

# Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in Seminary Admissions

To support the implementation of the directives contained in the *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*<sup>1</sup> (*Guidelines*) that were issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education in June 2008, and the pertinent sections of the *Program of Priestly Formation, Fifth Edition* (PPF),<sup>2</sup> the Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provides the following guidelines for bishops, major superiors, and seminary rectors, when developing policies on the use of psychological evaluations in seminary admissions.

## The Purposes of a Psychological Evaluation for Seminary Admissions

Psychological assessments help the diocesan or eparchial bishop, the major superior, and the seminary rector gain a greater understanding of developmental, psychological, and other personal factors at work in

---

1 Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* (*Guidelines*), (June 28, 2008), [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_20080628\\_orientamenti\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20080628_orientamenti_en.html).

2 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Program of Priestly Formation, Fifth Edition* (PPF), (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), especially nos. 42, 47, 51-57.

the life of an applicant and of how these may strengthen or hinder an authentic vocational discernment.

Psychological assessment by professional clinicians provides critical information that otherwise might not be obtained in the course of admissions interviews. Sometimes the psychological report is able to articulate important areas that need to be more fully screened, or it may identify features that warrant serious concern or further discernment by those making the final decisions about admission of the candidate. The process can also provide the applicant with knowledge of his own areas of strength and potential growth as well as some of the actual limits of his own freedom to hear clearly God's call. A thorough assessment can provide significant information for the applicant about his level of intellectual functioning, the presence of acute mental distress, and the characteristic ways he relates to himself and to others.

Psychological assessment serves in a supportive role to provide greater clarity about an applicant, so that those responsible for the admissions process have a fuller understanding of the applicant besides the many other components of the application process.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, psychological assessment can serve as confirmatory evidence in support of conclusions based on the entire admissions process, especially if there is a divergence of views during the screening process.

## **Suggested Components of a Psychological Assessment and Report for Admissions**

Psychological assessment seeks to understand the intellectual, emotional, and psychological functioning of the applicant through the use of psychometric measures; it is the mental equivalent of a physical evaluation.

To assist those responsible for judging the suitability of the applicant for seminary formation, according to numbers 47 and 53-56 of the PPF, the following components of a psychological evaluation and written report would be especially instructive:

1. Clinical interview (a structured interview of the applicant that is focused specifically on his mental health history)

---

3 PPF, no. 47.