (e.g. a conflict of interest).

Assessors are to be sent instruction on travel, etc. Their costs will be covered by the ACPO budget.

ASSESSOR TRAINING

The Provincial Secretary will develop means of training assessors in their conference duties and will ensure that each assessor is familiar with the conference process.

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 panel 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 ordained ministry, assessors should discuss relevant criteria in their panels and share their findings in a plenary session. The input of the Episcopal Chairperson can be very helpful in providing a bishop's view of the selection process leading to ordination.

From time to time applicants will arrive at an ACPO Conference in a state of crisis. The interview process may reveal incidents of abuse, marriage or family breakdown or symptoms of acute and debilitating loss. The temptation is felt at times to replace ACPO's mandate of discernment of character, charisms and call to ordained ministry with pastoral care. **It seems prudent not to assess any candidate in a state of crisis or personal instability/volatility but to refer them back to the sponsoring bishop. An ACPO conference is not the appropriate place to engage in therapeutic or diagnostic work. Should interviewers unwittingly tap into an applicant's trauma, the chaplain should provide pastoral care and make an attempt to arrange for help to receive the applicant home safely.**

The Secretary may choose to send information regarding interviewing techniques or the theology of ordained 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.

At the Conference the Secretary will review both the Conference schedule and the process for writing and producing reports. Each panel will be responsible for assessing a **maximum of 4** applicants and for producing a succinct prescriptive and evaluative report on each. It is essential that the content of the report support clearly the recommendation that has been made.

Each report will be received and approved by the plenary of assessors and then signed by the Secretary. Upon reading the report, the applicant signs it to indicate that he or she has received it at the conclusion of the ACPO process.

The Secretary should be extremely careful to screen out of reports any comments which will betray the identity of the referees or the source of any information in the files.

Clerical and/or computer consultant assistance should be solicited to produce the final reports (five copies). The 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 Office (white). All letters of reference are attached to the copy sent to the National Office.

The Provincial Secretary holds the files for two years and then destroys them.

THE ACPO CHAPLAIN

A Chaplain is appointed for each provincial Conference. He or she will work closely with the Secretary **but will not be involved in the assessment process.** The Chaplain serves as pastor to applicants, 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 react badly to receiving a 'not recommended' report or who experience distress during the interviews*
- 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 Hour' on Saturday evening while the assessors are preparing reports*

It is helpful to notify the Chaplain on Sunday morning of those who will receive 'not recommended' reports so that she or he can be available to respond readily to any distress.

SAMPLE CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Thursday	12:00 pm	Staff Registration
	12:30 pm	Lunch
	2:00 pm	Staff Orientation/Training Begins
	6:00 pm	Dinner
	7:00 pm	Staff Training
	9:00 pm	Evening Devotions
	9:15 pm	Social Time
Friday	8:00 am	Breakfast
	9:00 am	Morning Prayer (Commissioning of Staff)
	9:30 am	Staff Preparation

Friday	11:30 am	Candidates' Registration
	12:00 noon	Welcome and Briefing
	12:30 pm	Lunch
	1:30	All Worship Teams Meet With the Chaplain
	2:00	Worship Team #1 with Chaplain
	2:30	Group Interviews
	3:30	Staff Caucus
	4:15	Eucharist (Team #1), Celebrant & Preacher, Bishop
	5:00	Social Hour
	6:00	Dinner
	7:00	Worship Team #2
	7:30	Interview #1
8:45	Worship Team #3 With Chaplain; Staff Caucus	
9:30	Compline (Team #2)	

Saturday	8:00 am	Breakfast
	8:45	Morning Prayer (Team #3)
	9:30	Interview #2
	10:45	Worship Team #4 With Chaplain; Staff Caucus
	11:30	Interview #3
	12:30	Lunch
	1:30	Worship Team #5 With Chaplain; Staff Caucus
	2:30	Interview #4/Secretary's Hour
	4:00	Deadline for 4th Interview Request (to be conveyed to the Secretary)
	5:00	Social Hour
	6:00	Dinner
	7:00	Evening Prayer (Team #4)
	7:30	Chaplain's Evening With the Candidates; Assessors Prepare Reports
	9:00	Candidates' Social Time; Staff Caucus

Sunday	8:00 am	Breakfast
	9:15	Eucharist (Team #5)
	10:15	Staff Caucus
	10:30	Reception of Reports
	11:30	Staff Closing Session
	12:00 noon	Lunch

PROVINCIAL SUPPLEMENT FOR SECRETARIES

The foregoing is meant to be a general description of the ACPO process and responsibilities. Each province, however, will have developed its own peculiar practices in many of these areas. Some provinces insist on the presence of spouses or fiance(e)s while others discourage it.

It would perhaps be helpful if someone in each province might, for the sake of incoming Secretaries and Episcopal chairpersons, reduce the oral tradition to writing. Of course, it is assumed that these will learn the process most readily by participating in it.

APPENDIX - ACPO DOCUMENTS and 'Ordination Prerequisites'

Samples of current documents supplied to the ACPO Secretaries by the National Office should be appended and updated as amended at National Meetings.

Dioceses and Provincial Secretaries should obtain current ACPO documents and forms from Anglican Church House, 600 Jarvis Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2J6.