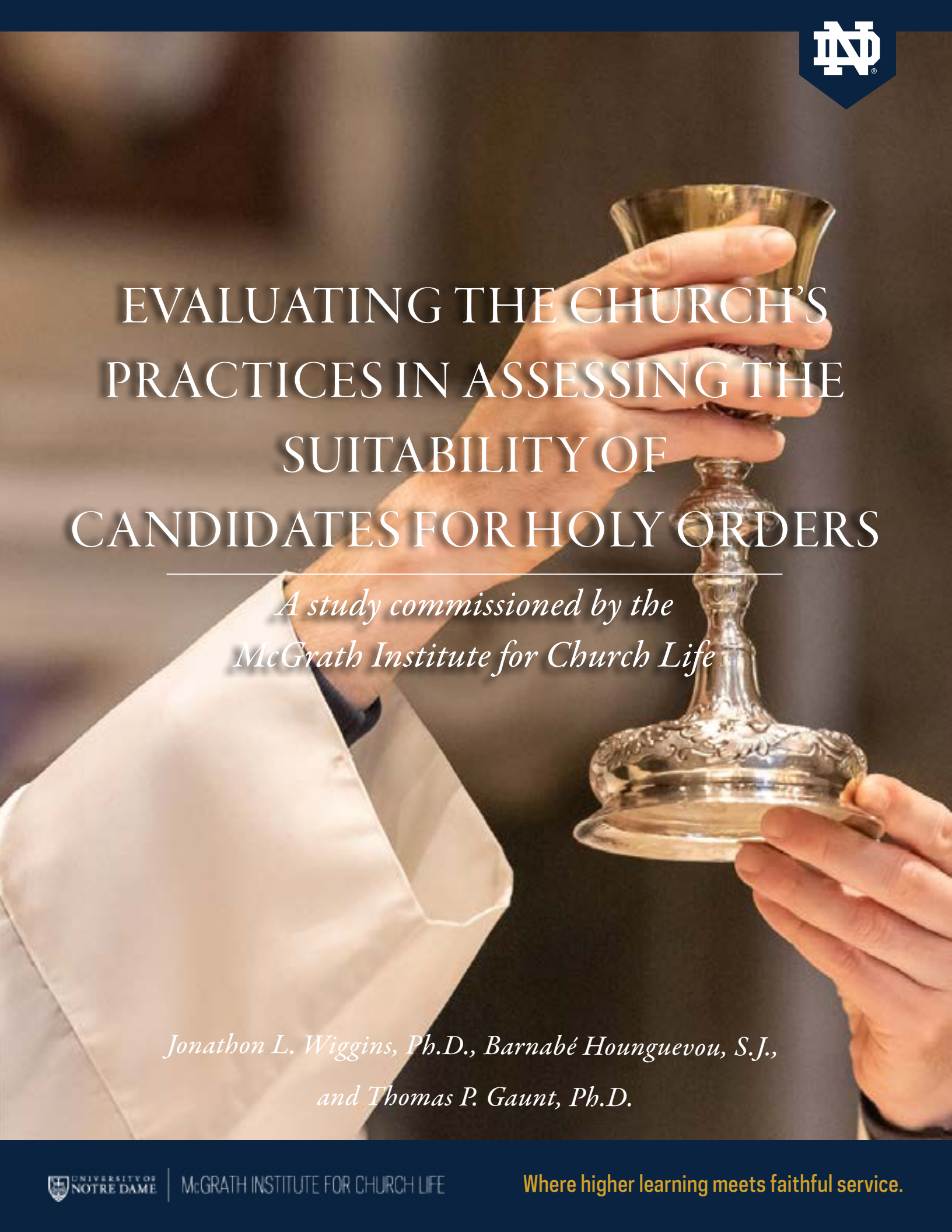


A close-up photograph of a priest's hands holding a silver chalice. The priest is wearing white vestments. The background is blurred, showing other people in similar vestments.

# EVALUATING THE CHURCH'S PRACTICES IN ASSESSING THE SUITABILITY OF CANDIDATES FOR HOLY ORDERS

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*A study commissioned by the  
McGrath Institute for Church Life*

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and Thomas P. Gaunt, Ph.D.*

**Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC**

***Evaluating the Church's Practices in Assessing the  
Suitability of Candidates for Holy Orders***

**commissioned by  
McGrath Institute for Church Life  
University of Notre Dame**



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## **Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate**

### ***Evaluating the Church's Practices in Assessing the Suitability of Candidates for Holy Orders***

#### **McGrath Institute for Church Life University of Notre Dame**

#### **Summary of Major Findings**

The *Evaluating the Church's Practices in Assessing the Suitability of Candidates for Holy Orders* project was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University in consultation with personnel from the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. In summer 2024, Fr. Thomas Berg of McGrath approached CARA about conducting a study of how effectively seminaries and dioceses assess the suitability of seminary candidates for advancement and ordination to the priesthood. Five surveys were designed for constituencies in the United States familiar with the assessment process: diocesan bishop ordinaries, diocesan vocation directors, seminary rectors, seminary formators and spiritual directors, and mental health professionals who work with seminaries. Interviews were conducted with each group as well. A summary of the major findings across all five surveys is presented below.

#### **Effectiveness of Seminary Formation Efforts**

##### **Bishops and Vocation Directors**

- Regarding how well seminaries work together with dioceses, more than nine-tenths (91% to 96%) of responding bishops and vocation directors say they have in-depth meetings with the seminaries once a year or more often to discuss their candidates.
- More than four in five bishops (90%) and vocation directors (84%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that overall, they are satisfied with the formation programs at the seminaries they send their candidates to. Nearly half of bishops (45%) and three-tenths of vocation directors (31%) “strongly agree” that they are satisfied overall with the programs.
- Bishops and vocation directors were asked to assess how confident they are about the formation at their seminaries in 28 distinct areas. Examining their responses together, both groups are especially likely to have great confidence in these two areas of formation:
  - Seminarians’ openness to growing spiritually – 55% to 59% are “very confident” in their seminary’s formation in this area
  - Regular engagement in self-reflection – 36% to 49%



- Below are the three areas of formation that both bishops and vocation directors are *least* likely to say they have great confidence in at their seminaries:
  - Seminarians' healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 19% to 21% are “very confident” in their seminary's formation this area
  - Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations – 17% for both
  - Dealing with learning disabilities – 16% to 17%

### **Rectors, Formators/Spiritual Directors, and Mental Health Professionals**

- At least nine-tenths of rectors (100%) and formators/spiritual directors (91%) report that their formation teams meet every few years or more often to evaluate the overall efficacy of their formation program.
- Like the bishops and vocation directors described above, rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals were also asked to assess how confident they are about the formation at their seminaries in 28 distinct areas. Examining their responses together, all three survey groups list these areas of formation among those they are most likely to have great confidence in, two of which were also mentioned above by the bishops and vocation directors:
  - Seminarians' openness to growing spiritually – 48% to 62% are “very confident” in their seminary's formation in this area
  - Regular engagement in self-reflection – 22% to 55%
  - Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety – 32% to 43%
  - Ability to form healthy relationships with others – 32% to 43%
- Below are the four formation areas that those from all three surveys are *least* likely to express great confidence in, one of which was also listed by the bishops and vocation directors above:
  - Seminarians' healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 11% to 23% are “very confident” in their seminary's formation in this area
  - Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation – 8% to 22%
  - Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 4% to 22%
  - Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 16% to 17%
- About half of formators/spiritual directors (47% to 49%) and two-fifths of rectors (37%) “strongly agree” that formators at their seminary utilize a series of effective, measurable formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation over all stages of formation *and* that the initial psychological evaluations are used to design personalized formation programs for each seminarian. In comparison, less than one-fifth of mental health professionals (11% to 18%) “strongly agrees” with these two statements.
- While about three-fifths of rectors (62%) and formators/spiritual directors (63%) “strongly agree” that their seminarians are explicitly encouraged to be vulnerable and transparent with those involved in their formation, fewer, between 42% and 48%, “strongly agree” that vulnerability and/or transparency is a major topic of formation, e.g., it is a topic of a formation conference at the seminary.

## **The Role of Psychological Services in Seminary Formation Efforts**

### **Bishops and Vocation Directors**

- Seven-tenths or more of bishops (69%) and vocation directors (84%) say they can “easily” contact the mental health professionals who conduct their psychological evaluations to confer further about their evaluations of candidates. More than three in five vocation directors (63%) say they have contacted a mental health professional about a psychological evaluation “often” or “very frequently.”
- Nearly two in five bishops (38%) and vocation directors (37%) “strongly agree” that psychological services at seminaries should play a significant role in determining the suitability of candidates for advancement or for Holy Orders, not just the initial psychological evaluation.
- More than seven-tenths of vocation directors (74%) and bishops (72%) say they are familiar enough with the USCCB’s 2008 guidelines/guidance on the use of psychological services in seminary formation to respond to a question about it. Among those familiar enough to respond, about four-tenths of bishops (42%) and three-tenths of vocation directors (31%) say the guidelines are “very helpful.”

### **Rectors, Formators/Spiritual Directors, and Mental Health Professionals**

- Approximately nine-tenths of rectors (93%), three-quarters of mental health professionals (73%), and half of formators/spiritual directors (55%) say they are familiar enough with the USCCB’s 2008 guidelines/guidance on the use of psychological services in seminary formation to respond to a question about it. Among those familiar enough to respond, about three-tenths of formators/spiritual directors (31%) and two-tenths of rectors (20%) and mental health professionals (19%) say the guidelines are “very helpful.”
- About three-tenths to four-tenths (28% to 41%) of rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals “strongly agree” with these three statements about the role of mental health professionals in seminaries:
  - In our seminary and throughout the formation process, psychological services play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or Orders – 28% to 41% of rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals “strongly agree”
  - A substantial number of our seminarians meet regularly with a psychologist/mental health professional – 33% to 39%
  - Our seminary has a full-time psychologist/mental health professional – 28% to 35%
- Just over one in ten rectors (15%) and mental health professionals (11%) “strongly agree” that psychological services staff members contribute periodically at their formation team meetings about the progress of individual seminarians. Some rectors and formators, in their interviews, describe how valuable it has been having mental health professionals involved in their programs and meetings.

- Mental health professionals were asked both in the surveys and the interviews to suggest ways seminary rectors, formators and faculty members could better utilize psychological services in their seminaries. They are especially likely to mention these four ways:
  - Giving mental health professionals more guidance and feedback about how their evaluations and services can better assist seminaries and dioceses – mentioned by 48% of all mental health professional respondents
  - Providing training for formators about how to get the most out of the evaluations and counseling services provided – 23%
  - Requiring more robust testing in the psychological evaluations and more frequent testing and evaluations – 23%
  - Better integrating mental health professionals into seminary formation teams – 16%

### **Effectiveness of the Psychological Evaluations**

- One hundred percent of rectors and 94% of formators/spiritual directors view the initial psychological evaluations as “a necessary tool to identify areas of needed growth” in the context of assessing the suitability of a candidate to enter seminary formation. In related findings, 68% of bishops and 81% of vocation directors view the initial psychological evaluations as either “one of the most effective tools” or as “the most effective tools” to identify issues related to a candidate’s suitability for formation.
- That said, fewer – less than three in five bishops (56%) and vocation directors (57%) – “agree” or “strongly agree” that their seminaries’ psychological evaluations adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest. In a related finding, combining the two most positive responses, 53% of mental health professionals say the psychological evaluations are “adequately effective” or “very effective” at identifying issues related to the suitability of a candidate for formation.
- Respondents to all five surveys were asked to think of the psychological evaluations they have seen (or produced) in the past ten years and to identify the areas they feel were sufficiently covered in them. For the purposes of this study, it is most instructive to identify the areas *least* likely to be sufficiently covered among the five groups, which are:
  - Severe learning disorders or disabilities compounded with lack of intellectual curiosity
  - Relations with self or others including relations that are so damaged or shame-based that the candidate cannot relate or assume healthy leadership
  - Pervasive developmental disorders that may lead to behaviors incompatible with the human formation traits and characteristics of healthy priestly relationships and ministry
  - Activity or inclination towards sexual activity with a minor or other trait that might indicate the person could be a harm to minors
- Bishops, vocation directors, rectors, and formators/spiritual directors were asked to write-in suggestions for how to improve the psychological evaluations. The seven most common areas for improvement mentioned across the four surveys are:
  - Revisions of the testing and/or the evaluation process
  - Improved assessments of the qualities needed for pastoral ministries

- Greater focus on measures of maturity and growth
- More in-depth history and cultural background assessments
- More frequent updates from seminaries about areas of concern
- Establishing universal standards for the testing, reporting, and recommendations
- More extensive testing in specific areas

### **Assessments of the Suitability of Candidates**

- While about nine-tenths of bishops (92%) and vocation directors (90%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that overall, they are satisfied that the seminaries they use are adequately assessing the suitability of men for formation or Orders, fewer – 65% to 68% – “agree” or “strongly agree” that the intermediate and final recommendations they receive from their seminaries adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest.
- Mental health professionals (54% to 57%) are more than twice as likely as rectors (24% to 27%) and formators/spiritual directors (17% to 25%) to “agree” or “strongly agree” with the two statements below.
  - Overall, I am satisfied that the seminary we use is adequately assessing the suitability of men for formation and Orders
  - The intermediate and final recommendations we receive from the seminary adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest
- More than nine in ten mental health professionals (94%) and seven in ten vocation directors (70%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that, in their various capacities, they directly ask candidates about any same-sex attraction they have experienced. In comparison, less than half of formators/spiritual directors (46%), rectors (39%) and bishops (36%), agree they do.
- About six-tenths to seven-tenths of bishops (68%), rectors (68%), formators/spiritual directors (63%), and vocation directors (57%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that they find the Congregation for Catholic Education’s 2005 “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” to be useful. In contrast, about a third of mental health professionals (36%) “agree” that it is. In the interviews, the main improvement they would like to see in the document are better definitions of the terms “transitory” and “deep-seated.”
- Rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals were asked to write in a response to this question (or a slight variation of it): *How do you determine that a man has or has not worked sufficiently through trauma to be eligible for ordination?* Most commonly, they identified these positive behaviors that men who have sufficiently worked through their trauma should exhibit:
  - A willingness to address the trauma and bring it into the internal forum
  - A willingness to meet with a therapist, with the seminarian giving his consent for the mental health worker to share about his progress with seminary leaders
  - They contend that sufficient healing must take place before ordination, but preferably by the time they enter the Configuration Stage; if necessary, the man may need to leave the seminary for a period of time to work on resolving the issues

- Regarding the signs that indicate men are processing and working their trauma, they are especially likely to identify these:
  - Has completed therapy and has been okayed by a mental health professional
  - Functions well and grows in all four dimensions of formation, which includes demonstrating self-care, having appropriate relationships, not experiencing inappropriate levels of anxiety or discomfort, being able to handle authority and be corrected, handling stress well, and coping well with the trauma and other stressors
  - Is able to talk openly about all stages of his trauma, without triggering an episode, including how he has experienced healing and how it has affected him
  - Demonstrates self-awareness and is able to forgive himself
  - Successfully brings his experiences with the trauma into his prayer and spiritual life and can articulate how those experiences will positively impact his ability to minister
  - Possesses the ability to function well as a priestly minister who can minister to others without having it trigger him into reenacting the trauma
- All five survey groups were asked to describe how much 15 factors impacted their judgment about the suitability of a man for Orders. Examining the factors they most often identify as “alone disqualifying” a man for ordination, these four are especially likely to be cited:
  - After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition
  - A dominant attraction to those of the same sex
  - Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex
  - Cyclical semi-compulsive behaviors – e.g., unhealthy alcohol use, gambling
- Between two-fifths to two-thirds of mental health professionals (65%), rectors (48%), and formators/spiritual directors (44%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that when assessing their suitability for Orders, some dioceses prioritize the quantity of candidates over the quality of candidates.
- About a fifth to a third of bishops (22%) and vocation directors (33%) say that, in the past ten years, their diocese at least once has disagreed with the *negative* recommendation of a seminary and advanced a seminarian to the next stage of formation or Orders. In related findings, more than three-fifths of mental health professionals (94%), formators/spiritual directors (76%), and rectors (61%) say that at least once a diocese has disagreed with a *negative* recommendation of their seminary.
- Two-tenths to three-tenths of bishops (21%) and vocation directors (31%) say that, in the past ten years, their diocese at least once has disagreed with the *positive* recommendation of a seminary and *not* advanced a seminarian to the next stage of formation or Orders. Similarly, about one-fifth to a third of rectors (36%), mental health professionals (31%), and formators/spiritual directors (21%) say that at least once a diocese has disagreed with a *positive* recommendation of their seminary and has *not* advanced a man.

