CHAPTER 10

Psychological Assessment

For more information contact GBHEM's director of Candidacy, Mentoring, and Conference Relations, candidacy@gbhem.org or 615-340-7374.

Introduction

Selecting clergy for licensed and ordained ministry is a significant responsibility of dCOMs and BOMs. It can be both joyful and agonizing. Psychological evaluation in the selection process provides valuable information to assist those who make decisions about applicants.

This chapter focuses on the selection process, the professional psychological assessment (including testing, clinical interview of the applicant, and the submission of a written psychological report to authorized persons on the BOM or dCOM). This process is referred to as the ministerial assessment process.

Candidate assessment occurs when an individual

- Applies for certification as a candidate for licensed or ordained ministry
- Transfers between denominations or annual conferences with either provisional or full member status.
- Returns from various leaves statuses, particularly when the reason given for the leave is emotional disability.
- Other instances include, but are not limited to, clergy who are self and/or administrator-referred for evaluation.

I: Psychological Assessment in the Context of Selection and Nurture Decisions

Psychological Assessment

Psychological assessment is one source of evaluation as dCOMs and BOMs select candidates and clergy for set-apart ministry. Psychological assessment provides consultation to applicants and interview committees in the screening and nurture process. BOMs and dCOMs decide about candidates using theological, ecclesiological, and psychological criteria. The ministerial assessment specialist (MAS) consults with dCOMs and BOMs on the psychological portions of the application.

- Minimum requirements for psychological assessment services include testing, staffing, interviewing, preparing reports, consultation, training, and evaluation research.
- Testing is defined as the utilization of standardized self-report instrumentation with multiple data gathering instruments
  - Data collection includes information about personality, vocational interests, biographical, interpersonal relationships, self-image, and behavior.

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- The standard battery of instruments includes the 16 Personality Factor (16PF, 5th Edition), the Minnesota Multi-Phasic Personality Inventory 2 (MMPI-2), and Incomplete Sentences Blank.
- Additional instruments include a Personal Data Inventory and standard reference forms. Other instruments may be included at the discretion of the MAS or BOM in consultation with the MAS.

- Interviewing (diagnostic or interpretive) is mandatory.
- The evaluation report is consultative in nature and includes both screening/selection and nurture components.
- Reports are to be in writing and released only with the written consent of the applicant and only to authorized persons, professionals, or agencies.
- There shall be a written statement of criteria by which the MAS evaluates data from the applicants.
- Consultation and training in the use of the psychological reports shall be provided to the BOM when requested and may be provided on a fee-for-service basis.
- Establish a plan and budget to periodically review and evaluate the assessment process.
- There shall be appropriate maintenance of the candidate files according to the guidelines for psychological files of the UMC, the laws of the state, and the ethical standards of the state psychological association and American Psychological Association.

Minimum Standards for Ministerial Assessment Specialists

The DOM oversees the evaluation process in general of persons entering licensed or ordained ministry and the psychological assessment process in particular. The DOM has established a recommended process for the required psychological evaluations, offers recommended assessment instruments and training, and sets standards for those approved to provide assessments.

An individual approved by the DOM to provide psychological assessments is called a Ministerial Assessment Specialist (MAS). An MAS is approved through an application process, and is required to have credentials, experience, and training which meet the DOM's standards. Only approved MASes may participate in the psychological assessment process the DOM provides.

Evaluating and Selecting a Psychological Assessment Service Including Program and Personnel (Ministerial Assessment Specialist - MAS)

Minimum Standards for Selecting a Psychological Assessment Service

Minimum standards have been set by the Advisory Committee on Candidacy and Clergy Assessment (ACCCA) of the Division of Ordained Ministry (DOM) for psychological services and personnel. A BOM should evaluate any actual or potential service against these standards.

Standards for MASes require three primary competencies:

- Psychological Assessment - a psychologist or other licensed professional certified in psychological assessment with specific training and experience in personality and vocational assessment, including test theory and construction, administration, scoring, and interpretation.
- Psychotherapy - a psychotherapist with graduate training in personality theory and psychotherapy, including experience in the application of clinical evaluative skills to vocational or personnel selection and evaluation.
- Ministry Assessment - a person who values church and religious experience, and is familiar with ministry issues as they apply to the selection and nurture of candidates in the UMC.

