

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

ACPO GUIDELINES

Revised by the House of Bishops, May, 1998

**I. PURPOSE**

ACPO, the Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination, is responsible for a national discernment process advisory to bishops. ACPO evaluates all persons seeking acceptance as postulants for ordination to the priesthood in the Anglican Church of Canada. It is one of the four arenas of the discernment process.

Each province shall have a Provincial Coordinating Committee which organizes ACPO events in the province. The National Coordinating Committee is composed of the members of the Provincial Coordinating Committees, which are composed of a bishop, the ACPO secretary and a member-at-large.

**II. FUNCTIONS**

The 4 arenas of discernment are the parish, the diocese, the theological college/training institution, and ACPO. All arenas report to the bishop. While each arena of discernment will assess a wide range of criteria and gifts, each has an area of particular responsibility. It is the primary responsibility of the parish to assess a candidate in the areas of spirituality, leadership, and Christian lifestyle, with the noted concern that a parish needs to work at objectivity. It is the primary responsibility of each diocese to assess the particular gifts of the candidate in the context of its own diocesan needs and ministries. It is the primary responsibility of the training institution/theological college to assess competency in academic and professional skills. **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
- screening prospective postulants around issues of power, trust and sexual misconduct
- 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 programs of education and formation suitable both for the candidate and for the particular form of ministry for which he/she is preparing. This function will no longer be performed by ACPO.

Special care needs to be taken in the various processes of discernment for the selection and screening of postulants for the ordained ministry around the issues of power, trust and sexual misconduct. This is in reference to potential abusers and to those in the midst of working through personal experiences related to these issues.

The entire process needs to be communicated clearly to the candidate at every stage, including the fact that there are no guarantees that approval at any stage will lead to ordination and/or employment. Recommendations from each arena need to be clearly communicated to each of the other arenas, stating what is affirmed, what recommendations for the future are being made, and if the candidate is recommended for postulancy to the priesthood or not. Use of a release of information form signed by postulant/applicant should be encouraged.

### **III. ACCOUNTABILITY AND ORGANIZATION**

(a) ACPOs are organized on a Provincial basis and held accountable to the House of Bishops through Provincial structures, e.g. the Metropolitan and Provincial House of Bishops. Each province has an ACPO coordinating committee, consisting of a bishop, Secretary and member-at-large. It is suggested that the Secretary and the member-at-large be from different orders. All three should have had experience with the ACPO process. The bishop is appointed by the Metropolitan, and the Secretary and the member-at-large are appointed by the Provincial House of Bishops. Each appointment is for a three year term, renewable once. Care needs to be taken to stagger appointments to ensure continuity. 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 representing an area of ministry important for the province.

(b) It is the responsibility of the Provincial Coordinating Committee to organize ACPO events in their province, in accordance with national standards, which may also reflect Provincial requirements for ministry. It maintains a pool of assessors, on nomination by the diocesan bishops. It offers training for assessors in accordance with standards set by the National Coordinating Committee. It is responsible for implementing any national guidelines approved by the House of Bishops. The Provincial Coordinating Committee should have an organizational meeting and determine its detailed terms of reference.

(c) The National Coordinating Committee consists of the members of the Provincial Coordinating Committee from each province and is accountable to the House of Bishops through the Primate's Office. The House of Bishops will appoint the Chair from among the four bishops. The Committee will meet not less than once in a triennium. It provides a forum for the ACPO Provincial Committees to exchange information and engage in future visioning. It is responsible for the development and coordination of national standards with respect to:

- the general components of ACPO events
- background checks, reference checks and psychological testing, in accord with legal counsel
- training for assessors
- procedures for reporting and communication of information
- distribution of national funding

(d) The Secretaries normally meet once a year with the national episcopal chair.

### **IV. FINANCES**

Basic funding for the ACPO process is provided by General Synod through the Primate's Office. This covers assessors' travel and accommodation expenses, prospective postulants' accommodation expenses, administrative costs, and an honorarium for the provincial ACPO secretary. Additional funding by provinces and/or dioceses is encouraged, and is expected for ACPO events which are specifically designed to assess for unique provincial ministry needs.

The province is responsible for the funding of the Provincial Coordinating Committee, and for the accommodation of spouses of prospective postulants, if applicable.

The diocese and the prospective postulants shall determine the responsibility for travel costs, according to diocesan policy. Costs associated with the travel of spouses is not covered.

