

### CHAPTER 11

# The Interview Process

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

## The Interview Process

Personal interviews are central to the BOM's work. Information for interviews may include: autobiographical statements, statements of call, written theological understanding, personal references, performance observations, sermons, reports of projects that demonstrate effectiveness in ministry, doctrinal statements, academic records, psychological assessment, physical examination reports, and background checks. All of these are brought together in the personal interview.

### Purposes for the Interview

Interviews determine the fitness, and readiness, of those applying for licensed or ordained ministry.

#### Meet the Candidate, Identify Issues, Test Assumptions

Face-to-face interviews help identify and test any assumptions about the candidate that may have been identified during the preparation process. Good interviewing is an exploration of candidates and the issues they bring. The interview team is required to read any information presented about the candidate beforehand and needs to confirm or change any preconceived notions about the candidate based on the interview's outcome. The team then makes a recommendation to the full BOM for final recommendation to the clergy session.

#### Give Guidance and Support

Interviews offer guidance and support to the candidate. Such help is offered by providing open and honest feedback that is not patronizing or condescending. When the candidate disagrees with the interview results, offering guidance and support may be difficult, as the interview team may be seen as blocking the candidate's desires. Under such circumstances, concern for the individual must be communicated, alternatives explored, and committee expectations clearly delineated.

When remedial action is recommended, the difference between tasks-to-be-done and change-to-be-manifested must be made clear. If the candidate completes the recommended tasks, but has not manifested changes that the BOM required, the recommendation does not change.

The BOM's responsibility to provide guidance and support does not always end at the interview's conclusion. Ongoing responsiveness may be helpful for someone who has experienced severe criticism, delay, or discontinuance. Sometimes an interview team member can provide this continued relationship. When this is not possible, the BOM can assure that a pastoral presence is provided by someone who is not a part of the interview process.

## Recommended Board or Conference Action

Nearly every interview results in a BOM recommendation for conference action. Conference standards for licensed and ordained ministry provide criteria to establish recommendations and these standards are to be communicated to interviewees, as well as those making decisions about the interview team's recommendations.

Conference standards for ordained and licensed ministry provide the foundation for feedback. These standards define expectations for candidates, licensed, or ordained ministers. The BOM develops expectations and shares them with all dCOM and BOM members and candidates. Standards offer consistent criteria for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of applicants, and provide the context in which leaves and conference relationship changes are considered.

## When to Interview and Skills Needed for Interviewing

The dCOM and BOM have varying responsibility for certification and ordination interviews throughout the application process.

### Required Interviews for Candidacy and Ordination Process

- Certification as candidate for licensed or ordained ministry, ¶ 666.6 (dCOM)
- Licensing and annual renewal of license as local pastor, ¶ 315.2d (dCOM)
- Application for provisional or associate membership and recommendation to the BOM, ¶ 324.10 (dCOM)
- Application for associate or provisional membership and recommendation to the clergy session, ¶ 324.11 (BOM)
- Completion of provisional membership and recommendation to the clergy session as deacon, ¶ 330.4, or elder, ¶ 335 (BOM)
- Readmission to provisional or full conference membership, ¶¶ 365-367 (dCOM/BOM)

### Voluntary Status Change

While not required, interviews by the BOM may be helpful with the following requests:

- Exiting ordained ministry, ¶ 361
- Honorable location, ¶ 359
- Medical leave due to medical and disabling conditions, ¶ 357
- Professional certification in specialized ministry, ¶ 635.2v
- Retired relationship (mandatory or voluntary), ¶ 358
- Transfer from other conferences, ¶ 347
- Voluntary leaves of absence (to and from), ¶ 354

### Involuntary Status Change

Any recommendation for an involuntary status change requires Administrative Fair Process, not simply an interview (see Chapter 29, BOM Handbook).

- Administrative location, ¶ 360
- Involuntary discontinuance of provisional membership (upon appeal), ¶ 327.6
- Involuntary leave of absence, ¶ 355
- Involuntary medical leave, ¶ 357
- Involuntary retirement, ¶ 358.3

## Interviewing Skills

Interviewing skills are learned and improved through practice and reflection. They include:

- Helping an interview group function with integrity
- Keeping confidences
- Preparing for the interview
- Creating an appropriate interview setting
- Asking questions that lead to helpful information from the candidate (beyond yes/no questions or surface level answers)
- Testing assumptions formed through reading the candidate's written statements presented before the interview
- Giving feedback
- Summarizing the interview in oral and written form
- Keeping notes and records
- Forming recommendations

## Training Interview Teams

### Process

Specific training needs vary based on the ability of the individual interviewer. However, an interview team requires special skill training.

