

PROPOSED GUIDELINES
ON THE ASSESSMENT
OF CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS FOR ASSIGNMENT

**Approved by National Conference
of Catholic Bishops**

November 18, 1993

Proposed Guidelines
on the
Assessment of Clergy and Religious for Assignment

* Explanatory Statement *

As partners in responsibility for the common good, the bishops and major superiors promote the welfare of the entire community of believers that is the Church. Whenever an individual is proposed for assignment, we routinely assess the capability of the individual--his or her strengths and weaknesses--for the task. In the overwhelming number of instances, this assessment confirms the suitability of the person for the assignment. In every instance, this assessment also includes our judgment, based on inquiry and personal knowledge, that the individual candidate will not cause some harm to a member of the Church or to the entire Church community. At times, when trying to meet their responsibilities in this regard, some dioceses and religious institutes utilized detailed procedures about personnel transfers and assignments that were difficult to administer and that confused relations between individual bishops and major superiors.

We asked representatives of our national organizations to study the process for assignment of clergy and religious between works of one diocese and another, between works of one religious institute and another, and between dioceses and religious

institutes, to determine if a common set of guidelines might be proposed. This document is the result of that effort. It proposes a consistent approach that we would recommend to individual bishops and major superiors to share necessary information, candidly and confidentially, about candidates. It could even be used in situations where an individual cleric or religious seeks ministry in the place where he or she is retired.

The bishops and major superiors in the United States have been working together to safeguard the Church and society at large against instances of harmful or scandalous behavior committed by clergy or religious. Although often stated in the context of child abuse, our concerns deal with a broader range of seriously improper behavior, such as untreated addictions to alcohol and other substances, abusive behavior or misconduct (especially that of a sexual nature), and financial improprieties. Although relatively rare, such conduct is still cause for grave concern and is especially odious when minors may suffer harm. It is our goal to prevent insofar as possible this kind of behavior by clergy and religious and to hold them accountable for their conduct. No cleric or religious will be given an assignment where there is any reasonable probability that he or she may bring harm to the Church or to individual persons, particularly minors.

It is not possible to anticipate every instance of misconduct. In some cases, the disorders which cause the misconduct make them extremely difficult to detect until they become manifest. As we know through painful experience, sometimes this behavior is only

discovered because it has already caused grave harm to members of our Church and to the community. However, by investigating and evaluating thoroughly the background of all candidates for positions in ministry and by communicating fully with one another, we major superiors and bishops substantially reduce the risk that anyone who has an untreated addiction or who is inclined to engage in any kind of seriously inappropriate behavior will be assigned to ministry.

In service to our people, we propose the accompanying guidelines for bishops and major superiors to use as a basis for relevant personnel policies of dioceses and religious institutes. The guidelines describe a process for recommending clergy and religious before assignment in a diocese whether they are known or unknown to the diocesan bishop. Similarly, in the spirit of mutuality, this same process will govern the assignment of a cleric to a ministry position in a religious institute. It will also apply in instances when a cleric seeks to join a religious institute, to be incardinated in a diocese, or to serve in another diocese.

We commit ourselves to the following goals:

- the full disclosure of pertinent information consistent with the limits of confidentiality,
- shared responsibility for the works of the Church,

- the protection of the community,
- respect for the individual, and
- the observance of canon law.

All who are involved in personnel investigations and related matters are reminded of the obligation to maintain confidentiality, to respect the individual's right to privacy and to a good reputation (canon 220), and to safeguard the common good of the Church (canon 223).

Both bishops and major superiors are asked to abide by the procedures for candidate assessment as described in the following guidelines. After a three-year period, there will be a review of our experience with these guidelines.

*** Guidelines ***

1. **Scope.** These guidelines apply to the transfer or assignment of all clerics and religious men and women: (1) when a member of a religious institute is formally proposed for or presents himself or herself for assignment into a diocesan ministry or one sponsored by another religious institute; (2) when a cleric (priest or deacon) of one diocese is proposed for assignment or incardination in another diocese or for an assignment in a ministry sponsored by a religious institute; (3) when a religious cleric seeks to be incardinated into a diocese, or a diocese cleric seeks membership in a religious institute; or (4) when any member of a religious institute seeks to become a member of another religious institute.

2. **Assessment.** The sending bishop or major superior will assess the fitness of the person proposed as a candidate for assignment. This assessment will be based on the personal knowledge of the bishop or the major superior, upon review of the written record of the candidate's performance, and upon inquiry of knowledgeable references, that is, those persons in the candidate's previous assignments who are best able to evaluate his or her conduct and character. The assessment will reflect whether the candidate has exhibited seriously improper behavior, such as, an untreated problem with substance abuse, violations of celibacy, sexual impropriety, physical abuse, or financial impropriety.