## **V. PROCESS**

### **A. Prior to ACPO**

1. The following are considered to be general prerequisites for any person desiring to be considered for postulancy for Holy Orders in the Anglican Church of Canada:
  - a) Confirmation, reception, or status as a communicant in the Anglican Communion at least three years prior to application for consideration as a postulant.
  - b) Regular participation in the life and worship of a parish or recognized worshipping community of the Anglican Church of Canada for at least one year prior to application for consideration as a postulant.
2. Every person desiring to be admitted as a postulant for Holy Orders who has satisfied the above prerequisites is expected to consult with his/her immediate pastor, sharing with him/her the basis for such a desire; and to seek the guidance and counsel of the pastor.
3. If the pastor of a person seeking to be admitted as a postulant for Holy Orders is satisfied that the individual is worthy of commendation for consideration as a possible postulant, the pastor will meet with and seek the considered opinion of four lay persons in the parish (normally, the wardens and two other persons) regarding the suitability of the person for further consideration.
4. If the pastor and the lay persons are satisfied that the individual is a person suitable for consideration as a postulant, they shall send to the bishop a letter of commendation giving information in the following areas:
  - a) The length of time the individual has been known by the referees, and a description of their association with the individual.
  - b) A description of the role the individual has played in the life of the parish or congregation.
  - c) The particular gifts and characteristics the individual possesses which make him/her particularly suited for the ordained ministry.
  - d) Any limitations or concerns of which they are aware which might hinder the individual in the exercise of ordained ministry.

- e) Whether the referees would be prepared to accept the individual for service as an ordained person in the parish or congregation which the referees attend, given proper preparation for ordained ministry.
  - f) Any further advice or counsel the referees wish to share with the bishop.
5. The bishop may, at this point, or at any subsequent time, seek the commendation of another parish to which an applicant may be referred by the bishop.
  6. An applicant thus commended by a parish or congregation will be interviewed by the bishop, and, if the bishop considers the individual to be suitable for further consideration, the applicant is referred to the diocesan Postulants Committee or Examining Chaplains (or equivalent).
  7. The Postulants Committee/Examining Chaplains will take responsibility for administering diocesan requirements for postulancy, such as psychological assessment, further interviews, or gathering of references.
  8. If, in the opinion of the Postulants Committee/Examining Chaplains, the applicant is suitable, he/she is commended to the bishop for referral to ACPO.
  9. If the bishop accepts the commendation of the Postulants Committee/Examining Chaplains, he/she refers the applicant to ACPO. Such referral is normally to be made **before** an applicant enters theological college. At the very latest, such referral is to be made **no later** than the end of the first academic year. **It is the responsibility of the applicant to seek postulancy in sufficient time to make such a referral possible.** Where variations on the standard model occur, the ACPO contribution should still occur at an early stage of the overall discernment process, as outlined in the 1986 Prerequisites for Ordination document.

**B. For ACPO**

1. The ACPO evaluation process normally consists of a two or three day residential conference, but other events may be designed which address the same issues and are appropriate for the needs of the province.
2. Prior to the conference, appropriate national ACPO information and biographical forms are completed by the prospective postulant. These forms are shared with the bishop, who forwards them to the provincial ACPO Secretary. This material, plus a medical certificate and letters of reference are available to the assessor at the conference. Letters of reference will include the parish (or comparable Christian community) letter of commendation obtained by the bishops (as explained above). The ACPO Secretary will request three additional references.
3. The provincial ACPO Secretary normally takes responsibility to design and carry out the evaluation conference, and to appoint assessors, in consultation with the Provincial Coordinating Committee.
4. The lay and clerical members of the Provincial Coordinating Committee are to maintain a pool of names of potential assessors on nomination of diocesan bishops. The 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 ordered and lay ministry present and evolving within the province. They are to be chosen from a variety of personal, professional and ecclesiastical backgrounds, with concern both for continuity and rotation within the panel of assessors.

5. The conference process normally includes group activities, evaluation of written work and recommendations, personal interviews, discussion of ministry, and shared worship in a community setting. Attention needs to be paid, in the design of the process, to cultural patterns of interaction and to the needs of those from oral rather than written cultures.
6. Training for assessors is essential. General standards for this training are set by the National Coordinating Committee; detailed standards are developed by the Provincial Coordinating Committee (bishop, Secretary, member-at-large). The ACPO Secretary ensures that training is provided. Training should include an exploration of the assumptions assessors are bringing to the task, developing clarity and consensus about the task, the theology of the priesthood as found in the ordinals, cultural sensitivity training, sensitivity to the particular ministries and cultures in the province, discernment processes and skills, sexual harassment training, and confidentiality.
7. The ACPO Secretary ensures that the “Checklist of Indicators” currently approved by the National Coordinating Committee be used by ACPO assessors in their evaluation of candidates.
8. The assessors’ recommendation is shared with the prospective postulant before the close of the conference.