An MAS demonstrates knowledge of:

- Technical assessment issues (i.e., how ministry candidates score differently from other norm groups on the assessment instruments).
- Evaluative criteria (i.e., how the criteria used in the decision-making processes – in ministry generally and the UMC particularly – are different from criteria in other selection contexts).

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- Effective interviewing (i.e., how to interpret test results in ways that relate to the ministry context, balancing agendas of nurture and selection).
- Effective report-writing (i.e., how best to convey assessment information to both candidate and board/committee, who are typically non-clinicians).

When one or more of the competencies are not present in a single person, a team will be used in order to include all three dimensions of the assessment standards.

To maintain an approved status, the MAS must remain in good standing with the appropriate professional credentialing bodies. The MAS approval also requires participation in DOM training events, and is subject to review at any time, at the discretion of the DOM.

Psychological Assessment Programs

Psychological reports address the kinds of questions that BOMs and dCOMs encounter in interviewing candidates. A psychological assessment process provides:

- Information to BOMs and dCOMs for selection and nurture decisions.
- Information to candidates that is pertinent to decisions about personal and professional preparation, and focuses on further developing strengths and/or corrections, and remedial work on problem areas.
- Information to candidates concerning the maintenance of maximum psychological health in professional ministry with concrete suggestions about how to handle areas of potential problems.
- Responses by the MAS to requests for resources from BOMs, dCOMs, and candidates as they address problems that may surface during the review process.

Mental Health Issues and the Role Requirements of Professional Ministry

In candidates' psychological assessment, the question is always asked, "What implications does this candidate's assessment profile have for both personal and professional functioning as clergy?"

A person may be in good mental health, but may also be emotionally insensitive to the feelings, needs, and opinions of others. Whether a candidate with such traits has the capacity for effective pastoral ministry is a serious question. Any characteristic or combination of traits that negatively impact professional ministry would seriously jeopardize the potential for effective ministry.

For example, insensitivity or the lack of capacity for empathy would be high on the list of undesirable traits. If a candidate has these traits, can he/she do anything to correct them and then become effective in licensed/ordained ministry? To put the matter another way, how does the applicant's personality structure and style fit with the requirements for effective professional ministry?

A second example focuses on the applicant's ability to relate to others. Effective clergy need an interpersonal and leadership style that results in the ability to enable and empower other Christians for ministry.

Another area of concern is the candidate's compatibility or possible conflict of mental health issues with the institutional structure of the UMC (or other denomination). Institutions require certain behavior from those who participate in them. Since the UMC's structure is authority-oriented, persons with authority issues may tend to encounter difficulties and present problems for the organization, and may tend to be uncooperative toward laity and denominational hierarchy.

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II. Selection Criteria, Psychological Reports, and Application of the Criteria

Criteria for the Selection Process

Four Stages

There are four major stages in the selection, nurture, and support of candidates.

	Stages	Emphasis	Criteria Question
1.	Candidacy	Fitness and Potential	Does applicant have qualities (gifts, grace, character, and personality) to become an effective minister?
2.	Provisional membership	Readiness	Is the candidate developing knowledge, professional and interpersonal skills, and spiritual formation essential for effective ministry and ready for appointment as a provisional member?
3.	Ordination	Effectiveness	Is the provisional member demonstrating developing effectiveness and ready to practice ministry as an ordained member of the annual conference?
4.	Continuing ministry	Effectiveness	Is the clergy person functioning effectively in ministry, and participating in continuing education and growth?

Psychological assessment is involved at each of these stages. All annual conferences are required to have a clear psychological assessment process developed for candidacy (Stage 1). Many have also instituted psychological assessment procedures for Stages 2, 3 and 4.

Culture and Gender Fairness and Accuracy

Throughout the process, all procedures must be appropriate and fair to the church and candidate. Comparisons need to be based on empirical research with both female and male candidates, and must be sensitive to cultural, language, and heritage of the candidate and corresponding groups in the church.

Psychological Reports

As Consultation

The MAS's primary responsibility in the assessment process is to the annual conference. Therefore, the written reports are presented to the dCOM and BOM to assist committees in identifying questions to discuss with candidates. The MAS report provides information concerning an applicant's internal and interpersonal functioning, and is one factor influencing the final decision.