# **Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate**

## ***Evaluating the Church's Practices in Assessing the Suitability of Candidates for Holy Orders***

### **McGrath Institute for Church Life University of Notre Dame**

#### **Introduction**

The *Evaluating the Church's Practices in Assessing the Suitability of Candidates for Holy Orders* project was designed by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University in consultation with personnel from the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. In summer 2024, Fr. Thomas Berg of McGrath approached CARA about conducting a study of how effectively seminaries and dioceses assess the suitability of seminary candidates for advancement and ordination to the priesthood. Five surveys were designed for constituencies in the United States familiar with the assessment process: diocesan bishop ordinaries, diocesan vocation directors, seminary rectors, seminary formators and spiritual directors, and mental health professionals who work with seminaries. Interviews were conducted with each group as well. How the surveys were distributed, the response rates, and details about the interviews are described below.

#### **Distribution and Response for the Surveys and Interviews**

##### **Distribution and Response for the Survey and Interviews of Bishops**

All 196 U.S. bishop ordinaries of arch/dioceses and eparchies in the United States were sent hard copies of a survey designed just for ordinaries in February 2025, which included an option to respond online; a reminder mailing went out in February as well. By April 2025, 103 had responded, for a response rate of 53%.

Using the list of bishops' email addresses compiled by CARA, bishops were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Only one volunteered to be interviewed, with the interview completed in March 2025.

Both the survey for bishops (with the percentage responses and non-response rates for each question presented) and the interview protocol are presented in Appendix I.

### **Distribution and Response for the Survey and Interviews of Vocation Directors**

Using a list of the email addresses of 159 U.S. diocesan vocation directors compiled by CARA, an email invitation to participate in an online survey designed specifically for vocation directors was sent to the directors in January 2025, with reminder emails sent in February and March. A total of 53 responded by March, for a 33% response rate.

Using that same list of emails compiled by CARA, vocation directors were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Seven were interviewed in March 2025.

Both the survey for vocation directors (with the percentage responses and non-response rates for each question presented) and the interview protocol are presented in Appendix II.

### **Distribution and Response for the Survey and Interviews of Seminary Rectors**

Using a list of the email addresses of 46 rectors in U.S. seminaries listed in the 2024-2025 Directory of the National Association of Theological Schools, an email invitation to participate in an online survey designed specifically for seminary rectors was sent to the rectors in January 2025, with reminder emails sent in February and March. A total of 27 responded by March, for a 59% response rate.

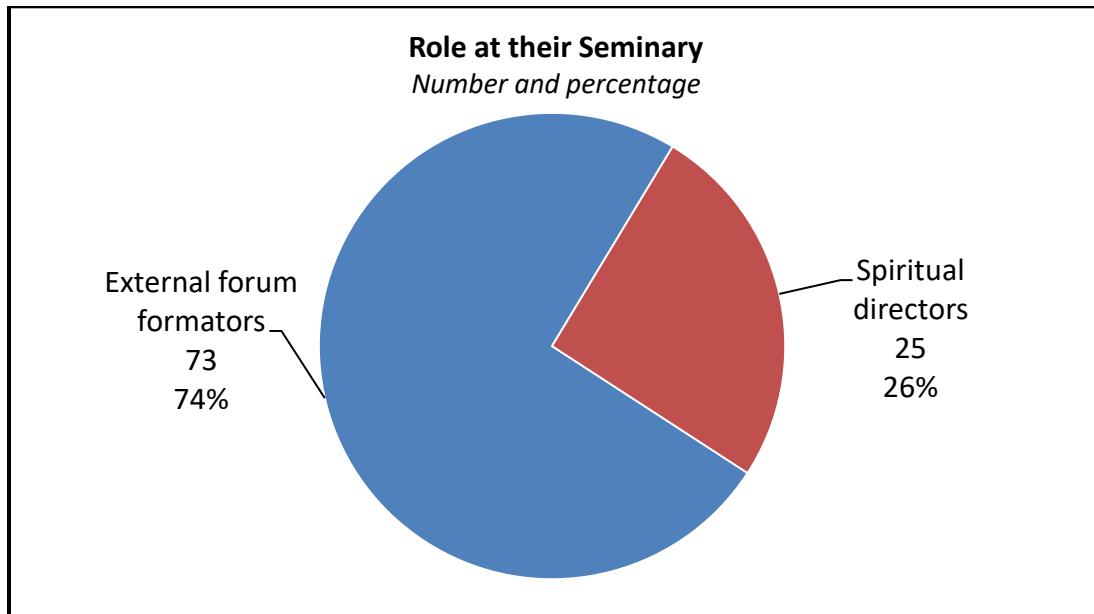
Using that same list of emails compiled by CARA, rectors were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Eight were interviewed in March 2025.

Both the survey for seminary rectors (with the percentage responses and non-response rates for each question presented) and the interview protocol are presented in Appendix III.

### **Distribution and Response for the Survey and Interviews of Seminary Formators and Spiritual Directors and their Roles at their Seminaries**

As CARA had no access to a list of seminary formators and spiritual directors at U.S. seminaries, CARA sent an email to the 46 rectors asking for their help to distribute an email invitation to an online survey to the seminary formators and spiritual directors at their seminaries. CARA has no way to estimate how many of the 46 rectors sent the invitation nor how many formators and spiritual directors received them, so no response rate can be calculated. A total of 111 responded by March 2025.

As can be seen in the figure below, three-quarters of respondents are external forum formators (74%) and one-quarter is a spiritual director (26%).<sup>1</sup>



Using that same method of sending an email to rectors for them to forward to their seminary's formators and spiritual directors, the formators and spiritual directors were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Seven were interviewed in March 2025.

Both the survey for seminary formators and spiritual directors (with the percentage responses and non-response rates for each question presented) and the interview protocol are presented in Appendix IV.

### **Distribution and Response for the Survey and Interviews of Mental Health Professionals and their Roles at their Seminaries**

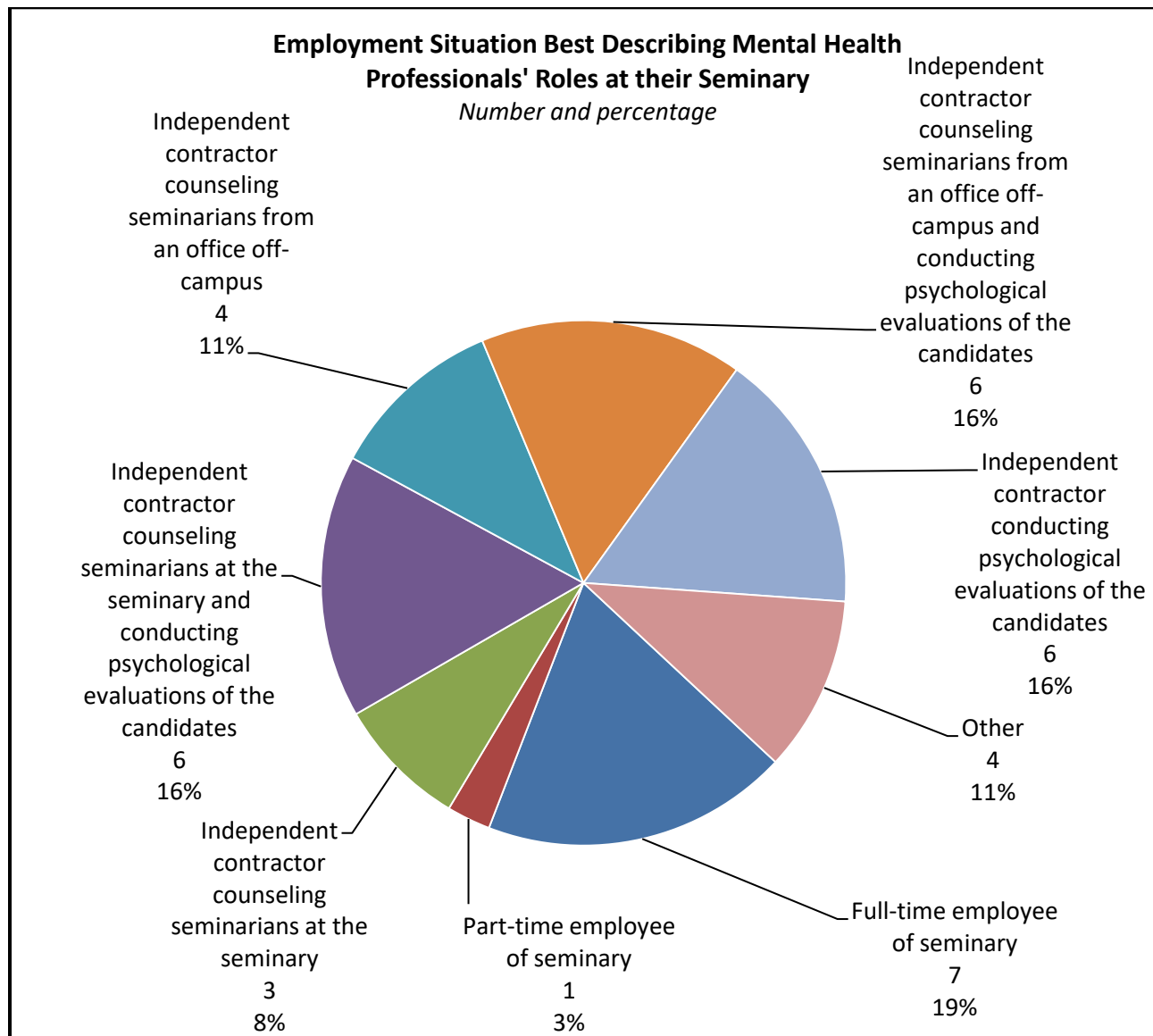
Similarly, CARA had no access to a list of mental health professionals working with U.S. seminaries, as to our knowledge, no such list exists. One of the designers of the project did, however, was on a listserv with many of those who do such work, and he distributed by email a link to an online survey for mental health professionals. A total of 59 responded by March 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> Twelve percent did not provide a response to the question.



They were asked what employment situation at the seminary best described them, with the results presented in the figure below.<sup>2</sup>



Those writing in an “other” employment situation gave these descriptions of their situations:

- Adjunct psychology professor; part-time independent contractor psychotherapist with an office on campus; independent contractor part-time human formation lecturer. Note that all together, my time commitment may be full-time, but I have never been offered a full-time job with benefits.

<sup>2</sup> Thirty-seven percent did not provide a response to this question.

- Although I live on campus, I am a contracted psychologist rather than an employee. I am allowed to complete psychological evaluations for men and women religious and for diocesan seminarians who are not affiliated with the seminary where I work.
- I have been full time psychologist for over 13 years at a seminary as well as an independent contractor in order to assess seminary applicants

Using that same method of one of the designers of the project sending an email to them, the mental health professionals were invited to participate in a follow-up interview. Nine were interviewed in Zoom sessions in March and April 2025, as two asked to be interviewed together.

Both the survey for mental health professionals (with the percentage responses and non-response rates for each question presented) and the interview protocol are presented in Appendix V. As many of the mental health professionals had very specific roles in seminaries, this survey had the highest non-response rate for individual questions of any of the five surveys.

### **Interpreting This Report**

Many of the questions in this survey use four-point response scales (i.e., “do not agree,” “somewhat agree,” “agree,” “strongly agree”; or “not helpful,” “somewhat helpful,” “helpful,” “very helpful”). These scales allow respondents to choose between two relatively “negative” choices (e.g., “do not agree” and “somewhat agree”) and two relatively “positive” choices (e.g., “agree” and “strongly agree”). In parts of the analysis in this report, these responses are combined to allow for clearer comparisons. However, as sometimes examining the most positive response distinguishes important contrasts in level of support, those responses are presented separately.

In addition, readers may also wish to compare the difference between the two extreme responses, say “poor” and “excellent,” to compare the level of intensity with which opposing opinions are held. These comparisons and others may be drawn by referring to the actual percentage responses given in Appendices I to V. Those appendices show the percentage responses for each item, calculated out of 100%, as well as the percentage of all respondents that did not respond to each question, separately calculated out of 100% for clarity of comparison.

In addition to the quantitative data analyzed in this report, many open-ended questions on the survey collected qualitative data. For these data, respondents were prompted with a question and given an open box for written comments, rather than select from a set of response options. These comments are analyzed along with the quantitative data as well as in separate sections throughout this report. While these responses are not suitable for statistical analyses, they do add depth to the data that is not attainable through closed-ended questions only.

## **Structure of This Report**

Besides the Summary of Major Findings and this Introduction, this report consists of three sections and six appendices. Due to the large number of pages involved, the sections appear in one volume and the appendices in the others.

### **Sections:**

- I: Effectiveness of Seminary Formation Efforts
- II: The Role of Psychological Services in the Formation Process
- III: Assessments of Suitability of Candidates

### **Appendices:**

- I: Bishops' Survey Instrument, Response Frequencies to All Questions and Interview Protocol
- II: Vocation Directors' Survey Instrument, Response Frequencies to All Questions and Interview Protocol
- III: Rectors' Survey Instrument, Response Frequencies to All Questions and Interview Protocol
- IV: Formators' and Spiritual Directors' Survey Instrument, Response Frequencies to All Questions and Interview Protocol
- V: Mental Health Professionals' Survey Instrument, Response Frequencies to All Questions and Interview Protocol

## Section I: Effectiveness of Seminary Formation Efforts

This section of the report describes how effective respondents to the five surveys see the seminaries they are attached to are in their formation efforts. Included in this section are measures of how effectively the seminaries work with the dioceses and eparchies sending men to their seminary, how well the formation teams operate, how effective survey respondents believe their seminaries are in different areas of formation, how well the formators design personalized formation programs for each seminarian, how well seminaries follow-up on issues identified as problematic for seminarians, and how well the seminary promotes transparency and vulnerability.

### Collaboration between Dioceses and Seminaries

As can be seen in the table below, vocation directors are more likely to report having in-depth meetings with the seminaries their candidates attend than bishops.<sup>3</sup>

| <b>How often do you have an in-depth meeting<br/>(virtually, by phone, or in-person) with the<br/>seminary you use most frequently about the<br/>candidates from your Diocese there?</b> |                |                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding</i>                                                                                                                                                             |                |                               |
|                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation<br/>Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                      |
| Never or rarely                                                                                                                                                                          | 9              | 4                             |
| Once a year                                                                                                                                                                              | 43             | 13                            |
| Every semester                                                                                                                                                                           | 33             | 61                            |
| More than once a semester                                                                                                                                                                | 15             | 22                            |

- More than four in five vocation directors (83%) have in-depth meetings with their seminaries at least once a semester, compared with about half of bishops (48%).<sup>4</sup>
- More than nine in ten bishops (91%) and vocation directors (96%) have in-depth meetings with their seminaries at least once a year.<sup>5</sup>
- Less than one in ten bishops (9%) and vocation directors (4%) never or rarely have in-depth meetings with their seminaries.