### **C. Post ACPO**

1. After the conference, the biographical essays, two copies of the forms, plus the recommendation are sent to the bishop: one copy for his or her files, and the other to be shared with the appropriate theological college authority or others directly involved in the training process. All copies of the ACPO recommendations and Information Forms are destroyed after five years.
2. It is understood that normally the diocesan bishop concerned, or his/her designate, will personally discuss the report with the candidate and continue to monitor the follow-through of any prescriptive material in the report. The report is also shared with the appropriate theological college or training program.
3. At the bishop’s discretion, the applicant may be admitted as a postulant. **Admission as a postulant does not imply any guarantee or promise of ordination.**
4. It is the responsibility of the bishop and training institution/theological college, in an intentional process, to make decisions about programs of education and formation suitable both for the postulant and for the particular form of ministry for which he/she is preparing.
5. National standards for the post-ACPO process will be determined after widespread consultation with dioceses and training institutions/theological colleges.

## **VI. CATEGORIES OF RECOMMENDATION**

There are two choices for the ACPO Conference to provide:

1. **Is recommended at this time for postulancy. We offer the following observations and suggestions. \***
2. **Is not recommended at this time for postulancy. We offer the following observations and suggestions. \*\***

\* For those who re recommend, the suggestions would typically concern particular areas for training and personal growth.

\*\* For those who are not recommended, the suggestions could be (a) for other areas of ministry and service which may be more appropriate, or (b) for areas of training and personal growth to be undertaken before further assessment by ACPO or other procedure is considered.

## **VII. DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT**

### 1. **Sponsorship**

Referral of a prospective postulant by a diocesan bishop to an ACPO event. Such sponsorship implies no commitment to eventual ordination or employment.

### 2. **Prospective Postulant**

A person who is sponsored by a bishop to attend an assessment conference.

### 3. **Postulant**

A person who has been recommended by ACPO, and accepted by a diocesan bishop for training leading toward possible ordination.

### 4. **Ordinand**

A postulant who has satisfied the requirements for candidacy for ordination and licensing by the diocesan bishop.

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**CHECKLIST OF INDICATORS OF THE POTENTIAL OF PROSPECTIVE POSTULANTS**  
(For use in ACPO Interviews and Assessments)

Bishops and others responsible for the acceptance or the training of postulants for ordination find it helpful to receive evaluations of the potential of prospective postulants for the ordained ministry of the Church. The following listing identifies the kinds of indications of potential about which the ordaining or educational authorities would like to know. This listing is meant to serve only as a guide to ACPO Assessors and staff, and it will need to be adapted to the specific characteristics and history of each person assessed. It would be helpful to relate suggestions and prescriptions for the future to these indicators:

1. **Spirituality and Church Life**

- (a) Understanding of and commitment to the Baptismal covenant.
- (b) Understanding of and sense of call to the ordained ministry, and of the relation of ordained and lay ministries.
- (c) Participation in the Church, breadth of Church experience, commitment to the Anglican tradition in an ecumenical context.
- (d) Patterns of worship, prayer, Bible Study and the integration of faith and life leading to an ever-deepening spirituality.
- (e) Understanding and articulation of how God has worked in this person's life and the lives of others.
- (f) Sense of mission to the world.

2. **Pastoral and Social Concern**

- (a) Commitment to serve and help others.
- (b) Openness and sensitivity to others emotionally and socially, ability to listen, ability to care.
- (c) Commitment to social justice, awareness of social issues.
- (d) Leadership: pastoral leadership, initiative and responsibility in situations of shared ministry, administrative talents.
- (e) Potential to build community, welcome newcomers.
- (f) Ability to deal with conflict.

3. **Personal Characteristics**

- (a) Personal and moral integrity.
- (b) Physical and emotional health; ability for self care and self esteem.
- (c) Quality of social relations and acquaintanceships: with women; with men.
- (d) Ability to form close, continuing, confiding, but non-sexual friendships (peer relationships): with men; with women.
- (e) Ability to sustain stable, committed, marital relationship, if such is applicable with this candidate.
- (f) Potential for educational preparation: commitment to ongoing education.
- (g) Flexibility, toleration of differences, creativity, sense of humour.
- (h) General life history: anything special to note.

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