The face-to-face interview between the applicant and the MAS should provide an interpretation of the testing results and should use non-technical language that is understandable to the candidate, dCOMs, and BOMs. The assessment gives information on mental health standards and the potential for effective performance of professional ministry. Specific suggestions for enhancing strengths and addressing areas for growth should be highlighted in the MAS's consultation with the candidate.

As Evaluation

The report consists primarily of a clinical description and evaluation of the candidate based on test data, as well as data from a diagnostic or history-taking interview. The focus of the psychological report is description rather than prediction, with the description concerning psychological requirements of professional ministry in the UMC.

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Application of the Criteria: The Selection Process and Confidentiality

The psychological report is useful at the three major decision points of candidacy, provisional membership, and ordination. It focuses on fitness, competency, and readiness for ministry in different proportions at each of these points.

The psychological assessment committee ensures the candidate's right to confidentiality in all steps of this process by maintaining confidentiality of materials consistent with the BOM's right to information in making informed decisions about candidates. The candidate's right to privacy is balanced with the BOM's and clergy session's "need to know" (in a legal sense of the phrase). BOM policies should guide the best use of the psychological material and effective standards for confidentiality. See ¶ 635.2m and Judicial Council Decisions 406 and 751.

Decision Point One: Certification of Candidacy and/or Request for License as Local Pastor

Candidacy Mentor

- Requests assessment packets by completing Form 112 online in the Candidacy Application System.
- Receives packets and monitors the testing situation.
- Returns completed packet to GBHEM's Candidacy Office for scoring.

Applicant

- Completes Personal Data Inventory.
- Provides reference names and contact information to GBHEM.
- Meets with the candidacy mentor to complete the assessment tests (MMPI-2, 16 PF, and Incomplete Sentence Blank).
- Meets with MAS to discuss results of the assessment process.

Ministerial Assessment Specialist

- Meets with the candidate after completion of report to assist candidate in assessing fitness for set-apart ministry.
- Recommends additional psychological resources as needed to enhance the candidate's development.
- Helps the candidate explore other vocational options, as needed.
- Sends completed assessment report to the BOM's psychological assessment chairperson or other appropriate dCOM/BOM representative (not the candidacy mentor or the DS).

Decision Point Two: Application for Commissioning to Provisional Membership

Process

- Conference registrar prepares list of provisional membership applicants for the psychological assessment chairperson to coordinate information for the MAS and applicants.
- Applicant participates in the testing and interview process.
- MAS conducts a review as applicable for provisional membership and presents results in a face-to-face interview with the candidate with a written report to the chair of the psychological assessment committee.
- Results of the assessment are made available to
  - Candidate (face-to-face interview).
  - BOM (through the psychological assessment committee).
  - Another mental health professional if requested by the candidate for future work.

Decision Point Three: Application for Ordination and Full Membership

Process

- BOM and applicant follow same process as in decision point two.

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- MAS prepares a report that focuses on developing effectiveness in ministry.
- MAS report considers
  - Candidate's education and provisional membership experiences.
  - Competency issues that may remain from previous assessments.
  - Developing effectiveness in ministry.
- Results are available in the same manner as decision point two.

III. Developing and Maintaining a Psychological Assessment Program

The Psychological Assessment Committee of the BOM

Structure and Function

Each BOM should have a psychological assessment committee with a designated chairperson. This committee administers the psychological assessment process and trains candidacy mentors, liaisons to dCOMs, and dCOM and BOM members in making decisions related to psychological assessment.

Characteristics of the Psychological Assessment Committee Chair

- Keeps confidential information confidential.
- Handles sensitive material with discretion, wisdom, and empathy.
- Interacts perceptively and firmly with peers.
- Represents the BOM's interests in the relationship with the MAS.
- Ideally has advanced training in pastoral counseling beyond what is offered in M.Div. programs.

Duties of BOM Committee Chair

Ensures communication and understanding among the following groups.