<sup>3</sup> Five percent of the bishop respondents and 13% of the vocation directors did *not* respond to this question.

<sup>4</sup> Calculated by summing the percentage for “every semester” and “more than once a semester.”

<sup>5</sup> Calculated by summing the percentage for “every year,” “every semester,” and “more than once a semester.”

## **Frequency of Meetings of the Formation Teams to Evaluate Overall Efficacy of the Formation Program**

Rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals were asked how often their team meets for two different functions: to evaluate the overall efficacy of their program and to discuss and evaluate their own functioning as a team.

### **Meetings to Evaluate the Overall Efficacy of the Formation Program**

As can be seen in the table below, formators and spiritual directors (80%) are most likely to say that their seminary's formation team meets at least once a year<sup>6</sup> to evaluate the overall efficacy of their formation program, followed by the rectors (73%) and mental health professionals (61%).<sup>7</sup>

| <b>How often does the seminary's formation team meet to evaluate the overall efficacy of the formation program?</b><br><i>Percentage responding</i> |                |                                          |                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Rectors</b> | <b>Formators and Spiritual Directors</b> | <b>Mental Health Professionals</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                     | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                                 | <b>%</b>                           |
| Never or rarely                                                                                                                                     | 0              | 9                                        | 31                                 |
| Every few years                                                                                                                                     | 27             | 11                                       | 8                                  |
| Once a year                                                                                                                                         | 35             | 26                                       | 15                                 |
| More than once a year                                                                                                                               | 38             | 54                                       | 46                                 |

- More than nine in ten rectors (100%) and formators/spiritual directors (91%) say their formation team meets at least every few years to evaluate the overall efficacy of their formation program, followed by the mental health professionals (69%).<sup>8</sup>
- Three-tenths of mental health professionals (31%) report that their seminary's formation team never or rarely meets to evaluate the overall efficacy of their formation program, compared to 9% of formators and spiritual directors and none of the rectors.

<sup>6</sup> Calculated by adding the percentages for "once a year" and "more than once a year."

<sup>7</sup> Those mental health professionals who are not a part of that team have been grouped into the non-response category, which is much higher for the mental health professionals (79%) than for rectors (4%) and formators and spiritual directors (9%).

<sup>8</sup> Calculated by adding the percentages for "every few years," "once a year" and "more than once a year."

## Meetings to Discuss and Evaluate How Well the Formation Team Functions

As can be seen in the table below, rectors (81%) and formators and spiritual directors (76%) are most likely to say that their seminary's formation team meets at least once a year<sup>9</sup> to discuss and evaluate its own functioning as a team, followed by the mental health professionals (50%).<sup>10</sup>

| <b>How often does the seminary's formation team meet to discuss and evaluate their own functioning as a team?</b> |                |                                          |                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding</i>                                                                                      |                |                                          |                                    |
|                                                                                                                   | <b>Rectors</b> | <b>Formators and Spiritual Directors</b> | <b>Mental Health Professionals</b> |
|                                                                                                                   | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                                 | <b>%</b>                           |
| Never or rarely                                                                                                   | 11             | 17                                       | 50                                 |
| Every few years                                                                                                   | 8              | 7                                        | 0                                  |
| Once a year                                                                                                       | 31             | 21                                       | 14                                 |
| More than once a year                                                                                             | 50             | 55                                       | 36                                 |

- More than four in five rectors (89%) and formators/spiritual directors (83%) say their formation team meets at least every few years to discuss and evaluate their own functioning as a team, followed by the mental health professionals (50%).<sup>11</sup>
- Half of mental health professionals (50%) report that their seminary's formation team never or rarely meets to discuss and evaluate its own functioning as a team, compared to 17% of formators and spiritual directors and 11% of rectors.

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<sup>9</sup> Calculated by adding the percentages for "once a year" and "more than once a year."

<sup>10</sup> Those who say they do not know/are not sure have been grouped into the non-response category, which is much higher for the mental health professionals (79%) than for rectors (4%) and formators and spiritual directors (9%).

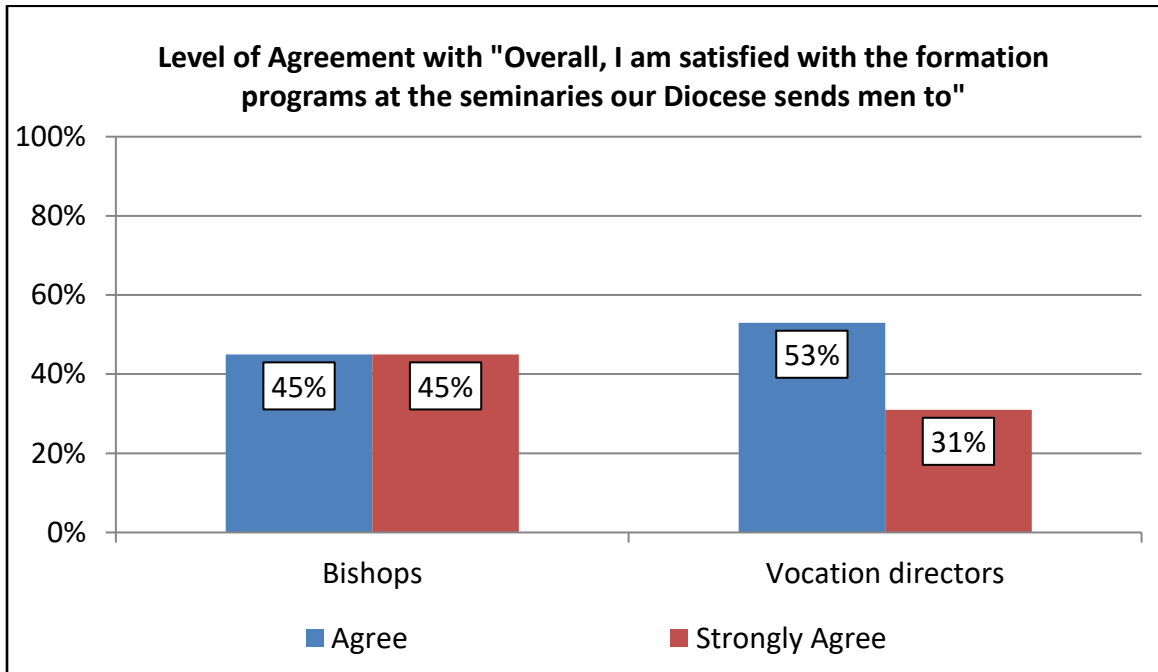
<sup>11</sup> Calculated by adding the percentages for "every few years," "once a year" and "more than once a year."

## Effectiveness of their Seminary in Areas of Formation

Respondents to all five surveys evaluated the effectiveness of the formation efforts at the seminaries they have relationships with. First, the findings from the bishops and vocation directors are presented, followed by the findings from the rectors, the formators and spiritual directors, and the mental health professionals.

### Bishops and Vocation Directors

Nine in ten bishops (90%) and more than eight in ten vocation directors (84%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that overall, they are satisfied with the formation programs at the seminaries where they send their men to.<sup>12</sup> Examining just those agreeing strongly,” bishops (45%) are more likely than vocation directors (31%) to “strongly agree” that they are satisfied overall.



<sup>12</sup> The non-response rate for bishops is 0% and for vocation directors is 2%.

*“Confident” and “Very Confident” Combined*

When asked how confident they are that their seminary is adequately forming candidates in 18 different areas, with two exceptions each, at least two in three bishops and vocation directors report having confidence (“confident” and “very confident” combined) in the seminary they send their men to in each of the areas shown in the table below.<sup>13</sup>

| <p><b>How confident are you that the formation programs at the seminary you use most often is adequately forming your men in the following areas?</b><br/> <i>They were asked to skip questions about areas of formation they are not aware of</i><br/> <i>Percentage responding “Confident” and “Very Confident” combined</i></p> |                |                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                  |
| Openness to growing spiritually                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 96             | 87                        |
| Ability to get along with classmates                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 96             | 87                        |
| Regular engagement in self-reflection                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 92             | 87                        |
| Willingness to be guided by authority figures                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 90             | 77                        |
| Cultivating intellectual curiosity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 89             | 87                        |
| Growth in maturity in general                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 89             | 83                        |
| Ability to form healthy relationships with others                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 88             | 87                        |
| Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 88             | 78                        |
| Sexual maturity growth in general                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 85             | 72                        |
| Healthy management of one’s unhealthy or addictive behaviors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 80             | 61                        |
| Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 79             | 80                        |
| Ability to relate to and get along with women                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 79             | 78                        |
| Growth in understanding one’s sexual orientation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 77             | 62                        |
| Flexibility, ability to adapt to changes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 74             | 79                        |
| Dealing with one’s emotional vulnerabilities, including being a victim of abuse in the past                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 74             | 74                        |
| Healthy management of one’s neuroses or minor pathologies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 69             | 67                        |
| Dealing with learning disabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 61             | 66                        |
| Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 56             | 74                        |

<sup>13</sup> For this set of questions, the non-response rates for bishops ranges from 7% to 31% and for vocation directors ranges from 9% to 28%. For both survey groups, the question with the highest non-response rate is the area in the final row: management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement.



## Bishops

Bishops are most likely to express confidence in these areas of formation, seen as an area they have confidence in by at least nine in ten:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 96%
- Ability to get along with classmates – 96%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 92%
- Willingness to be guided by authority figures – 90%

On the other end of the scale, less than seven in ten express confidence in these areas of formation:

- Healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 69%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 61%
- Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 56%

## Vocation Directors

Vocation directors are most likely to express confidence in these areas of formation, three of which were also among the most highly rated by the bishops responding:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 87%
- Ability to get along with classmates – 87%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 87%
- Cultivating intellectual curiosity – 87%
- Ability to form healthy relationships with others – 87%

On the other end of the scale, less than seven in ten vocation directors express confidence in these areas of formation, three of which were listed among the lowest areas by bishops as well:

- Healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 67%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 66%
- Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation – 62%
- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 61%

### Comparison between Bishops and Vocation Directors

Bishops are 10 to 19 percentage points more likely than vocation directors to have confidence in the adequacy of their seminary's formation in these areas:

- Willingness to be guided by authority figures
- Sexual maturity growth in general
- Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation
- Health management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies
- Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety

Vocation directors, on the other hand, are 18 percentage points more likely than bishops to express confidence in the area of management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement.

*“Very Confident” Only*

More than half of responding bishops (59%) and vocation directors (55%) say they are “very confident” that their seminary is adequately forming men in the area of having an openness to growing spiritually.

**How confident are you that the formation programs at the seminary you use most often is adequately forming your men in the following areas?**

*They were asked to skip questions about areas of formation they are not aware of  
Percentage responding “Very Confident”*

|                                                                                             | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation Directors</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
|                                                                                             | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                  |
| Openness to growing spiritually                                                             | 59             | 55                        |
| Regular engagement in self-reflection                                                       | 49             | 36                        |
| Ability to get along with classmates                                                        | 48             | 30                        |
| Growth in maturity in general                                                               | 45             | 33                        |
| Ability to form healthy relationships with others                                           | 45             | 30                        |
| Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety                    | 38             | 39                        |
| Willingness to be guided by authority figures                                               | 38             | 35                        |
| Cultivating intellectual curiosity                                                          | 37             | 39                        |
| Ability to relate to and get along with women                                               | 34             | 21                        |
| Growth in understanding one’s sexual orientation                                            | 31             | 19                        |
| Healthy management of one’s unhealthy or addictive behaviors                                | 30             | 27                        |
| Sexual maturity growth in general                                                           | 30             | 19                        |
| Dealing with one’s emotional vulnerabilities, including being a victim of abuse in the past | 28             | 33                        |
| Flexibility, ability to adapt to changes                                                    | 26             | 26                        |
| Healthy management of one’s neuroses or minor pathologies                                   | 21             | 19                        |
| Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations                                | 17             | 17                        |
| Dealing with learning disabilities                                                          | 17             | 16                        |
| Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement      | 15             | 29                        |

Bishops

Bishops are most likely to say they are “very confident” in these areas of formation, with more than two in five saying they have great confidence in these areas:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 59%

- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 49%
- Ability to get along with classmates – 48%
- Growth in maturity in general – 45%
- Ability to form healthy relationships with others – 45%

On the other end of the scale, less than a quarter of bishops are “very confident” about the formation in these four areas:

- Healthy management of one’s neuroses or minor pathologies – 21%
- Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations – 17%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 17%
- Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 15%

### Vocation Directors

Vocation directors are most likely to say they are “very confident” in these areas of formation, two of which were also among the most highly rated by the bishops responding:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 55%
- Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety – 39%
- Cultivating intellectual curiosity – 39%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 36%
- Willingness to be guided by authority figures – 35%

On the other end of the scale, less than one in five vocation directors is “very confident” in these areas of formation, two of which were listed among the lowest areas by bishops as well:

- Growth in understanding one’s sexual orientation – 19%
- Sexual maturity growth in general – 19%
- Healthy management of one’s neuroses or minor pathologies – 19%
- Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations – 17%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 16%

### Comparison between Bishops and Vocation Directors

Bishops are 11 to 18 percentage points more likely than vocation directors to be “very confident” in their seminary’s formation in the areas of:

- Ability to get along with classmates
- Ability to form healthy relationships with others
- Regular engagement in self-reflection

- Ability to relate to and get along with women
- Growth in maturity in general
- Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation
- Sexual maturity growth in general

Vocation directors, on the other hand, are 14 percentage points more likely than bishops to be “very confident” in the area of management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement.

## Rectors, Formators/Spiritual Directors, and Mental Health Professionals

### *“Confident” and “Very Confident” Combined*

When asked how confident they are that their seminary is adequately forming candidates in 18 different areas, more than half of rectors and formators/spiritual directors report having confidence (“confident” and “very confident” combined) in the adequacy of formation at their seminary in each of the areas shown in the table below.<sup>14</sup> Less than half of mental health professionals (27% to 49%), on the other hand, have confidence in each of these areas.

**How confident are you that the formation programs at the seminary you use most often is adequately forming your men in the following areas?**

*They were asked to skip questions about areas of formation they are not aware of  
Percentage responding “Confident” and “Very Confident” combined*

|                                                                                                | <b>Rectors</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                                         | <b>%</b>                                   |
| Openness to growing spiritually                                                                | 100            | 92                                               | 93                                         |
| Ability to get along with classmates                                                           | 100            | 90                                               | 63                                         |
| Regular engagement in self-reflection                                                          | 100            | 87                                               | 66                                         |
| Growth in maturity in general                                                                  | 92             | 93                                               | 75                                         |
| Ability to form healthy relationships with others                                              | 92             | 89                                               | 61                                         |
| Flexibility, ability to adapt to changes                                                       | 88             | 86                                               | 56                                         |
| Willingness to be guided by authority figures                                                  | 88             | 84                                               | 81                                         |
| Dealing with one’s emotional vulnerabilities,<br>including being a victim of abuse in the past | 88             | 76                                               | 49                                         |
| Cultivating intellectual curiosity                                                             | 84             | 82                                               | 78                                         |
| Sexual maturity growth in general                                                              | 84             | 81                                               | 35                                         |
| Ability to relate to and get along with women                                                  | 84             | 76                                               | 40                                         |
| Management of past unethical behaviors, such as<br>dishonesty and financial mismanagement      | 79             | 61                                               | 27                                         |
| Seeking treatment for mental health issues such<br>as depression or anxiety                    | 76             | 80                                               | 82                                         |
| Growth in understanding one’s sexual orientation                                               | 72             | 76                                               | 37                                         |
| Healthy management of one’s neuroses or minor<br>pathologies                                   | 64             | 71                                               | 46                                         |
| Healthy management of one’s unhealthy or<br>addictive behaviors                                | 60             | 73                                               | 36                                         |
| Healthy living with medical concerns or physical<br>limitations                                | 56             | 72                                               | 52                                         |
| Dealing with learning disabilities                                                             | 56             | 64                                               | 42                                         |

<sup>14</sup> Non-response rates range from 7% to 11% for rectors, 12% to 15% for formators/spiritual directors, and 51% to 56% for mental health professionals.

