

Anglican Church of Australia Professional Standards Commission

A Process for the Comprehensive Psychological Assessment of Candidates for Ordination

Background

At its meeting in October 2004, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia passed resolutions concerning Child Protection and Professional Standards. Those resolutions included a recommendation for the adoption of a system for the selection of ordination candidates that includes:

- completion and assessment of the Safe Ministry Check form;
- a medical report;
- a children's commission child protection check and criminal history check; and
- some form of psychosexual assessment.

Research of such assessments conducted elsewhere in Australia as well as overseas was carried out by looking at relevant literature and talking with current practitioners working with other denominations. The best practice revealed by this research is that both psychometric measures and a detailed structured interview should form the basis for assessment.

Outline

The Professional Standards Commission has developed a Process for use in dioceses that provides:

- a method for conducting and reporting the comprehensive psychological assessment (including psychosexual assessment);
- for the assessment to be made by means of a psychometric measure of personality (PEPQ or suitable alternative) and a psychological interview structured around a detailed personal history booklet that is completed by the candidate at the time of testing, together with additional questions about psychosexual maturity to be used during the interview;
- opportunity for additional assessment if required (e.g. cognitive testing if there are concerns about a candidate's ability to undertake tertiary level study);
- criteria against which the psychologist's report is to be written;
- for the candidate to be debriefed by the psychologist about their assessment and to agree in writing to the release of their report in order to meet privacy requirements. Should a candidate not agree to their report being released, their application will be considered to have been withdrawn. This is regarded as the best way of dealing with such concerns.

The processes should be reviewed after the first use to establish whether improvements to them would benefit the candidates and the value that the diocese obtains from the reports. Further reviews in later years should be undertaken to establish the utility of the process and the instruments in achieving the objectives envisaged in the General Synod resolution.

Appreciation is extended to Alan Gallimore, Catherine Laufer and Marilyn Redlich for permission to use this process.

LTCOL Alan Gallimore, RFD, M.Sc., Dip. Psych. was until retirement a registered Psychologist (Queensland) who is involved in various areas of the Anglican Church at parish, diocesan (Brisbane) and national levels.

Reverend Dr Catherine Laufer, B.Sc., Grad. Dip. Psych. (Couns.), M.Ed., B.Theol., Ph.D. is a registered Psychologist (Queensland) who worked as a psychologist and priest in the Diocese of Melbourne and is now in parish ministry in the Diocese of Brisbane.

Marilyn Redlich, B.Econ, Dip.Ed., M.Counselling is a qualified and experienced counsellor who has extensively researched the area of psychosexual assessment. She is a member of the Professional Standards Commission of General Synod.

Process

The Anglican Church [Diocese of...] will conduct comprehensive psychological assessments of ordination candidates as follows:

- The assessments will be conducted when the initial or enquiry phase is complete and before those who advise the Bishop meet to consider the suitability of candidates for ordination. This allows the assessing psychologist to advise the Bishop, through the person responsible for ordination candidates, of any concerns before the Bishop formally invites an enquirer to join the selection process. The person responsible for ordination candidates will refer any relevant questions to the assessing psychologist for advice before a final recommendation is made to the Bishop.
- The person responsible for ordination candidates will seek Christian psychologists who are competent and experienced in assessment and selection, including psycho-sexual assessments. The psychologist on referral will be provided with a copy of relevant material given to enquirers as background. The psychologist must not have a previous or current personal or professional relationship with the candidate or their immediate family.
- Assessments will include both psychometric measures (tests) and a structured interview.
- Candidates will be provided with appropriate referral letters that set out in some detail what they can expect of the assessment.
- Before commencing the assessment the psychologist must seek the informed written consent of the candidate to participate in the assessment and to release the report to the Diocese. The candidate may choose not to give their consent, or having given it, withdraw it at any time. The psychologist will report this fact to the person responsible for ordination candidates who will regard this as the candidate having withdrawn their application and advise the Bishop accordingly.
- The currently recommended psychometric instrument is the PsychEval Personality Questionnaire (PEPQ). The PEPQ is a derivative of the 16PF personality test (personality profile for normal population) and the Clinical Assessment Questionnaire (this provides indicators of possible psychopathology). Having regard to the type of people who are candidates, this is considered to offer a good assessment of normal personality functioning together with any signs of possible pathology. If a psychologist wishes to suggest an alternative instrument be used, this will be considered.
- Where a psychologist considers that cognitive testing is also necessary, the most appropriate instrument should be used. It is expected that cognitive testing will normally only be carried out when there is concern about a candidate's ability to undertake tertiary level study.
- Following completion of the PEPQ, each candidate will complete a detailed written Personal History Booklet which will be forwarded to the psychologist. Areas covered will include family background and relationships, education, work history, health, church involvement, sports, hobbies and social interests, and vocational interest. Specific questions addressing psychosexual issues are included within relevant topics. The Explanatory Note Concerning Psychosexual Assessment which expands on these issues will be available to the Bishop and the person responsible for ordination candidates and will be provided to the assessing psychologist at the time of referral.
- The interview will be structured primarily around the Personal History Booklet and will include additional questions relating to sexual history.
- The psychologist will de-brief the candidate about the assessment and provide the Diocese and the candidate with a copy of the written report.
- The Diocese is responsible for payment of the psychologist's fees for the assessment and the report preparation.

Report of Psychologist

The psychologist's report should provide assessments on each of the following criteria:

- **Presentation** (including brief physical description and how candidate related with psychologist).
- **Psychological Factors**
 - Biological and Constitutional Factors (relevant health history and status; ability to actualise; family history of substance or psychiatric disorders; drug or medication history).
 - Cognitive Factors (ability to study at tertiary level; attitude to learning).
 - Social Determinants and Current Life Situation (family background; educational and work history; friends and social support systems).
 - Identity and Self-Concept (self-view and how viewed by others; level of self-esteem, ego-strength; personal and career aspirations; ability to change).
 - Personality Factors (capacity to work under tension and deal with multiple stressors, including those that are beyond a person's control; energy level; time management abilities; adequacy of defences; presence and degree of underlying self-absorption; ability to relate comfortably with authority figures).
 - Interpersonal Skills (capacity to establish and maintain appropriate interpersonal relationships; comfort and effectiveness in group settings; capacity for receiving feedback from others; empathic ability; capacity to recognise own impact on others and to maintain healthy boundaries; openness to living, relating, and working with individuals from cultures other than own).
 - Sexual Maturity (sexual maturity at a level consistent with age and state in life; sexual orientation, identity; sexual behaviours consistent with vocation; potential resistance to growth and maturation of sexual experience or expression).
- **Skills, Capacities, and Experience**
 - Skills (leadership potential, for example as exhibited in personal initiatives and personal life decisions; capacity to cooperate with others; capacity to build relationships and communities; capacity for active listening; capacity for compassion and empathy; capacity to communicate adequately in English in both writing and speaking; commitment to promote social justice).
 - Experience (including past experience of active involvement in a parish or other Christian community; familiarity and experience with ministry requirements of the Diocese).
 - Personal Capacities (openness and flexibility; sense of humour; capacity for self-appraisal; adequate physical health; decision-making skills; money management skills; adequate etiquette skills; familiarity with and attraction to Anglican ordained ministry).
- **Motivation** (what motivates this person's application for ordination? how realistic are the person's expectations and understanding of the demands of ministry?)
- **Overall Assessment** (are there any reasons why this person should not be accepted for ordination training?)

The overall assessment must include *one of* the following three statements regarding the candidate's potential risk of sexual misconduct:

- No evidence of risk.
- Further investigation needed.
- There is evidence of a risk of misconduct.

Recommended by the Standing Committee 17 November 2012