3. **Confidentiality.** The assessment shall be conducted with respect for the privacy and good reputation of the candidate. All inquiries relative to an assessment and all communications concerning suitability for an assignment of any individual under these guidelines are confidential, to protect both the candidate and the providers of information. Matters disclosed in final statements of suitability should have been previously communicated to the candidate.

4. **Transmittal.** The major superior or bishop of the candidate is to provide to the receiving major superior or bishop a written statement about the suitability of a candidate for the proposed assignment. That statement will indicate whether anything in the history or background of the candidate should in any manner limit his or her service in that assignment. Such a statement should also indicate that it was prepared in accord with these Guidelines or any other procedures established for that purpose. An example of such a statement is appended. Failure to provide such a statement is sufficient reason for delaying or denying the appointment to the candidate. For clerics seeking appointments within a diocese or a religious institute, the statement may be reviewed in confidence in particular cases by an appropriate delegate of the bishop or major superior. For non-ordained religious men or religious women, applying as individuals for ministry positions in a parish or other work, or a work sponsored by another religious institute, the statement may be reviewed in

confidence by the pastor, or the major superior or other appropriate authority. Where further explanation or more detailed inquiry is necessary in particular cases, all such communications should occur between the bishops, or the major superiors, or either of them.

5. Complete Information Available. Except in particular cases in which a more complete explanation or further communication between the bishop and the major superior (or others as delegated) may be required to resolve the questions about the background or status of a candidate, ordinarily no additional information, indemnification agreements, or other agreements are required. The statement of suitability (described above in No. 4) by the major superior or bishop of the candidate suffices. Moreover, whenever information becomes available subsequent to the appointment that may have a bearing on the suitability of a person for that assignment, that information will also be communicated.

6. Other Processes Not Affected.

A. These guidelines do not negate other personnel policies of the diocese or the religious institute including those that require all candidates to complete personnel questionnaires. These guidelines also do not displace the governing principles of canon law in any respect especially as it reflects the means by which privacy is respected and communications are made and received.

B. If, after assignment an allegation of serious impropriety is made regarding the behavior of a diocesan cleric or a member of a religious institute, the person's proper bishop or major superior will cooperate fully with the major superior or the bishop of assignment in the investigation of the complaint in accord with procedures established by the diocese, the religious institute, and both civil and canon law (cc. 1717-1719). In responding to and conducting any investigation into the truth of the allegations, the first concern of the Church is for the alleged victim or victims, their families, the parishioners or others affected, and the prevention of further harm. The bishops and the major superiors are also concerned for the common good and welfare of the Church as a whole, the welfare of the accused, and the entire community. Together the major superior and the diocesan bishop will see that, in accord with both civil and canon law, the alleged offender, when necessary, will refrain from performing his or her ministry pending further investigation, that there is adequate professional intervention, and that arrangements are undertaken for pastoral outreach to the victim and to the accused.

"APPENDIX"

**MODEL FOR A LETTER/STATEMENT
ON THE SUITABILITY OF A CANDIDATE**

**Model for a Letter/Statement
on the Suitability of a Candidate**

Dear (Receiving Bishop or Major Superior):

Under Guidelines proposed by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, and the policies of this [(arch)diocese/religious institute], I certify the suitability of [_____], a member in good standing of this religious institute] [_____, a cleric in good standing of this (arch)diocese] for assignment as (position) in (identify diocese or work of religious institute).

The reason that (name) is being proposed for this assignment is _____

_____. For this ministry, (name) possesses these special talents or experiences: (describe)

_____. I expect that [he/she] will [serve temporarily or for _____ years] [seek a permanent position/membership in your diocese/institute].

Furthermore, I have carefully reviewed our personnel and other records which we maintain, and I have consulted with some who served with [him/her] in the works [he/she] has been assigned under our authority. Based on these inquiries, I am able to the best of my ability to assure you that (name) is a person of good moral character and reputation, and is qualified to serve in an effective and suitable manner in your [diocese/institute]. In addition, also based on inquiry and to the best of my knowledge, I assure

you that nothing in [his/her] background in any way would limit or disqualify [him/her] from this assignment. ^{2/}

I hereby grant [him/her] permission to seek to exercise the proposed assignment.

A curriculum vitae including name, date of birth, place and date of or profession of vows/ordination; place(s) and date(s) of formation/seminary studies; and previous assignment(s), is enclosed.

Date: _____

(Signature)

(Title)

^{2/} Explanatory Note--At this point, a sending religious institute/diocese may wish to list the absence of particular behaviors, as found in Guideline No. 2. Similarly, a receiving religious institute/diocese may inquire about particular behaviors, as found in Guideline No. 2.