## Rectors

Rectors are most likely to express confidence in these areas of formation, seen as an area they have confidence in by more than nine in ten:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 100%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 100%
- Ability to get along with classmates – 100%
- Ability to form healthy relationships with others – 92%
- Growth in maturity in general -- 92%

On the other end of the scale, less than two in three rectors express confidence in these areas of formation:

- Healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 64%
- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 60%
- Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations – 56%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 56%

## Formators and Spiritual Directors

Formators and spiritual directors are most likely to express confidence in these areas of formation, five of which were among the most highly rated by the rectors as well:

- Growth in maturity in general – 93%
- Openness to growing spiritually – 92%
- Ability to get along with classmates – 90%
- Ability to form healthy relationships with others – 89%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 87%
- Flexibility, ability to adapt to changes – 86%
- Willingness to be guided by authority figures – 84%

On the other end of the scale, two in three or less formators and spiritual directors express confidence in these areas of formation, all three of which were listed among the lowest areas by rectors as well:

- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 73%
- Healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 71%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 64%

## Mental Health Professionals

Mental health professionals are most likely to express confidence in these areas of formation, three of which were also among the most highly rated by the rectors and/or formators and spiritual directors responding:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 93%
- Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety – 82%
- Willingness to be guided by authority figures – 81%
- Cultivating intellectual curiosity – 78%
- Growth in maturity in general – 75%

On the other end of the scale, less than half of mental health professionals express confidence in these areas of formation, three of which were listed among the lowest areas by the rectors and/or formators and spiritual directors as well:

- Healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 46%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 42%
- Ability to relate to and get along with women – 40%
- Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation – 37%
- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 36%
- Sexual maturity growth in general – 35%
- Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 27%

## Comparison between Rectors, Formators/Spiritual Directors, and Mental Health Professionals

Rectors are particularly likely to be confident in the adequacy of their seminaries in these areas:

- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 100%
- Ability to get along with classmates – 100%

Formators and spiritual directors are most likely to be confident in the adequacy of formation in these areas:

- Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations – 72%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 64%



Mental health professionals are relatively *less* likely to be confident in the adequacy of formation in these areas:

- Growth in maturity in general – 75%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 66%
- Ability to get along with classmates – 63%
- Ability to form healthy relationships with others – 61%
- Flexibility, ability to adapt to changes – 56%
- Dealing with one's emotional vulnerabilities, including being a victim of abuse in the past – 49%
- Healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 46%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 42%
- Ability to relate to and get along with women – 40%
- Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation – 37%
- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 36%
- Sexual maturity growth in general – 35%
- Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 27%

*“Very Confident” Only*

Similar to the findings from bishops and vocation directors presented above, about half to three-fifths of rectors (60%), formators/spiritual directors (55%), and mental health professionals (48%) say they are “very confident” that their seminary is adequately forming men in the area of having an openness to growing spiritually.

**How confident are you that the formation programs at the seminary you use most often is adequately forming your men in the following areas?**

*They were asked to skip questions about areas of formation they are not aware of*

*Percentage responding “Very Confident”*

|                                                                                                | <b>Rectors</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                                         | <b>%</b>                                   |
| Openness to growing spiritually                                                                | 60             | 62                                               | 48                                         |
| Regular engagement in self-reflection                                                          | 44             | 55                                               | 22                                         |
| Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as<br>depression or anxiety                    | 36             | 43                                               | 32                                         |
| Ability to form healthy relationships with others                                              | 32             | 43                                               | 36                                         |
| Growth in maturity in general                                                                  | 28             | 45                                               | 29                                         |
| Dealing with learning disabilities                                                             | 28             | 22                                               | 4                                          |
| Cultivating intellectual curiosity                                                             | 24             | 38                                               | 33                                         |
| Ability to get along with classmates                                                           | 24             | 46                                               | 26                                         |
| Flexibility, ability to adapt to changes                                                       | 24             | 33                                               | 19                                         |
| Dealing with one’s emotional vulnerabilities,<br>including being a victim of abuse in the past | 21             | 29                                               | 19                                         |
| Management of past unethical behaviors, such as<br>dishonesty and financial mismanagement      | 17             | 19                                               | 4                                          |
| Willingness to be guided by authority figures                                                  | 16             | 37                                               | 22                                         |
| Healthy management of one’s unhealthy or<br>addictive behaviors                                | 16             | 24                                               | 4                                          |
| Healthy management of one’s neuroses or minor<br>pathologies                                   | 16             | 23                                               | 11                                         |
| Healthy living with medical concerns or physical<br>limitations                                | 16             | 26                                               | 15                                         |
| Ability to relate to and get along with women                                                  | 12             | 34                                               | 11                                         |
| Sexual maturity growth in general                                                              | 8              | 27                                               | 14                                         |
| Growth in understanding one’s sexual orientation                                               | 8              | 22                                               | 11                                         |

## Rectors

Rectors are most likely to express great confidence in these areas of formation, seen as an area they are “very confident” is adequate by more than a third:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 60%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 44%
- Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety – 36%

On the other end of the scale, one in six rectors or less say they are “very confident” about the adequacy of formation in these areas:

- Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 17%
- Willingness to be guided by authority figures – 16%
- Healthy management of one’s unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 16%
- Healthy management of one’s neuroses or minor pathologies – 16%
- Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations – 16%
- Ability to relate to and get along with women – 12%
- Sexual maturity growth in general – 8%
- Growth in understanding one’s sexual orientation – 8%

## Formators and Spiritual Directors

Formators and spiritual directors are most likely to say they are “very confident” that formation is adequate in these areas, three of which were among the most highly rated by the rectors as well:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 62%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 55%
- Ability to get along with classmates – 46%
- Growth in maturity in general – 45%
- Seeking treatment for mental health issues such as depression or anxiety – 43%
- Ability to form healthy relationships with others – 43%

On the other end of the scale, two in three or less formators and spiritual directors say they are “very confident” in the adequacy of formation in these areas, six of which were listed among the lowest areas by rectors as well:

- Dealing with one’s emotional vulnerabilities, including being a victim of abuse in the past – 29%
- Sexual maturity growth in general – 27%

- Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations – 26%
- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 24%
- Healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 23%
- Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation – 22%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 22%
- Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 19%

### Mental Health Professionals

Mental health professionals are most likely to report that they are “very confident” of the adequacy of formation in these areas, two of which were also among the most highly rated by the rectors and/or formators and spiritual directors responding:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 48%
- Ability to form healthy relationships with others – 36%
- Cultivating intellectual curiosity – 33%

On the other end of the scale, less than one in five mental health professionals says they are “very confident” about the adequacy of formation in these areas, eight of which were listed among the lowest areas by the rectors and/or formators and spiritual directors as well:

- Flexibility, ability to adapt to changes – 19%
- Dealing with one's emotional vulnerabilities, including being a victim of abuse in the past – 19%
- Healthy living with medical concerns or physical limitations – 15%
- Sexual maturity growth in general – 14%
- Healthy management of one's neuroses or minor pathologies – 11%
- Ability to relate to and get along with women – 11%
- Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation – 11%
- Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 4%
- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 4%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 4%

### Comparison between Rectors, Formators/Spiritual Directors, and Mental Health Professionals

Formators and spiritual directors are most likely to be “very confident” in the adequacy of formation in these areas:

- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 55%
- Willingness to be guided by authority figures – 37%
- Sexual maturity growth in general – 34%

- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 24%
- Growth in understanding one's sexual orientation – 22%
- Ability to relate to and get along with women – 21%

Compared to the responses from rectors and formators/spiritual directors, mental health professionals are relatively *less* likely to be “very confident” in the adequacy of formation in these areas:

- Openness to growing spiritually – 48%
- Regular engagement in self-reflection – 22%
- Dealing with learning disabilities – 4%
- Management of past unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty and financial mismanagement – 4%
- Healthy management of one's unhealthy or addictive behaviors – 4%

## Personalized Formation Programs for Seminarians

Rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals were asked about how prevalent personalized formation benchmarks are at their seminary for each seminarian and how well utilized they are. In addition, the rectors and formators/spiritual directors are asked who at their seminary develops those personalized programs and benchmarks.

### Design and Utilization of Personalized Formation Programs and Benchmarks

#### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

Rectors and formators are more likely to agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) with the three statements in the table below than mental health professionals.<sup>15</sup>

| <b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b>                                                                                                        |                |                                                  |                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined</i>                                                                                                |                |                                                  |                                            |
|                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Rectors</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                                         | <b>%</b>                                   |
| At our seminary, formators utilize a series of <i>effective, measurable</i> formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation over all stages of formation | 78             | 76                                               | 46                                         |
| Our formators annually evaluate each seminarian according to a series of <i>personalized</i> formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation             | 74             | 81                                               | 59                                         |
| At our seminary, the initial psychological evaluation is used to design a <i>personalized</i> formation program for each seminarian                               | 48             | 51                                               | 36                                         |

- Nearly four in five rectors (78%) and formators/spiritual directors (76%) agree that formators utilize a series of *effective, measurable* formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation over all stages of formation at their seminary. In comparison, just under half of mental health professionals (46%) agree that such benchmarks are utilized in this way.
- Approximately four in five formators/spiritual directors (81%) and rectors (76%) agree their formators annually evaluate each seminarian according to a series of *personalized* formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation, compared to three in five mental health professionals (59%).

<sup>15</sup> Non-response rates for these questions are 0% for rectors, range from 3% to 5% for formators/spiritual directors, and 39% to 44% for mental health professionals.

- About half of formators/spiritual directors (51%) and rectors (48%) agree that the initial psychological evaluation is used to design a *personalized* formation program for each seminarian at their seminary, compared to just over a third of mental health professionals (36%).

*“Strongly Agree” Only*

Rectors and formators are more likely to “strongly agree” with the first two statements in the table below than mental health professionals.

| <p><b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b><br/> <i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i></p>                                              |                     |                                                       |                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Rectors</b><br>% | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b><br>% | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b><br>% |
| At our seminary, formators utilize a series of <i>effective, measurable</i> formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation over all stages of formation | 37                  | 49                                                    | 18                                              |
| Our formators annually evaluate each seminarian according to a series of <i>personalized</i> formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation             | 37                  | 47                                                    | 18                                              |
| At our seminary, the initial psychological evaluation is used to design a <i>personalized</i> formation program for each seminarian                               | 11                  | 20                                                    | 11                                              |

- Nearly half of formators/spiritual directors (47% to 49%) and nearly two in five rectors (37%) “strongly agree” that formators utilize a series of *effective, measurable* formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation over all stages of formation at their seminary and that their formators annually evaluate each seminarian according to a series of *personalized* formation benchmarks in all four dimensions of formation. In comparison, just under one-fifth of mental health professionals (18%) “strongly agrees” with each of these statements.
- Two-fifths of formators/spiritual directors (20%) “strongly agree” that the initial psychological evaluation is used to design a *personalized* formation program for each seminarian at their seminary, compared to one in ten rectors (11%) and mental health professionals (11%).

## **Interview Findings from Mental Health Professionals**

During their interviews, some mental health professionals who work at seminaries mentioned that they are directly involved in helping seminaries set for personalized goals for seminarians, with others saying they do so only indirectly. A few examples are below.

Interviewer: And pretty much when the initial psych evals come in, they would go to you and they would go to the rector, and you would help identify the issues that you especially want to pay attention to. Is that how it would work?

Mental Health Professional 2: Yeah, that's correct.

[...]

Interviewer: Okay, that makes sense. And are you involved in developing formation goals then, directly or indirectly?

Mental Health Professional 4: Indirectly.

Interviewer: Indirectly. So, you would suggest it to the rector or to the formation team and they might take it or –?

Mental Health Professional 4: No. I suggest with the guy, and then he can bring it to his formator if he wants. And then I will be consulted for formation goals or areas of concern with the seminarian. But my priority is the individual relationship with the seminarian, so sometimes I can talk about it, sometimes I can't, to maintain the confidentiality.



## Seminary Personnel Developing Personalized Formation Programs for Each Seminarian

Rectors and formators/spiritual directors whose seminarians have personalized formation programs were asked to identify what personnel on their staff develops the programs.<sup>16</sup> As can be seen below, formation advisors (80% to 95%) and rectors (54% to 60%) are particularly likely to be identified by both groups.

| <b>If your seminary has a personalized formation program for each seminarian, who develops it?</b> |                |                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding</i>                                                                       |                |                                          |
|                                                                                                    | <b>Rectors</b> | <b>Formators and Spiritual Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                    | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                                 |
| Formation advisor                                                                                  | 80             | 95                                       |
| Rector                                                                                             | 60             | 54                                       |
| Psychologist                                                                                       | 30             | 36                                       |
| Spiritual director                                                                                 | 10             | 25                                       |
| Others                                                                                             | 30             | 21                                       |

At least two of those listing “other” seminary personnel who help develop the personalized formation programs, identify the seminarian himself (mentioned by five respondents), their seminary’s academic dean (mentioned by four respondents), formation faculty (mentioned by two respondents), and formation team (mentioned by two respondents). One each mentions their seminary’s admissions board, assistant to the psychologist, director of human formation, director of pastoral formation, director of seminary admissions, human formator, pastoral formation director and dean of seminaries, the team of advisors, and the vice-rector.

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<sup>16</sup> Those who say their seminaries do not have personalized formation programs have been grouped into the non-response category, which is 26% for rectors and 34% for formators/spiritual directors.

## Creation of a Seminary Environment Conducive to Effective Formation

Three questions on the survey help to gauge how conducive the seminary's environment is to effective formation. They focus on how well the seminary encourages seminarians to be vulnerable and transparent as well as how well the seminary follows up on having seminarians receive counseling for issues seen as problematic.

### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

Between eight-tenths and nine-tenths of rectors and formators/spiritual directors agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that, in their seminaries, seminarians are explicitly encouraged to be vulnerable and transparent with those involved in their formation (85% to 92%) and that the concept of vulnerability and/or transparency is a major topic of formation – e.g., the topic of at least one conference (79% to 81%). Mental health professionals are somewhat *less* likely to agree with either of these statements (63% to 73%).<sup>17</sup>

| <b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b>                                                                                   |                |                                                  |                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined</i></b>                                                                    |                |                                                  |                                            |
|                                                                                                                                              | <b>Rectors</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b> |
|                                                                                                                                              | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                                         | <b>%</b>                                   |
| In our seminary, seminarians are explicitly encouraged to be vulnerable and transparent with those involved in their formation               | 85             | 92                                               | 73                                         |
| In our seminary, the concept of vulnerability and/or transparency is a major topic of formation (e.g., the topic of at least one conference) | 81             | 79                                               | 63                                         |
| In our seminary, there have been men who were initially referred for counseling, but who ultimately ended up receiving little or none at all | 27             | 17                                               | 57                                         |

Nearly three in five mental health professionals agree that there have been men at their seminary who were initially referred for counseling, but who ultimately ended up receiving little or none at all (57%). Rectors (27%) and formators/spiritual directors (17%) are *less* likely to agree with this statement.