The BOM and the MAS

- Instructs MAS regarding the reports needed by the dCOM and BOM.
- Arranges for a contract between the BOM and the MAS.
- Manages reports.
  - Receives reports from the MAS and distributes them for dCOM and BOM interviews.
  - Collects reports after decisions are made.
  - Returns report to the MAS to retain on behalf of the candidate and the BOM.
- Arranges for a second opinion in the event that a candidate desires one as part of an appeal process.
- Prepares a budget and submits invoices for payment as required by the conference treasurer.
- Arranges for the transfer of the candidate's psychological files from any outgoing MAS to any newly designated MAS.

The psychological assessment program and dCOMs, including candidacy mentors

- Interprets the psychological assessment process to the candidacy registrar and candidacy mentors.
- Serves as the point of contact from the MAS to the BOM in order to receive and distribute all reports.
- Communicates the content of the report to the dCOM liaison for the psychological assessment committee.
- Follows the BOM's policies in determining access to the assessment reports and maintains a balance between the candidate's right to confidentiality and the BOM's "need to know" information that contributes to decisions about candidates.
- Collaborates with the candidacy registrar to arrange for training in the use of the psychological report in the dCOM interview process.

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- Ensures that the dCOM requires the candidate to sign an "Acknowledgement of the Process" and "Release of Information" before the assessment process begins.

The psychological assessment program and the BOM selection process

- Interprets the psychological assessment program and the use of psychological reports to the BOM interview team members.
- Receives the list of applicants for provisional or full membership from the conference registrar and forwards to the MAS.
- Receives copies of the psychological reports from the MAS for distribution to the one or two members of the psychological assessment committee who serve on each interview team.
- Works with the psychological assessment committee to meet with the MAS in order to review the written reports for clarification of issues and their implications, and for training prior to report use.
- Ensures that only those with legitimate "need to know" access the psychological reports and that any copies are returned to the ministerial assessment specialist's files at completion of their use.
- Arranges for a second opinion if a candidate desires one as part of an appeal process.
- Ensures that the dCOM requires the candidate to sign an "Acknowledgement of the Process" and "Release of Information" before the assessment process begins.

The psychological assessment program and provisional or full membership candidates

- Informs applicants about the purpose, timing, criteria, and results of the psychological assessment process.
- Asks candidates to complete the recommended "Release of Information" or similar document that sets forth BOM policies and procedures concerning:
  - purposes and uses of the psychological report.
  - the boundaries of confidentiality established in the use of the reports.
  - the custodial rights and responsibilities of the BOM and the MAS with reference to the reports.
  - the location of the MAS reports after the BOM process is complete.
  - the criteria to be utilized in the screening process.
  - the further use the candidate can make of the information from the report in terms of personal and professional growth.
- Arranges for the nurturing (pastoral care) of applicants during the candidacy/provisional/full membership evaluation process.

The committee chair maintains contact with DOM staff, psychological assessment chairpersons from other annual conferences, and with jurisdictional, regional, seminary, and general church-sponsored programs and events in the area of psychological assessment, candidate interviewing, and clinical counseling.

Duties of the Psychological Assessment Committee Liaison Member of the dCOM

- Communicate with the BOM committee chair in order to facilitate the psychological assessment process for candidates.
- Receive psychological reports from the BOM psychological assessment committee for use in the dCOM process of candidate evaluation.
- Review the psychological report in light of the conference standards for licensed and ordained ministry and the candidate's fitness (potential) for gaining sufficient levels of competence for effectiveness in licensed or ordained ministry.
- Orient the dCOM in the proper use of the reports during the dCOM interview process, including issues of confidentiality and the nature of the reports as consultation rather than as recommending an accept/reject decision.

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- Report to the BOM psychological assessment committee once the dCOM has concluded its work with the candidate.
- Participate in training with members of the BOM psychological assessment committee.

Budgeting and Contracting for a Psychological Assessment Program

The cost of psychological assessment programs is best understood in the context of the stewardship of the church's resources. The selection of persons psychologically unsuited to ministry can result in material and spiritual costs to candidates, local churches, other ministry settings, and annual conferences. BOM's are strongly encouraged to contract with an MAS. For more information and a model contract, contact DOM, Candidacy Office, 615-340-7394 or assessmentcoordinator@gbhem.org.

Sources of Income

Annual conferences vary both as to the funds allocated for psychological assessment and the costs charged to candidates.