### Purpose

Interview teams can do useful work only when the interview's purpose is clearly identified. It is an inquiry into the way candidates meet ministry standards established by the BOM and guided by *The Book of Discipline*. The interview is not therapeutic or working toward resolution of issues, nor is it an inquisition. It is a system to identify issues and information needed in order to make a recommendation and decision.

Mutual respect and trust must be established among BOM members. Board members must be trained in developing interview skills for a variety of settings. They must be familiar with annual conference policies, disciplinary requirements, and the implications of these standards. They must agree to the responsibilities required to prepare for and participate in any interview.

## Offering Feedback in an Interview

Open and clear feedback (both during and after the interview) helps people understand how they are being evaluated. Feedback is offered in the interview setting and in written summation afterwards.

Near the interview's end, a summary of perceptions should be offered by candidates and the interview team. This summation might be made after the interview team has had time apart from the interviewee to reflect on the individual perceptions of team members. Such a break time also allows the person being interviewed a time of reflection prior to the end of the interview.

Feedback following the interview is to be done orally and in writing. The oral communication is timely contact with the person after the interview is finished and recommendations are made. The written feedback is provided both for the candidate's and BOM's file to record both the interview and any BOM recommendations. Additionally, written feedback provides a record of where to start working on problematic issues. The written record also shows progress over the time period that someone is a candidate. Identical information and expectations should be conveyed in the oral and written feedback.

# Structuring Interviews

## Length of Screening Interviews

The recommended length for interviews is 45 – 90 minutes. A shorter time frame does not allow time to adequately deal with all working points, while more than 90 minutes tends to be unproductive. A debriefing time should follow each interview. This allows for immediate evaluation and time to record the team's recommendation.

## Size of Interview Team

Three to four interviewers is an ideal size for a team and allows for a good representation from BOM members without becoming too overwhelming for the candidate.

## Phases of the Interview Session

### Team Briefing

A brief moment just prior to the candidate's arrival when the team reviews its working points, questions, and strategy.

### Opening

This short time establishes the climate for a good working relationship among candidate and interviewers. Included are a greeting, a summary of the recommendation being sought, and developing an understanding of the candidate's situation. The candidate and interviewers express any feelings about the interview and the team may recognize the candidate's anxiety and take that into account. The team also conveys how any decisions made or information shared will be used.

### Middle

This is the major portion of the interview and involves using working points that have been agreed on in the team briefing. An effort is made to identify and come to consensus about issues, strengths, and problems that will assist the team in making a recommendation. Although team members may be concerned about the candidate, the primary focus of the interview is to gain insight. The team maintains a balance between concern for the schedule and desire for adequate communication. Team members should keep extraneous conversation to a minimum in order to accomplish the interview's purpose.

### Closing

The team briefly reviews the interview's significant points with the candidate. They inform the candidate when to expect a report—both oral and written—on the BOM's recommendation, and honor this commitment. They discuss the candidate's response and allow time for the candidate to raise any final questions.

### Debriefing

The team, without the candidate present, reviews the interview, makes decisions, and prepares a report for the BOM as well as notes useful to future interviewing committees.

### Follow-Up

Some BOM members should be available to talk with each candidate immediately following the interview. Some boards keep two or three members free for this purpose. If the interview has been difficult, this gives team members a chance to show they care about the candidate. Additionally, allow time and space for those who desire to be alone. The BOM then discusses and initiates short-term and long-range follow-up procedures, including communication with the dCOM and DS as needed.

## Final Decision Making and Process

- The interview team's recommendation to the BOM must be in writing. Notes and other appropriate materials are kept by the registrar in the candidate's file.

- The interview team’s recommendation must be acted on by the BOM, regardless of the interview process. Accountability for all recommendations is shared by the full BOM. The full board may choose to meet with the candidate before or after the recommendation is acted upon.
- The Ministerial Assessment Specialist provides a psychological assessment report. If possible, that person should be available to the BOM during final deliberations. This allows for clarification of any issues raised, and the MAS may function as an observer and offer useful critique of the BOM.
- The DS should immediately receive decisions about BOM recommendations and any future requirements established by the BOM. The BOM and cabinet have shared responsibility for candidates and clergy members and should share information about status decisions and interview recommendations.

## Types of Interviews

Candidates interview at various stages of the candidacy and ordination process. The BOM evaluates for different standards at each stage along the way.

### Candidacy: Fitness for Ministry

Fitness and potential effectiveness are the focus of the dCOM’s candidacy interview. Statements of call, statements of faith, recommendations, interest inventories, psychological assessments, and background checks are the material used in this interview. Explorations of the candidate’s call to ministry, relationship with God, and the ability to relate to people are fundamental. At this stage, a candidate is not evaluated based on standards or readiness to serve or effectiveness in leadership, but on the potential they have for developing into an effective clergy leader. The substance of this interview provides a reference point in later interviews.