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<sup>17</sup> Non-response rates for rectors are 4% for each question, for formators/spiritual directors range from 6% to 7%, and for mental health professionals are 49% for each question.

*“Strongly Agree” Only*

Just over three in five formators/spiritual directors (63%) and rectors (62%) “strongly agree” that, in their seminary, seminarians are explicitly encouraged to be vulnerable and transparent with those involved in their formation. About half as many mental health professionals (30%) “strongly agree” that seminarians are encouraged in this area.

| <b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b>                                                                                   |                      |                                                        |                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i></b>                                                                                         |                      |                                                        |                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                              | <b>Rectors<br/>%</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals<br/>%</b> |
| In our seminary, seminarians are explicitly encouraged to be vulnerable and transparent with those involved in their formation               | 62                   | 63                                                     | 30                                               |
| In our seminary, the concept of vulnerability and/or transparency is a major topic of formation (e.g., the topic of at least one conference) | 42                   | 48                                                     | 33                                               |
| In our seminary, there have been men who were initially referred for counseling, but who ultimately ended up receiving little or none at all | 0                    | 3                                                      | 7                                                |

- More than two in five formators/spiritual directors (48%) and rectors (42%) “strongly agree” that the concept of vulnerability and/or transparency is a major topic of formation in their seminary – e.g., the topic of at least one conference. A third of mental health professionals “strongly agree” that these are major topics of formation.
- Roughly one in 20 rectors (0%), formators/spiritual directors (3%), and mental health professionals (7%) “strongly agree” that, in their seminary, there have been men who were initially referred for counseling, but who ultimately ended up receiving little or none at all.

## **Interview Findings from the Formators/Spiritual Directors**

One formator summed up his opinion about the importance of seminarians being vulnerable and open to formation below, although he called it the need for seminarians to have docility.

Formator 7: Okay. So, as you can hear from my accent, I'm not from here, I'm from [African country]. So, I had my formation, my seminary formation for college was in [African country], and then I came here to [City] for theology back in the '90s. And then I went back home to be ordained in [African country], and I'm still a priest of my diocese in [African country]. So, I come at this from a little bit a different perspective. I come from like an African seminary experience and so on, but I've also had the experience of being a seminarian here. So, I try to kind of merge the two. And one of my greatest concerns is just — well, I guess maybe two. One would be a lack of docility and then a lack of communion in the seminarian. That's something I think we need to work on. And what I mean by docility is not in the sense of submissiveness or whatever, but just the idea that I can be taught, that I don't know enough, that there's a lot more out there that I don't know. And a seminarian who lacks that will not benefit from seminary formation, will not benefit even in the parish. In the parish, the parishioners have a lot to teach us as priests. And if I am not docile, I'm not teachable, I don't learn anything. And so that's really my biggest concern. Now, sometimes the docility is — well, I try not to attribute to malice what can be explained by other factors. Sometimes there are some psychological hindrances to that whereby, like I know guys who have been homeschooled, for example, they will say they've been trained to be independent, independent learners and so on. So, they just find it hard to have to listen to somebody else, someone tell them what to do, when to do it, and so on. And then you've got — there are guys who just struggle with other conditions, the ADHD, the ADDs, and all those. And that can sometimes hinder, or even those who are on the spectrum lite, not really recognizable, but there's a light element of being on the spectrum. They just find it difficult to have to listen to somebody else to tell them what to do. And so that's my biggest concern.

## Section II: The Role of Psychological Services in the Formation Process

This section of the report describes the roles psychological services should play in the formation process at dioceses and seminaries and how effectively psychological services are employed at seminaries.

### The Role of Mental Health Professionals in Dioceses

Included in three of the five surveys were questions about how easy diocesan personnel can contact the mental health professionals who conduct psychological evaluations of their seminarians, as well as how often they do contact them.

#### Level of Ease for the Diocese to Contact a Mental Health Professional to Confer about a Psychological Evaluation

Three-quarters of bishops (74%) and more than four-fifths of vocation directors (84%) say they can easily contact the psychologist/psychiatrist who conducted psychological evaluations for their men to confer about it after its delivery. No vocation directors say they cannot easily contact the psychologist/psychiatrist, compared to one in 20 bishops saying the same thing.<sup>18</sup>

| <b>How easily can you [for bishops: or your delegate] contact the psychologist/psychiatrist who conducted a psychological evaluation to confer about it after its delivery?</b> |                |                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding</i>                                                                                                                                                    |                |                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                  |
| Not easily                                                                                                                                                                      | 5              | 0                         |
| With some effort                                                                                                                                                                | 21             | 16                        |
| Easily                                                                                                                                                                          | 74             | 84                        |

<sup>18</sup> One of the response options offered for this question is “I am not sure.” For the purposes of this analysis, those selecting that option have been grouped with the non-respondents. Using that formulation, the non-response rate is 11% for bishops and 8% for vocation directors.

## Frequencies Dioceses Have Conferred with a Mental Health Professional about a Psychological Evaluation

More than three in five vocation directors (63%) say they have contacted the psychologist/psychiatrist who conducted a psychological evaluation for their diocese to confer about it after its delivery “often” or “very frequently,” compared to 36% of bishops. Asked about in the reverse way, 30% of mental health professionals say they have been contacted by a diocese to confer about the results of a psychological evaluation they completed.<sup>19</sup>

| <b>Frequency Diocesan Personnel Have Contacted the Mental Health Professionals<br/>Who Conducted Psychological Evaluations</b><br><i>Percentage responding</i>                         |                                  |                           |                    |                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Never or<br/>Rarely<br/>%</b> | <b>Infrequently<br/>%</b> | <b>Often<br/>%</b> | <b>Very<br/>Frequently<br/>%</b> |
| <i>Vocation Directors:</i> How often have you contacted a psychologist/psychiatrist who conducted any psychological evaluation to confer about it after its delivery?                  | 17                               | 19                        | 40                 | 23                               |
| <i>Mental Health Professionals:</i> How often have you been contacted by a diocese to confer about the results of a psychological evaluation you completed on one of their candidates? | 27                               | 42                        | 15                 | 15                               |
| <i>Bishops:</i> How often have you contacted a psychologist/psychiatrist who conducted any psychological evaluation to confer about it after its delivery?                             | 25                               | 40                        | 25                 | 11                               |

A quarter of bishops (25%) and one-sixth of vocation directors (17%) say they have “rarely or never” conferred with one of the psychologists/psychiatrists who conducted a psychological evaluation for their diocese. Similarly, about a quarter of mental health professionals (27%) say they have “never or rarely” been contacted by a diocese to confer about one of their psychological evaluations.

<sup>19</sup> One of the response options offered for these questions is “I am not sure.” For the purposes of this analysis, those selecting that option have been grouped with the non-respondents. Using that formulation, the non-response rate is 9% for bishops, 11% for vocation directors, and 56% for mental health professionals (many of whom do *not* conduct such psychological evaluations, as was reported on p. 10).

## The Role Psychological Services Should Play in Seminary Formation

### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

More than eight in ten bishops (85%) and three-quarters of vocation directors (74%) agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that psychological services at a seminary should play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or for Orders throughout the formation process, not just the initial evaluation.<sup>20</sup>

| <b>How much do you agree with these statements?</b>                                                                                                                                                               |                |                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined</i>                                                                                                                                                |                |                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation</b>  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>%</b>       | <b>Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                | <b>%</b>         |
| Psychological services at a seminary should play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or for Orders throughout the formation process, not just the initial evaluation | 85             | 74               |

### *“Strongly Agree” Only*

Nearly two-fifths of bishops (38%) and vocation directors (37%) “strongly agree” that psychological services at a seminary should play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or for Orders throughout the formation process, not just the initial evaluation.

| <b>How much do you agree with these statements?</b>                                                                                                                                                               |                |                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i>                                                                                                                                                                     |                |                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation</b>  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>%</b>       | <b>Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                | <b>%</b>         |
| Psychological services at a seminary should play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or for Orders throughout the formation process, not just the initial evaluation | 38             | 37               |

<sup>20</sup> Non-response rates are 0% for bishops and 2% for vocation directors.

## **Interview Findings from the Formators/Spiritual Directors**

When asked about the topic during an interview, one formator spoke of what he sees as an ideal situation: a knowledgeable mental health worker being a part of the formation staff. That mental health professional also serves as someone who makes sure the formators find the support they need.

Formator 5: So, we probably have among the more robust kind of counseling departments out there. So, we have a full-time director of counseling services. And he's also given the title of assistant director of human formation. I'm the director of human formation, so he and I work together pretty carefully and I think fruitfully in summary formation. So, he oversees the other counselors. So, we have one person who is 25 hours a week, and then we have two others who are contracted for one day a week total, so about eight hours a week total. So, we have a team of four counselors who work together with the men. We started with just the director and then we've needed to add more along the way, particularly to help run groups in the house, because we do a fair amount of counseling groups, which in many ways I would say is more fruitful than one-on-one, even, sometimes. And so that's our kind of setup. And so, the director of counseling services, as the assistant director of human formation, works intimately with the priest-formators for ongoing skill development and formation, and then also helps us. One time a month, we all gather as priest-formators with him and he helps us kind of process the work of formation and the impact on us, and to help with that as we accompany one another in that.

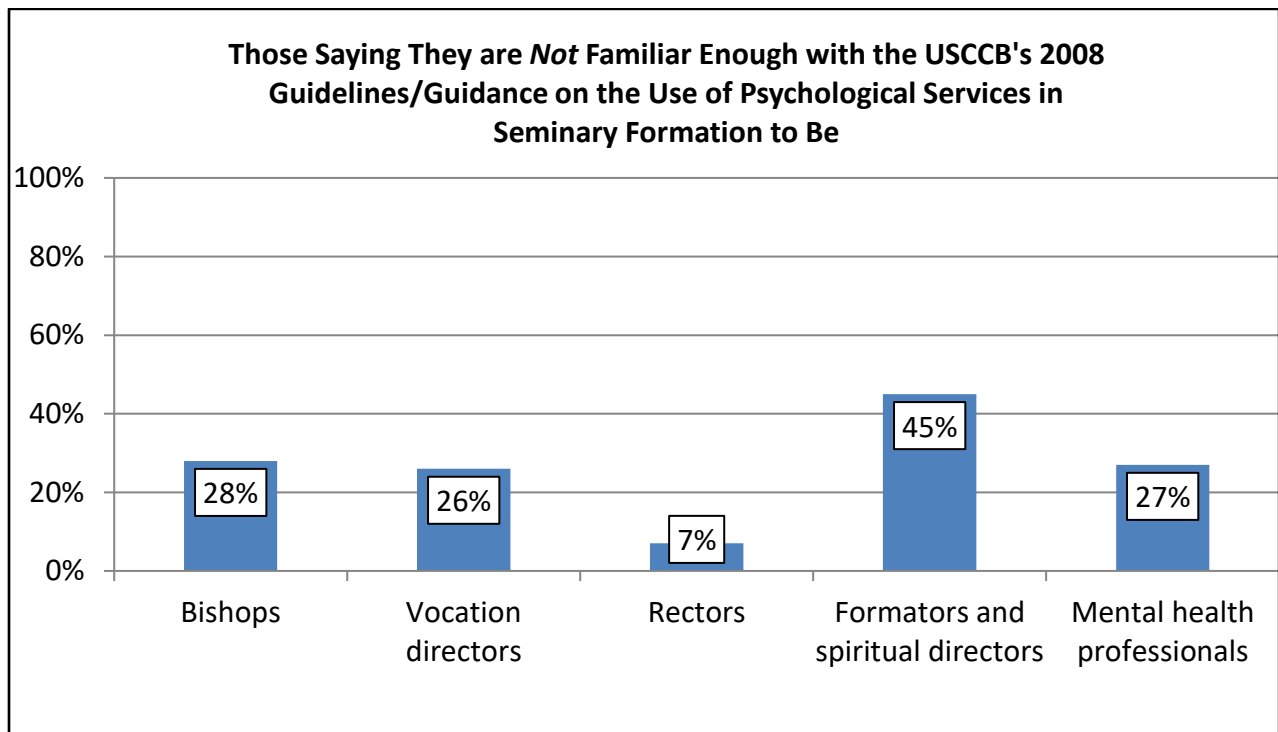
Interviewer: And so, in an ideal world, do you think that would be a great model for other seminaries to have as well, if they had the right guy?

Formator 5: So, we're only able to do it because we have the right people who are faithful Catholics, are on board with the mission and have a heart for formation. But I certainly think every place should have a director of counseling services, so have an in-house psychologist. And then more added as needed. It depends on the size of the seminary and what the needs are. But we found it to be invaluable and I couldn't imagine not having the resources that we do.



## Helpfulness of the USCCB Guidelines about Psychological Services

All five surveys asked an identical question: *For screening candidates before they enter seminaries, how helpful do you find the USCCB's 2008 guidelines/guidance on the use of psychological services in seminary formation to be?* One of the options offered on all five surveys is: "I am not familiar enough with the guidelines to respond." The figure below shows the percentage of respondents to all five surveys who chose that option. About one in 20 rectors (7%) are not familiar enough with the USCCB's guidelines/guidance, compared to about a quarter of bishops (28%), mental health professionals (27%), and vocation directors (26%). The formators and spiritual directors (45%) are most likely to not be familiar enough with the guidelines/guidance.



The table below shows how helpful respondents to all five surveys say the guidelines/guidance is to them.<sup>21</sup> Combining those responding “helpful” and “very helpful” to examine the positive half of the responses, formators/spiritual directors (79%) and bishops (78%) are most likely to find the guidelines/guidance helpful, followed by the vocation directors (67%), rectors (64%), and mental health professionals (59%).

| <b>For screening candidates before they enter seminaries, how helpful do you find the USCCB’s 2008 guidelines/guidance on the use of psychological services in seminary formation to be?</b><br><i>Percentage responding</i> |                               |                             |                |                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Not at All<br/>Helpful</b> | <b>Somewhat<br/>Helpful</b> | <b>Helpful</b> | <b>Very<br/>Helpful</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>%</b>                      | <b>%</b>                    | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                |
| Bishops                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0                             | 22                          | 36             | 42                      |
| Formators and spiritual directors                                                                                                                                                                                            | 0                             | 21                          | 48             | 31                      |
| Vocation directors                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 2                             | 31                          | 36             | 31                      |
| Rectors                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0                             | 36                          | 44             | 20                      |
| Mental health professionals                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 2                             | 40                          | 40             | 19                      |

<sup>21</sup> This table omits those who say they are not familiar enough with the guidelines/guidance, grouping them with those not providing a response. The non-response rates, including those not familiar enough, are 28% for bishops, 26% for vocation directors, 7% for rectors, 45% for formators/spiritual directors, and 27% for mental health professionals.

## The Role of Psychological Services in Seminaries

Five questions on the surveys of rectors, formators, and mental health professionals ask about what role mental health professionals play in their seminary. In addition, rectors and formators/spiritual directors were asked how often they confer with those creating the psychological evaluations they receive and mental health professionals were asked whether they feel their input is valued by the formation teams at their seminaries.