Estimated Costs of a Psychological Assessment Program

- Budget approximately $400-600/person/assessment when the DOM's Candidacy office is not involved.
- Assessment costs per person may be approximately $100 less if done through the DOM Candidacy office, depending on the details of arrangements that can be made with the MAS.
- Total costs of a psychological assessment program include
  - assessment packet and materials.
  - scoring of assessments.
  - clinical staffing.
  - preparation for and conduct of interview.
  - preparation of report.
  - secretarial services and office expenses.
  - program administration.
  - consultation with BOM and dCOM (phone, mail, time).
  - MAS travel costs, if needed.

IV: Standard Core Battery and Centralized Scoring

Standard Core Battery of Instruments and Central Scoring

A standard core battery of instruments has been established for regular use by ministerial assessment specialists. This standardization provides the convenience of flexibility for students who need to take tests when they are attending seminary outside the annual conference.

Additionally, standardization reduces duplication of effort by the applicant, facilitates the development of norms for sub-populations, provides standardization of data collection and reporting, allows for quality control, and enhances the possibility for ongoing long-term research which can be utilized to improve the process and document results.

Standard Core Battery:

- The Incomplete Sentences Blank (developed by the National Task Force on Psychological Testing/Pastoral Evaluation)
- The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory 2 (MMPI 2)

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- Personal Data Inventory with an autobiographical statement (developed by the National Task Force on Psychological Testing/Pastoral Evaluation; revised by the ACCCA)
- The 16 Personality Factor (16PF, 5th Edition)
- The Standard Reference Form (developed by the Task Force on Psychological Testing/Pastoral Evaluation; revised by the ACCCA)

Some conference psychological consultants will use additional instruments while some will use only the standard core battery. In any case, the expectation is that at least the standard core battery of instruments will be utilized in the assessment process.

Centralized Scoring

In addition to a standard core test battery, centralized scoring of the standardized tests is essential because it can significantly contribute to improved quality of interpretive results.

Further, centralized scoring facilities are needed for research efforts since the data is collected and stored at one location. Consequently, in addition to the identification of a standardized core set of instruments the Candidacy Office at DOM provides a scoring service for the candidacy assessment process. MAS's that wish to utilize this scoring service for assessments may contact the Candidacy Office for more information (assessmentcoordinator@gbhem.org or 615-340-7374).

Confidentiality and Release of Information

Confidentiality

Acceptance by the clergy session into annual conference membership involves a corporate and legal responsibility. The BOM and clergy session has a right to know information needed to make this decision in a responsible way for each applicant. Individuals also have a right to privacy and confidentiality of information not relevant to such decisions (see ¶ 635.2m and Judicial Council Decisions 406 and 751).

Full details of confidentiality and handling of files are included in the BOM Handbook, Chapter 27. A review of those guidelines indicates that the applicant controls the release of information, the conference owns the report, and the MAS owns the data generated for the review. Guidelines for the proper functioning of each party having a stake in the materials are spelled out.

Release of Information

The "Authorization for Release of Information" form specifies to whom, and by whom, information is to be released. It identifies whether the applicant has a right to review information before, or only after, submission to the annual conference.

In the event that an applicant believes a particular report is not accurate, the annual conference may permit the applicant to obtain a second opinion. A suggested process is that the applicant: 1) pay for that assessment, 2) consult with the chair of the psychological assessment committee concerning approval of the credentials and experience of the professional selected by the applicant to provide a review, and 3) release both reports for review by the committee.

The release of information form includes a release for research purposes, when the research is properly authorized and standard research safeguards are provided.

Conclusion

Psychological assessment is an important factor that provides sensitive information for making decisions about ministry candidates. While the BOM and clergy session have the right to know necessary information, candidates

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also need to know that assessment reports are treated confidentially. A well-managed psychological assessment process protects the rights of those being assessed and provides the dCOMs and BOMs with helpful information for making appropriate recommendations.

While psychological assessment provides critical information for the selection of candidates, the reports should also be used in consideration of other information gathered from the candidate (i.e. background checks, theological exams, interviews, references, etc.). Evaluating information received from a variety of sources in light of the candidate's potential for ministry will assist dCOMs and BOMs in making the most appropriate decision regarding each candidate.

For more information contact GBHEM's director of Candidacy, Mentoring, and Conference Relations, candidacy@gbhem.org or 615-340-7374.

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