Chronic physical limitations are to be evaluated in light of the disciplinary requirement that, “Disabilities are not to be construed as unfavorable health factors when a person with disability is capable of meeting the professional standards and is physically able to render effective service as a provisional member” (§ 324.8). When a candidate will not be able to render effective service due to physical disability, it is better to recognize and explore implications of this early in the candidacy process.

### Provisional Membership: Readiness for Ministry

Determination of readiness for provisional membership and service in appointive ministry is the focus of the interview following certified candidacy. Developing areas of competency are explored and discussed. Attention is given to the applicant’s academic background, theological statement, and seminary reports, including field education internships. Although developing skills for full membership and ordained ministry is ongoing, those applying for provisional membership are evaluated on whether or not they are fit and ready to serve an appointment and are developing the needed skills for effectiveness.

### Full Membership: Effectiveness in Ministry

When a provisional member applies for full conference membership, the interview focuses on growth in effectiveness in ministry. Primary documentation is the DS’s and S/P-PRC’s (or other employer) reports and evaluations. The candidate’s participation in the BOM’s residency program for provisional membership is also evaluated.

An ordination requirement was added in 2012 for full membership applicants to submit “a project that demonstrates fruitfulness in carrying out the church’s mission of ‘Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World’ ” (§ 330.4(5) and § 335.1(7)). BOMs determine the standards for these projects and guide applicants in meeting this requirement.

Provisional deacons who serve appointments beyond the local church without a personnel committee should establish an advisory committee related to the appointment setting for the purpose of giving support and supervision. This committee’s report should include observations of the applicant’s ability to lead in servant ministry.

Candidates applying for full membership must demonstrate that they have been effective in their appointments during provisional membership, according to the standards of the annual conference. When a provisional member is ineffective, there are unresolved questions of fitness and readiness, and the candidate is not ready for full membership.

## License as a Local Pastor

The dCOM interviews and recommends candidates applying for license as a local pastor. The interview's purpose is to determine the candidate's fitness and readiness for licensed ministry using documentation from candidacy certification, Orientation to Ministry, the local pastor's licensing school, DS recommendations, and other sources as determined by the BOM and dCOM. The dCOM then meets each year with the local pastor to review and approve continuation of the license.

## Professional Certification for Specialized Ministry

BOMs interview and recommend candidates for professional certification. The committee evaluates skills, education completed, knowledge about UM curriculum or programming, and resources identified in the area of specialization. Those with appropriate specializations may assist in these interviews (see Chapter 20, BOM Handbook).

## Follow-Up, Files, and Confidentiality

### Follow-Up

Regardless of the decision, continuing contact with and nurturing concern for the candidate should be planned. This is especially true when a difficult decision is made that discourages the candidate from continuing. Vocational alternatives may be explored and assistance given in locating other employment. Candidates who experience difficulties in dealing with the BOM's recommendation should be informed about pastoral care services that are available.

### Files

Files shall be kept according to the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) guidelines (see Chapter 28, BOM Handbook).

### Confidentiality

The candidate has the right to expect that information shared with an interview team will be kept confidential. This means that such information may be shared only with the BOM and cabinet. At the request of the clergy session, information may be shared with the clergy members in full connection with an annual conference (§ 635.2m).

It is the ethical responsibility of BOM members and the cabinet to keep all information on interviews in strictest confidence. When confidential information is requested by and shared with the clergy session of the annual conference, the ministerial covenant binds all of its members to keep such information in confidence as well—even if the candidate chooses not to.

## Check List for Interview Team Members

- Review appropriate *Book of Discipline* paragraphs.
- Become familiar with annual conference policy and the BOM Handbook.
- Enter into an open and trusting relationship with BOM members, the cabinet, and candidates.
- Understand and clarify the purpose of each interview.
- Participate in skills training related to interviewing.
- Be prepared to make difficult decisions.

- Review the candidate's file ahead of time.
- Apply appropriate licensing, commissioning, or ordination standards to the interview's content and discussion.
- Work with the interview team to build interview structure and content.
- Take notes for the interview file and BOM report.
- Abide by the requirement of confidentiality in all interviews – even if the candidate chooses not to.

## Consistency and Standards

Whatever process and standards the BOM establishes for interviewing candidates for licensed and ordained ministry and for determining voluntary and involuntary status changes, the BOM must apply this process consistently to all candidates and clergy. While *The Book of Discipline* outlines the requirements for certification, licensing, associate, provisional, and full membership, the BOM establishes the standards and expectations for the evaluation of all requests for candidates and clergy in the annual conference. Through a well thought out, well run interview process, the BOM is able to make recommendations to the clergy session and insure consistent treatment of candidates and clergy alike.

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