### The Roles Mental Health Professionals Play in Seminaries

#### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

More than seven-tenths of formators/spiritual directors (84%), rectors (78%), and mental health professionals (72%) agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that, in their seminaries, throughout the formation process (not just the initial evaluation), psychological services play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or for Orders.<sup>22 23</sup>

#### ***How much do you agree with these statements?*** *Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Rectors<br/>%</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> | <b>Mental Health<br/>Professionals<br/>%</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| In our seminary, throughout the formation process (not just the initial evaluation), psychological services play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or for Orders | 78                   | 84                                                     | 72                                           |
| My input is valued by the formation team at our seminary                                                                                                                                                        | —                    | —                                                      | 72                                           |
| A substantial number of our seminarians meet regularly with a psychologist/mental health professional                                                                                                           | 66                   | 68                                                     | 71                                           |
| Our seminary has a full-time psychologist/mental health professional                                                                                                                                            | 44                   | 55                                                     | 58                                           |

<sup>22</sup> Non-response rates range from 0% to 7% for rectors, 2% to 3% for formators/spiritual directors, and 39% to 44% for mental health professionals.

<sup>23</sup> When a question was not asked on a survey, a “—” is inserted in the table.

***How much do you agree with these statements? CONT'D***  
*Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined*

|                                                                                                                                  | <b>Rectors</b><br>% | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b><br>% | <b>Mental Health<br/>Professionals</b><br>% |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Psychological services staff contribute periodically at our formation team meetings about the progress of individual seminarians | 34                  | 57                                                    | —                                           |
| I contribute periodically at our formation team meetings about the progress of individual seminarians                            | —                   | —                                                     | 31                                          |

- More than seven in ten mental health professionals (72%) agree that their input is valued by the formation team at their seminary.
- Approximately two in three mental health professionals (71%), formators/spiritual directors (68%), and rectors (66%) agree that a substantial number of our seminarians meet regularly with a psychologist/mental health professional.
- More than half of mental health professionals (58%) and formators/spiritual directors (55%) agree that they have a full-time psychologist/mental health professional. Fewer rectors (44%) agree that they have someone in that role full time.
- Formators/spiritual directors (57%) are most likely to agree that psychological services staff contribute periodically at our formation team meetings about the progress of individual seminarians. About a third of rectors (34%) and mental health professionals (31%) agree.

*“Strongly Agree” Only*

A third to two-fifths of mental health professionals (40%), formators/spiritual directors (39%), and rectors (33%) “strongly agree” that a substantial number of our seminarians meet regularly with a psychologist/mental health professional.

| <p><b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b><br/> <i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i></p>                                                                                            |                     |                                                       |                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Rectors</b><br>% | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b><br>% | <b>Mental Health<br/>Professionals</b><br>% |
| A substantial number of our seminarians meet regularly with a psychologist/mental health professional                                                                                                           | 33                  | 39                                                    | 40                                          |
| In our seminary, throughout the formation process (not just the initial evaluation), psychological services play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or for Orders | 30                  | 41                                                    | 28                                          |
| My input is valued by the formation team at our seminary                                                                                                                                                        | —                   | —                                                     | 30                                          |
| Our seminary has a full-time psychologist/mental health professional                                                                                                                                            | 28                  | 35                                                    | 33                                          |
| Psychological services staff contribute periodically at our formation team meetings about the progress of individual seminarians                                                                                | 15                  | 31                                                    | —                                           |
| I contribute periodically at our formation team meetings about the progress of individual seminarians                                                                                                           | —                   | —                                                     | 11                                          |

- About three-tenths to four-tenths of formators/spiritual directors (41%), rectors (30%), and mental health professionals (28%), and “strongly agree” that, in their seminaries, throughout the formation process (not just the initial evaluation), psychological services play a significant role in determining the suitability of a candidate for advancement or for Orders.
- Three-tenths of mental health professionals (30%) agree that their input is valued by the formation team at their seminary.

- Roughly a third of formators/spiritual directors (35%), mental health professionals (33%), and rectors (28%) “strongly agree” that they have a full-time psychologist/mental health professional.
- Formators/spiritual directors (31%) are most likely to “strongly agree” that psychological services staff contribute periodically at their formation team meetings about the progress of individual seminarians. Approximately one in ten rectors (15%) and mental health professionals (11%) agree.

## **Interview Findings from the Bishops and Vocation Directors**

The sole bishop who was interviewed shared his thoughts about how involved psychological services should be in seminary life:

Bishop 1: I think there should be availability, especially in college seminary, for growth — we used to call it growth counseling, where they just needed to learn some skills. They weren't dealing with character personalities or things that are impossible or very difficult to change, but just growing up kind of things. The other issues that come up in the seminary nowadays, I know, are pornography, for example. A lot of seminaries are putting together actually clubs of St. Joseph men or something, where they come together like Alcoholics Anonymous or Sex Anonymous to talk about this addiction and to really try to create an environment where they could talk about it and work through it, because it is so rampant. I mean, any priest in the confessional will tell you that. And so, it needs to be present. Now, whether you need someone on staff, I don't know. Someone available, yes. And I think parts of the formation should include just psychological training, just so people understand the dynamics, for example. And I think this happens in family life ministry, things like that, for the dynamics of dysfunction in a family, because they're going to be counseling that, and also to understand their own family dysfunction maybe. That's a big part of growing up and understanding. And if you're going to be counseling, you better kind of know what the real thing is before you counsel someone else. And so, I think it's got to be a part of it, somewhere woven into the formation. If it's completely separate, the guys will wonder how it fits. But if it's woven into a good course on family dynamics or counseling, counseling program, for example, how to counsel families. But that should be something they're talking about — they would get that probably in theology. If they're in college, that's where it should be talked about, or in pre-theology. Those are foundational issues that affect not only the person, how they deal with community life with another priest, or deal with the way they see their bishop or authority. And so, coming to understand the dynamics of family and their family is also very helpful. So, I think it's got to be in there somewhere, earlier the better, so that by the time they get to theology, the ideal is those things are kind of settled and now you can pull yourself completely into the work of formation for priesthood. It's not, am I going to be a priest, but when I'm going to be a priest.

Five of the vocation directors also say they want psychological services well-integrated into the seminaries where they send their men, one of whom describes it ideally below.

Vocation Director 3: Definitely, the evaluation, the psychological assessment, I think that's done on the front end. I think it's very helpful. And we use really good counselors for that and I think they do a really good job. Also, being able to focus in on particular things that you're trying to assess, the strengths and the weaknesses of a candidate, just background, family origin, work experience, health, mental health, all of that, I think is really helpful in just getting a good sense of the guy. And then of course, being able to process that with a counselor who — so you're getting it from one person and then you're also able to process it too with another, and their background and sphere of experience. Because then you're identifying is there any red flags or is there any yellow flags, things like that that would be of issue, things that they need to work on before they enter seminary, I think is always helpful. And then kind of from there, are there things that, not a problem, but things that we definitely want to work on maybe throughout the course of formation, I think that's really helpful, because then guys can track that, formators can track that, vocation directors can track that. And I think it helps the guy, too, see the progress he's making because ultimately, especially with human formation, the PPF is very clear on the benchmarks for that. And I think clear, too, on benchmarks on the intellectual nature of a guy coming in, that I think are really helpful in that. And so being able to then track that progress of the guy throughout his time in formation. Not that, somehow, it's all fixed or something by the time he's ordained, but are there things that we definitely could work on where he's at a better spot as a human being that can help him serve better as a priest. Those are all things that I think are really, really helpful.

### **Interview Findings from Rectors and Formators/Spiritual Directors**

Tying together the incidence of clergy sexual abuse of minors with the need for better human formation in seminaries, one rector told of how he realized that his seminary needs psychologists better integrated into his formation program.

Rector 3: I'm actually reading the John Jay criminal justice report for the causes of the sexual abuse crisis. I'm on 50% in my Kindle. I read it every day, just sections of it, and try to digest it. So, in that report, it's very clear. And why am I reading that is because we recently had Bishop [Name] who's auxiliary bishop for the Diocese of [City], come over, ask him to talk about governance. And he did. And he also referred to what he referred to as the sequel to the PPF-6, which is an ongoing formation document for priests. In that document, there was a footnote that had struck me which came from the John Jay report, as far as causes of the sexual abuse crisis. And the John Jay report, a main cause was human formation. And they're able to use, supported by data, that seminary formation programs, as they adapted human formation programs, there seemed to be a high, strong

correlation with that and a great reduction or a significant noticeable reduction of abuse cases, which makes sense to me. In addition, the John Jay report, when read along with the wonderful document that's called the sequel to the PPF-6, they both are very helpful as far as giving insights. So as far as my main concern, my main concern is not our spiritual formation program. That is very, very good. We're improving that but I inherited something that was good. Our pastoral formation program, we have improved that. I'm happy with that. Our intellectual has always been good, probably from day one. And there's been some problems historically, such as not having people with the right credentials. Right now, we don't have that problem. The human formation piece, that's new, and I know the previous rector emphasized it, but he also came from a different era, from a different time, so there wasn't a human formation coordinator. We have a human formation coordinator. There is now a human formation committee that meets, I believe it's every month. We cover human formation topics. Unlike the previous administration, they had more money for the seminary and that was good. So, they did have a psychologist on board. We don't. What I have done is I've reached out and contacted with the [Center Name] and signed a contract with them. And let me just tell you about that. So, with the [Name], this would be with Dr. [Name]. It's something that we can afford. So just in a nutshell, two steps. One is change the psychological confidentiality agreement where the seminarian — and let me read it to you so you have it exactly correct. “I grant the president-rector permission to disclose such information to my priest formator and spiritual director, as the president-rector informed me of the need to do so.”

The exact roles of mental health professionals is not yet uniform and has been evolving over time. A few examples of different opinions regarding the integration of mental health professionals into the seminary community are represented in the interview excerpts below.

Rector 1: Here at [Seminary Name], we have a full-time clinical psychologist on our faculty. He holds a doctorate in psychology and has been, at this point, in clinical practice for about 35 years, brings a great wealth of experience to us. [...] He walks me, our academic dean and our vice rector, through each profile when it's received, gives his own commentary, oh, here is what this indicates, or this is not a major concern. You mentioned jargon earlier. Sometimes he helps us sort through some of that and gives his overall assessments of each candidate based on the report. And then later, he meets in person with each candidate. And it is not a repeat psych eval, though some dioceses do use this faculty member to do their psych evals. He meets every candidate in-person. And then based on about an hour to an hour and a half long interview with them, plus the written assessment of another psychologist, he gives an overall opinion to us. He then also counsels students in the seminary as needed, whether they have serious red or yellow flags, or whether they simply want to talk to a counselor about something that's on their heart. He's been a wonderful person for us. [...] He is also so approachable. He's low key.



He's a deeply committed Catholic. And the seminarians know he's here to serve a certain critical purpose. He sometimes needs to call them to task to bring things to their attention they don't want to talk about, yet he's also deeply supportive of them. And that means a lot.

Rector 6: I'll have to say, we are not optimal. We're moving in that direction. It's been a challenge. We have a great psychologist. So, he's involved from the very beginning. He reviews all the documents, the psychological documents. He sits in on the interview. And then he's also available for counseling for the men that they themselves may choose to participate in. We don't know who's doing that, but he's available for that. There's another aspect that we call — it's just a term we've used here since even before I came, called logistical referral.<sup>24</sup> So, if a seminarian comes in with some real issues that are flagged up, we ask the man to do logistical referral, which is at least a minimum of six sessions with the counselor, our counselor. And it could be anything. It could be anxiety, it could be pornography, it could be learning, whatever it might be. But the difference there is he signs a release in which the psychologist is able to share what they've discussed with the formation team, and then we're able to work with him in that way. Or a man in formation already, some things come up, we say, look, we need a little bit more information, we want to do logistical referral. And the man signs a release and it's shared in confidence with the rector and the vice rector and possibly the formator as well.

Rector 5: We basically borrowed the model that — we brought a model from [Name] Seminary. At the moment we have two because we have an incoming, but normally our coordinator of counseling services comes to the formation team meeting, and as a consultant to the team, generally does not vote on the men, will only speak to issues that — and they don't do counseling with them but they can — like, we'll do screening, or hey, we're going to send somebody to counseling, which of our counselors is best to use, et cetera. Really serving as a consultant to us and also does stuff to work with us to help us in terms of our development as a team and services with us. So, we really find that very helpful. I think it's worked out very well for us. That person used to be a formation advisor and so could not fulfill these other roles. And I think it's been much more helpful to have her be available to the guys, but available to us as opposed to trying to be an advisor to some.

Rector 2: It's interesting. With our two mental health professionals who are friendly with one another, good colleagues, they bounce ideas off each other sometimes and they work together very well, but they have two different positions on the issue of a resident clinician. One feels, well, that gives greater opportunity for the seminarians to meet with the counselor, greater frequency, greater exposure, creates an atmosphere of trust, etc. The other says, you don't want to be having lunch every other day with your therapist. It

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<sup>24</sup> The jargon used by Rector 6 was replaced by “logistical referral” as it might identify his seminary.

doesn't ring true to him. So, I tend in that direction now, because I've experienced both. I think they are auxiliary to a seminary faculty. They're an invaluable resource and they ought to be brought in for workshops and etc., etc., but I don't favor the full-time counselor model. I think a little bit of separation, distance, creates more comfort, and I think ultimately more openness on the part of the seminarian. So, just on that issue, but especially in today's moment, we need to have on-hand, depending on the size of the seminary, several mental health professionals to be of assistance to us, because at any one time, close to half of the seminarians are seeing a counselor in our situation, sometimes for very minor issues – procrastination, anxiety management, those kinds of things, but others for more deep-seated issues.

Formator 2: At our seminary, a mental health professional comes to some formation meetings, so, which is to say he gives some topics — they speak about some topics to the men. But in terms of our like formators meetings where we evaluate the men or talk about how they're doing, there's never a mental health professional a part of those. I'd welcome it, but I'm not sure — but that doesn't happen. We don't have a mental health professional on the staff, as I understand. There has been in the past, as I understand. The downsides with that were that sometimes the men didn't feel free to go to him because he was kind of on staff. And I think the latest idea, the latest operating principle is that the men feel more free to pursue help if it's a counselor who's outside of the staff. The downside with that is I think we could benefit from having a mental health person in some of our evaluation meetings, even if he didn't have an official vote, that he could share his assessment like, yeah, this guy is crazy. I think that is the place where we sometimes struggle as formators to make an assessment, where we see a man who — we wonder, like, am I crazy or is this guy crazy? And we kind of wonder, like — as a formation team, we try to assess whether the guy is just socially awkward or is it something more. Is he introverted or is this something pathological? And that kind of getting an expert's opinion on some of those questions, I think would be helpful. Otherwise, yeah, it seems like we're kind of doing like armchair psychology sometimes.

## How Frequently Seminary Personnel Have Contacted a Mental Health Professional about an Initial Psychological Evaluation

Three in ten formators/spiritual directors (31%) and one in six rectors (16%) say they or members of their formation team have contacted the psychologist/psychiatrist who conducted a psychological evaluation for their diocese to confer about the results “often” or “very frequently.”<sup>25</sup>

### How Frequent Seminary Personnel Have Contacted the Mental Health Professional who Conducted an Initial Psychological Evaluation to Confer about the Results?

*Percentage responding*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Never or<br>Rarely<br>% | Infrequently<br>% | Often<br>% | Very<br>Frequently<br>% |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Rectors:</i> How often have you contacted the psychologist/psychiatrist who conducted an initial psychological evaluation to confer about the results?                                                               | 28                      | 56                | 8          | 8                       |
| <i>Formators and spiritual directors:</i> How often have you or a member of your formation team contacted the psychologist/ psychiatrist who conducted an initial psychological evaluation to confer about the results? | 36                      | 35                | 22         | 7                       |

More than a quarter of formators/spiritual directors (36%) and rectors (28%) say they have “rarely or never” conferred with one of the psychologists/psychiatrists who conducted a psychological evaluation for their diocese.

<sup>25</sup> One of the response options offered for these questions is “I am not sure.” For the purposes of this analysis, those selecting that option have been grouped with the non-respondents. Using that formulation, the non-response rate is 7% for rectors and 25% for formators/spiritual directors.

## **How Seminary Personnel Can Better Utilize Psychological Services**

Responding mental health professionals were asked to write in a response to this question: *In your opinion, what could the seminary rector and/or faculty do to better utilize psychological/ counseling services, including the psychological evaluation? Be as specific as possible.*

Thirty-one wrote in a response, which is 53% of the 59 mental health professionals responding to the survey. Their responses have been grouped by topic into the six categories below:

- Giving mental health professionals more guidance and feedback about their evaluations and services can better assist seminaries and dioceses – mentioned by 48% of all mental health professional respondents
- Providing training for formators about how to get the most out of the evaluations and counseling services provided – 23%
- Requiring more robust testing in the psychological evaluations and more frequent testing and evaluations– 23%
- Better integrating mental health professionals into seminary formation teams – 16%
- Greater diligence by formators in following-up on psychological services recommendations – 10%
- Getting more from the seminarian feedback sessions – 7%

### **Giving Mental Health Professionals More Guidance and Feedback about How their Evaluations and Services Can Better Assist Seminaries and Dioceses**

According to 15 mental health professionals, the way rectors and formators can better utilize psychological services is to be more collaborative with the mental health professionals. This will help the mental health professionals to better understand the diocese, the formation process, and how the psychological issues can be addressed within that process. In addition, it will help the rectors and formators to better understand where interventions such as counseling can and cannot help to address the issues identified. Some examples of these comments appear below.

I do not work in a seminary but rather provide psych assessments for various dioceses. I have wondered how to make my recommendations more practically useful. Some vocations directors have been more involved in the process, participating in the feedback session and communicating regarding the results / discussing utility of the recommendations. This seems to make a difference and has improved my understanding of how to tailor recommendations to meet the referral question. Lack of involvement is less ideal. I think having a post-eval consultation for the vocations director in on the feedback session clears up potential misunderstandings.

Establish a collaborative relationship of trust and openness with assessing psychologists and providers of psychological services. Effortful and proactive collaboration is key to the most effective utilization of psychological resources. I also think it is vital for seminary. Rectors would benefit from "doing their own work" and pursuing counseling for themselves. They have a very difficult task and would personally benefit from counseling. It would also set a good example for the men (even if it is not publicly disclosed it has a way of influencing how formators/Rectors talk about counseling). Lastly, it would help rectors and psychologists have more of a shared language and mutual understanding.

Seminary rectors could meet with evaluating and treating psychologists/therapists on an annual basis to discuss areas of psychological/emotional growth issues faced by seminarians. Have contact with therapist about anyone referred for therapy in advance to discuss seminarian's need for therapy, and outcomes desired.

It would be helpful for the faculty to have a chance to know the mental health professionals to make consultation or referrals more likely. Encourage faculty to share any concerns they have about a seminarian with the counselor or faculty member who has access to the evaluation. The evaluation could be reviewed to see if the current concerns or problems fit with the results and any recommendations contained in the evaluation report. Encouraging seminarians to use counseling services for multiple reasons (e.g., stress management, study skills, sleep) not just when they are really struggling with signs of depression and anxiety.

I would like to see regular scheduled meetings (at least one per semester) between the rector (and/or formators) and our Psychological Services team. Presently, the meetings are impromptu or on an as-needed basis. Relatedly, I believe Psychological Services could serve a consultative role to the formators to assist them in their roles as formators.

Work at establishing an integrated system during years in seminary to identify issues set a plan and manage growth. Also work to train bishops as they cannot understand and override the seminary recommendations.

-Have a really good psychologist do the evaluation who can follow USCCB guidelines (2015) and evidence-based practices of assessment -That psychologist and rector should have a good relationship, regular communication, mutual respect, and trust to be able to connect the dots between decision making and outcomes -The rector needs to be open and honest with psychologist about what they need from the evaluation and the psychologist needs to be responsive to the needs.

I am concerned the reports are either too long and unwieldy for him to see the information. I also worry the recommendations are not firm or concrete enough for him to take action. I think the rectors need a type of translation of the report to action.

As I only provide evaluations currently, my comments will address this area only. I think the two vocations directors from whom I regularly receive referrals could be more diligent in informing me before an assessment of a candidate's context of assessment, the presence of any concerns on the diocese's part, and any previous evaluations that have taken place, as well as their own assessment of the candidate's readiness to continue in formation. I would also like to know more about how the reports are used and followed through on after they are completed, and how my recommendations might be better tailored to fit their needs.

### **Providing Training for Formators about How to Get the Most Out of the Evaluations and Counseling Services Provided**

Seven mental health professionals say one way to help rectors and formators to better utilize psychological services is to provide training for formators about how to best use the evaluations and recommendations. Some of the comments are below.

Require recommendations in psychological evaluations that are categorized according to benchmarks for the four dimensions of formation. Formators should participate in a workshop on utilizing the evaluation as a tool, as well as how to conduct ongoing formation evaluations.

The rector, formation team, and/or faculty could better take an interest in and be informed of the counseling process and the distinctions between counseling and advising/spiritual direction. The rector and formation team could advocate for higher quality psychological evaluations from some sponsoring diocese. There is a wide variety in quality/thoroughness of evaluations.

Generally, we are doing well in this area. However, more formation advisor "training" and workshop would be recommended. The rector is excellent in this area.

Provide encouragement/normalize counseling services and evaluation, take time to understand how counseling and evaluations can be helpful (and what are the limitations).

### **Requiring More Robust Testing in the Psychological Evaluations and More Frequent Testing and Evaluation**

Seven mental health professionals identify deeper testing as a way to help rectors and formators to better utilize psychological services. They include these two comments.

I think our diocese formation process is doing well in this area. An area of weakness in seminarians I have worked with is family of origin wounding. In several cases where the parents are Catholic and supportive of seminary, a veneer of false hagiography comes

over the parents that prevents the son from properly differentiating the areas of weakness in their parenting. A majority of my cases have involved helping the seminarian move through a process of differentiation from parents in a way that is less common or less abrupt than for my non-seminarian cases.

1.) Require robust psychological evaluations including Rorschach AND the Diana Screen. 2.) Provide a staff psychologist for growth counseling and consultation with formators. 3.) Provide regular professional development of formators on psychological science to help them understand the evaluations and adapt formation approaches to the unique psychological needs of the seminarian. 4.) Provide periodic seminars / workshops for seminarians themselves on common psychological issues they may struggle with and/or may come up in pastoral ministry.

It is important to standardize the psychological assessment instruments to meet the benchmarks of all 4 areas of formation. This requires a psychologist who understands the benchmarks and lives a discerning life of faith. In addition, providing a second evaluation before Diaconate ordination, of certain markers like development of personality disorders that have matured. Also assessing capacity to live a joyful holy life of chastity and be a man of communion.

An area that is "in development" is working on greater consensus on having a cut-off regarding issues with internet and masturbation in their psychosexual development. We do have interventions that are continuing to improve. There is some internal debate at what constitutes an addictive lack of freedom. I think compulsive level of issues are generally ruled out well, but the between that and occasional habit is still in debate regarding readiness for orders. We are now including a C-SAT trained therapist contracted on our team, but there is not always buy in by formation staff. We also do not do a secondary evaluation with men after admission, and may need to consider this more frequently (currently do it occasionally as indicated). I think we are doing much better at surfacing any issues and men do routinely seek assistance to address issues in attachment/family of origin issues, anxiety and mood issues, possible autistic spectrum issues, and struggles with chastity. Most men do seek counseling services at some point. Personality issues can occasionally slip through the cracks when men are highly functional. Peer evals have been very helpful. I think our review process as a team is much improved and more able to consider complexity. However, as a psychologist who practices confidentially I do not freely speak about men in my care (I do speak into needs identified in the admissions process). Releases are obtained when appropriate. Also, the men sign a document that acknowledges that I will publicly discontinue services with them if issues are grave and not being brought into the external forum by them. Finally, with the addition of the propaedeutic year, I see our formation being much more robust and issues are flagged more readily and decisions about advancement are dealt with

forthrightly by the man and the team. I think the close living situation and open trust in a non-performative environment, as well as the interpersonal process groups.

### **Better Integrating Mental Health Professionals into Seminary Formation Teams**

Five respondents identify the need for seminaries to better integrate the mental health professionals they work with into their formation teams. A few comments are presented below.

I do three part-time jobs for the seminary (academics, formation lecturer, psychotherapy). It has been my experience that many seminaries have a 'silo model.' What I mean by this is... formation does not necessarily communicate with those with whom they need to communicate. In over 9 years of working at one seminary, I have never once been invited to a formation meeting. Instead, I turn in reports each semester – which I often do not have a chance to explain to anyone except the director of counseling services. However, even he has confidentially complained to me that the 'moving parts' of the seminary do not communicate well. I have been involved at other seminaries where this works better, in that therapists are regularly invited to formation meetings for the men whom they serve. Seminaries need to have meetings to regularly review the processes involved in formation and how this works/doesn't work well. Therapists need to be invited to formation meetings, especially high stakes ones. They also need to have someone to give suggestions to, who will listen. Thank you.

Our seminary values and encourages men to utilize psychological services, sometimes formators specifically referring men. They value the written and verbal feedback from the testing psychologist as part of the admission board review process. However, we do not have a full-time counselor/psychologist dedicated to the seminary. Counseling duties are split between two in-house counselors that equal approximately 70-80% full time position. This sometimes limits how frequently men can be seen for counseling. We could also do a better job consulting and collaborating on the counseling process of individual seminarians toward their formation goals/process (especially for men that are referred by formators for counseling) - of course, this is a delicate balance of maintaining the internal and external forum processes within seminary formation and maintaining counseling as a safe and private space for part of a seminarian's human formation.

I think that regular (at least once on every man) consultation with the psychologist who provided the report to ensure that the seminarian, seminary staff and psychologist all understand the issues to work on across time and signs, bench-marks, etc. or progress – connected to expected timeframes would be very helpful. Often it appears that even reports that seem very clear to me as a psychologist are not understood and how to treat the concern effectively is not understood sometimes resulting in inappropriate accompaniment of the seminarian. I recall diagnosing a seminarian with chronic



depression, but in seminary he was treated as "lazy" and they intentionally "turned up the heat" (psychological pressure) to motivate him resulting predictably in a mental health crisis. On another occasion a client diagnosed with a personality disorder connected to immaturity was not challenged, but accommodated, in a manner that prevented him from having any reason to change, as he could do the academic work satisfactorily. When I finally challenged him in therapy when he was a deacon, he left therapy abruptly and was ordained anyway. It seems very important that seminaries/formators develop the capacity to treat seminarians as they really are and not in a one-size-fit-all model (i.e., according to the preference of a formator who cannot flex themselves to meet the unique need before them).

### **Greater Diligence by Formators in Following-up on Psychological Services' Recommendations**

Three mental health professionals suggest that a way for rectors and formators to better utilize psychological services is to be more vigilant in following up on the recommendations they receive. Two of these comments appear below.

Realizing that any unresolved issues will come up and be replayed in ministry. Also, just because issues are not obvious in seminary does not mean that they are resolved.

At our seminary, only the rector and the coordinator of counseling services (myself) review the psychological evaluations. Neither the formation advisors or spiritual directors are provided access to the psychological reports. The coordinator of counseling sits on the admissions committee where psychological reports are reviewed, and based on these makes recommendations for acceptance or not into formation. To better use these evaluations, summaries of the results and recommendations could be shared with each seminarian assigned formation advisor and spiritual director. At present, about 70% of the seminarians request or are required to participate in some form of counseling at the seminary, but there is only one psychologist available to provide both individual and group psychotherapy. The seminary<sup>26</sup> has been reluctant to hire more due to budget issues and fear that a negative image of the seminary would be portrayed if two full-time counselors were hired. Therefore, we are not meeting the demand for requested or required counseling. It is a good problem to have as it indicates that the seminarians of this generation are open to counseling in helping grow in various freedoms and in affective maturity.

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<sup>26</sup> A few of the terms and phrases in this quote were changed to help conceal the identity of the seminary.

## **Getting More from the Seminarian Feedback Sessions**

Improving the feedback sessions with the candidates is a way that rectors and formators could better utilize psychological services according to two mental health professionals.

I believe a good practice is to meet with the man, his formation advisor, and spiritual director together to review the psychological with the Psychologist or Seminary Psychological service. When everyone comes together, there are no secrets and all can be a part of an effective plan for formation.

1. Use psychological evaluators to provide ongoing updates to the initial psychological evaluation, specifically addressing areas of concern that emerge during formation.
2. Employ a full-time mental health professional who is part of the formation staff, who serves as a liaison with outside mental health professionals to whom a seminarian may be referred, who can offer psychological consultation to the rector and the formation staff, and who can provide workshops of a psychological nature to both formation staff and seminarians.
3. Require the initial evaluator to provide a summary of the initial evaluation to accepted applicants that provides practical suggestions addressing the needed growth areas of the seminarian, and that can be utilized by formation staff to facilitate the seminarian's accountability and commitment to his own growth.
4. Develop and share with the seminarians a transparent written policy that outlines information about the provision of psychological counseling services during formation, and includes topics such as the procedure for requesting psychological counseling, suggestions for choosing a counselor, confidentiality, accountability to the formation staff regarding the progress made in counseling, etc.

### Section III: Assessments of Suitability of Candidates

Many of the questions on the five surveys asked about how well dioceses and seminaries assess the suitability of candidates for Holy Orders and how it can be improved. They were also asked about how much various factors affect their assessments of candidates.

#### How Sufficiently Topics Are Covered in Psychological Evaluations

All five surveys asked respondents to think of the psychological evaluations they have received in the past five years and how well different areas were covered.

#### Bishops and Vocation Directors

Approximately three-quarters to nine-tenths (75% to 88%) of bishops and vocation directors say the areas presented in the first part of the table below have been sufficiently included in the psychological evaluations they have received in the past five years.<sup>27</sup> These six are those most likely to be seen as sufficiently covered.

| <b>Thinking of the areas covered in the psychological evaluations you have received in the past five years, have they <u>sufficiently included</u> these specific areas?</b> |                |                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Respondents checked all that have been <u>sufficiently included</u></i>                                                                                                   |                |                           |
|                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                  |
| Review of family of origin and any related issues                                                                                                                            | 86             | 88                        |
| Personality traits and disorders inconsistent with or compromising healthy ministry                                                                                          | 83             | 78                        |
| Capacity for growth and conversion, ability to be formed, and presence of rigidity or inflexibility that precludes openness to guidance and influence                        | 82             | 84                        |
| Psychosexual history, including psychosexual development, sexual experiences and the presence of any psychosexual disorders                                                  | 81             | 88                        |
| Mental health issues and psychiatric diagnoses including review of what cannot be managed easily                                                                             | 75             | 84                        |
| Addiction history, including any significant troubles with substance abuse, and addictive disorders or habits                                                                | 75             | 82                        |

<sup>27</sup> Three percent of bishops and f% of vocation directors did not provide a response to this series of questions.

About half to about three-fourth (49% to 77%) of bishops and vocation directors say the areas presented in the second part of the table below have been sufficiently included in the psychological evaluations they have received in the past five years.

| <b>Thinking of the areas covered in the psychological evaluations you have received in the past five years, have they <u>sufficiently included</u> these specific areas? <i>CONT'D</i></b><br><i>Respondents checked all that have been <u>sufficiently included</u></i> |                      |                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Bishops<br/>%</b> | <b>Vocation<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> |
| Intellectual limitations that would hinder either higher academic studies or the navigation of the complexities of leadership in parish life                                                                                                                             | 71                   | 77                                  |
| Pervasive developmental disorders that may lead to behaviors incompatible with the human formation traits and characteristics of healthy priestly relationships and ministry                                                                                             | 69                   | 65                                  |
| Sexual orientation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 69                   | 65                                  |
| Areas of serious emotional vulnerability, given the demands of the priest's responsibilities, celibacy and life as a public figure and man of communion                                                                                                                  | 68                   | 69                                  |
| Physical and medical concerns that significantly impair the ability of the candidate to function responsibly                                                                                                                                                             | 68                   | 51                                  |
| Trauma history, including any history of childhood abuse and abuse by clergy                                                                                                                                                                                             | 66                   | 73                                  |
| Activity or inclination towards sexual activity with a minor or other trait that might indicate the person could be a harm to minors                                                                                                                                     | 57                   | 63                                  |
| History of psychopathic deviance, criminality, and unethical, illegal, and unconscionable behavior                                                                                                                                                                       | 55                   | 71                                  |
| Severe learning disorders or disabilities compounded with lack of intellectual curiosity                                                                                                                                                                                 | 55                   | 61                                  |
| Relations with self or others including relations that are so damaged or shame-based that he cannot relate or assume healthy leadership                                                                                                                                  | 49                   | 59                                  |

Looking at the responses for both bishops and vocation directors, these areas are *least* likely to be sufficiently covered in the psychological evaluations they have received:

- Activity or inclination towards sexual activity with a minor or other trait that might indicate the person could be a harm to minors
- Severe learning disorders or disabilities compounded with lack of intellectual curiosity
- Relations with self or others including relations that are so damaged or shame-based that he cannot relate or assume healthy leadership

## Rectors, Formators/Spiritual Directors, and Mental Health Professionals

Between 72% and 97% rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals say the areas presented in the first part of the table below have been sufficiently included in the psychological evaluations they have received in the past five years. The top seven are those most likely to be seen as sufficiently covered.

### Thinking of the areas covered in the psychological evaluations you have received in the past five years, have they sufficiently included these specific areas?\*

*Respondents checked all that have been sufficiently included*

|                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Rectors<br/>%</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals<br/>%</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Addiction history, including any significant troubles with substance abuse, and addictive disorders or habits                                           | 96                   | 90                                                     | 94                                               |
| Review of family of origin and any related issues                                                                                                       | 92                   | 92                                                     | 97                                               |
| Personality traits and disorders inconsistent with or compromising healthy ministry                                                                     | 92                   | 88                                                     | 88                                               |
| Capacity for growth and conversion, ability to be formed, and presence of rigidity or inflexibility that precludes openness to guidance and influence   | 84                   | 80                                                     | 79                                               |
| Psychosexual history, including psychosexual development, sexual experiences and the presence of any psychosexual disorders                             | 80                   | 88                                                     | 91                                               |
| Sexual orientation                                                                                                                                      | 76                   | 79                                                     | 82                                               |
| Trauma history, including any history of childhood abuse and abuse by clergy                                                                            | 76                   | 78                                                     | 88                                               |
| Intellectual limitations that would hinder either higher academic studies or the navigation of the complexities of leadership in parish life            | 76                   | 74                                                     | 76                                               |
| Activity or inclination towards sexual activity with a minor or other trait that might indicate the person could be a harm to minors                    | 76                   | 73                                                     | 85                                               |
| Areas of serious emotional vulnerability, given the demands of the priest's responsibilities, celibacy and life as a public figure and man of communion | 72                   | 78                                                     | 79                                               |

\*The question on the mental health professional survey was worded slightly differently: *Thinking of the areas covered in the psychological evaluations you have produced in the past five years, have they sufficiently included these specific areas?* Non-response rates for this series of questions were 7% for rectors, 17% for formators/spiritual directors, and 44% for mental health professionals.

Mental health professionals are more likely than rectors and formators/spiritual directors to say that some of the areas in the table below have been covered sufficiently in the psychological evaluations they have produced in the past five years (rows 1, 2, 4, and 5 in the table).

**Thinking of the areas covered in the psychological evaluations you have received in the past five years, have they sufficiently included these specific areas?\*** *CONT'D*  
*Respondents checked all that have been sufficiently included*

|                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Rectors<br/>%</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals<br/>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Mental health issues and psychiatric diagnoses including review of what cannot be managed easily                                                                             | 64                   | 84                                                     | 88                                               |
| Physical and medical concerns that significantly impair the ability of the candidate to function responsibly                                                                 | 64                   | 76                                                     | 88                                               |
| Pervasive developmental disorders that may lead to behaviors incompatible with the human formation traits and characteristics of healthy priestly relationships and ministry | 64                   | 70                                                     | 70                                               |
| Relations with self or others including relations that are so damaged or shame-based that he cannot relate or assume healthy leadership                                      | 64                   | 67                                                     | 76                                               |
| History of psychopathic deviance, criminality, and unethical, illegal, and unconscionable behavior                                                                           | 60                   | 70                                                     | 85                                               |
| Severe learning disorders or disabilities compounded with lack of intellectual curiosity                                                                                     | 56                   | 61                                                     | 55                                               |

\*The question on the mental health professional survey was worded slightly differently: *Thinking of the areas covered in the psychological evaluations you have produced in the past five years, have they sufficiently included these specific areas?*

Looking at the responses for all three respondent groups, these areas are *least* likely to be sufficiently covered in the psychological evaluations they have received:

- Pervasive developmental disorders that may lead to behaviors incompatible with the human formation traits and characteristics of healthy priestly relationships and ministry
- Relations with self or others including relations that are so damaged or shame-based that he cannot relate or assume healthy leadership
- Severe learning disorders or disabilities compounded with lack of intellectual curiosity.

## **Interview Findings from Rectors and Formators/Spiritual Directors**

Rectors and formators/spiritual directors were asked how the psychological evaluations they see could be improved. Notably, one rector says that his seminary requires dioceses that send men to them to do a certain battery of tests, with another saying his seminary regularly has to go back to dioceses and require them to do other tests.

Rector 1: Yes. The seminary does have such a list of required exams or instruments, as the psychologists often say, survey instruments that we do require that to be used. And I found in general, the assessments to be of roughly equal quality. Some are a little more probative than others, but I found them all to be satisfactory and to comply with what we request in terms of surveys and interview topics and so forth.

Rector 8: So, what we did was we retained a psychological expert with seminary experience who's really a top — I think probably one of the top men certainly in the country, if not the world. And so, we still receive psychological evaluations by the diocese, which is part of their admissions process, but then every one of them we have reviewed by this man who's on retainer. And he reviews it for quality of the evaluation. And if he feels that it's adequate, then we accept that as the admissions evaluation. If he doesn't, we send it back and we say, either you can redo it following these criteria that he's given us, or we'll have it done by [Counseling Center], which does a very good job, who we have a relationship with. But we won't admit the man on this evaluation. So that's the quality control that we've put in place.

A formator agrees that seminaries need to offer the mental health professionals producing the psychological evaluations more guidance.

Formator 1: We've moved in the direction here at the seminary of being more specific of what we're asking psychologists to produce. Too often we've had reports, I know this has been a problem all around the country, of reports that are too superficial. They don't contain enough narrative, enough analysis. We've been able to work through that. It would be wonderful if there was a greater consensus of at least best practices. What do these reports need to contain?

## Effectiveness of the Initial Psychological Evaluations

While respondents to all five surveys were asked how useful or effective they believe the initial psychological evaluations for assessing the suitability of candidates, there were three versions of the question. In addition, bishops and vocation directors were asked an additional question about how well it predicts how well a man will later function as a priest.

### Bishops and Vocation Directors

#### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

Nearly six in ten vocation directors (57%) and bishops (56%) agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that their seminary’s psychological evaluations adequately predict how well a man will later function as a priest.<sup>28</sup>

| <b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b>                                                                                              |                |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined</i>                                                                                      |                |                  |
|                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation</b>  |
|                                                                                                                                                         | <b>%</b>       | <b>Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                         |                | <b>%</b>         |
| Based on my experience with men post-ordination, our seminary’s psychological evaluations adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest | 56             | 57               |

#### *“Strongly Agree” Only*

About one in 20 vocation directors (8%) and bishops (4%) “strongly agree” that their seminary’s psychological evaluations adequately predict how well a man will later function as a priest.

| <b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b>                                                                                              |                |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i>                                                                                                           |                |                  |
|                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation</b>  |
|                                                                                                                                                         | <b>%</b>       | <b>Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                         |                | <b>%</b>         |
| Based on my experience with men post-ordination, our seminary’s psychological evaluations adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest | 4              | 8                |

<sup>28</sup> Six percent of bishops and 4% of vocation directors did not provide a response to this question.



Both vocation directors (62%) and bishops (58%) say the initial psychological evaluations they receive are one of the most effective tools they have for identifying issues related to the suitability of a candidate for formation.<sup>29</sup>

| <b>In your experience, how effective is the initial psychological evaluation for identifying issues related to the suitability of a candidate for formation?</b><br><i>Percentage responding</i> |                     |                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Bishops</b><br>% | <b>Vocation Directors</b><br>% |
| Not as effective as other tools our Diocese uses                                                                                                                                                 | 2                   | 0                              |
| About as effective as other tools                                                                                                                                                                | 30                  | 19                             |
| One of the most effective tools                                                                                                                                                                  | 58                  | 62                             |
| The most effective tool                                                                                                                                                                          | 10                  | 19                             |

### Interview Findings from the Bishops and Vocation Directors

The sole bishop interviewed conveyed that he has found the initial psychological evaluations he has seen to vary dramatically, with some very useful and others quite vague and noncommittal. Below he describes how he was both a vocation director and a rector of a seminary before becoming a bishop and the variety of psychological evaluations he has seen during his overall career.

Bishop 1: And so, I think the questionnaire asked a lot of questions about psychological evaluations. That seemed to be one of the areas you were centering in on. And I'll give you some thoughts on that just real off the cuff very quickly. And so, they were just becoming — we were just adopting true psychological evaluations at that time. And what I've learned about psychological evaluations is that they vary a lot, depends on who's doing them. And I also noticed from the ones I used to get in [City] with psychologists that seemed to be really focused in on seminary formation and priesthood and weren't at that time so concerned about liability, because that was before all this stuff started happening, you would get a pretty honest and pretty, I think, insightful conclusion. Over the years I saw many different ones at the seminary and there. And some of them are really just cut and paste. So, they give the test — I happen to like the MMPI and those things they give that really believe they are — they do elucidate information. I don't

<sup>29</sup> In addition, they were also offered the option of “I am not familiar enough with it to respond.” For the analysis in this table, those responses are grouped together with the non-responses. With not being familiar included, the non-response rate for bishops is 9% and is 2% for vocation directors.

know how those tests work, but they seem to work. Like the Myers-Briggs, I don't know how it works, but it seems to have some truth to it. But I see some that would come in, they give you a very matter of fact interview, and they ask all the pertinent questions, all the ones you talked about, sexual life and about trauma, about family life. They'd have a good — they would often ask questions very directly, and I got some of the information from those. Then also then they would do the MMPI and they would give you the results. Some of them obviously took it right out of the catalog. If you had these numbers on these questions, they just kind of cut-pasted in. And sometimes the conclusion was basically just a rehash of that and without any kind of attempt to say, this man would make a good candidate for a seminary formation. And maybe rightly so left up to the person that was doing the — the priest or the vocation director. But I found some were able to give you a much more — they gave you that information, but then they gave their own personal kind of insight into this from their history and their experience. And I found that much more helpful.

Interviewer: Mmm hmm.

Bishop 1: In the end, the thing about psychology — this is my thumbnail thing. In the end I said, by the time I set up a psych evaluation, I knew them pretty well. Okay. So, if I got back something that said basically what I knew already or kind of felt intuitively and learned, then I said, okay, then I know who I'm dealing with here. Now let me make a decision. But where they were really helpful is that two or three times, they came back completely opposite from what I saw. And one strange one was, this guy is a narcissist, he has no real sense of self. It was horrible. And I said, what do I do with this? And the psychologist said, well, you can read it to him, but it's probably not going to make any difference. So, I read it to him. I would be devastated. He went, okay, what comes next? Where do I sign up? You know, so sometimes they've been very elucidating and so I've found them helpful, but not always completely — they can't really tell you completely how they're going to do in formation. Give you some hints, and then what I would say is when they got in to formation, if those things began to show themselves, then I began to take them more seriously and see how bad they were or not. But that's kind of my assessment of it. Good, helpful, I wouldn't do away with them, but not the only thing you need, obviously, but sometimes critical.

Interviewer: Have they included if you have this issue, then this should be the follow up, like kind of the next steps?

Bishop 1: They might suggest growth counseling in these areas or that areas, or if they're dyslexic, they're going to say, well, they're going to need certain special helps in education. Obviously, if they come down low on the scales for intelligence, you take that into account. Oftentimes, not all the psychologists know what formation is really. And so, they'll just tell you more in general, this person is going to have trouble with

relationships, or in situations of conflict, they're going to find it difficult to deal with those. And I take those seriously, but then watch for them in formation. Unless they said, this guy's a catastrophic mess, then I would — that would take me in another direction. But usually, I would have sensed that by then. And young guys, though, high school guys going into seminary, you don't know how they're going to turn exactly. I mean, they're really formable. A guy 30, 40 years old, pretty much what you see is what you get. Then you have to decide, can we work with this or not?

[...]

Bishop 1: Sometimes the testing will kind of hint to a kind of addictive personality, maybe some traits that come out. Normally I wouldn't know much about that from the psych evaluation. I don't remember getting a lot of information about that because — except to say that they have traits that would lend them to these kinds of things. But they would be asked of course about those things, about the use of alcohol. The questionnaires I found the psychologist asked in terms of generally their state of life, history, were pretty precise and helpful. Sometimes they ask questions I forgot to ask and found that information in that first section of a psych evaluation. But I think they weren't predictive necessarily. But for me in the seminary, that was not a really serious difficulty — at college level, I only had one case where I found a guy was a — he had — addicted to pills. But that should have been known before, because it was a pretty big problem when he got to me. Kept hidden for the first month or two, and then it came out. That should have been caught earlier. I don't know why it wasn't in their diocese, I don't know.

[...]

Interviewer: And one last question. So, have you found that the evaluations do an adequate job with rigidity, scrupulosity, those kinds of behaviors?

Bishop 1: They only pointed you in that direction, really. Things like scrupulosity, you can pick up as you talk to a guy many times. Was it scrupulosity? What's the other one? Scrupulosity —

Interviewer: And rigidity.

Bishop 1: Rigidity is a trickier one. My little catchphrase was, you can test for everything in a seminary except for what they're going to do when they have authority. Because I've had guys that toe the line and the minute they're out — and I'd say the bigger part of formation today is what I call the seminary outside the seminary. And that is, guys will listen to their rector, but then go to the Internet or go call someone and say, is this right? Is this good? And then they'll get another formation. And so that can sometimes be going on at the same time as the — look like an ideal seminarian, but once they get out, out comes whatever it is. They can go one direction or the other. Out comes the Beretta, out

comes a whole different personality. It's like, where did that come from? You've got to be very attentive to that. And I'm hoping things like the propaedeutic year will help some of that. But that's something that always — every bishop will have a story about someone that came out of the seminary and think, what happened to him? Where'd that come from? It was the seminary outside the seminary.

Interviewer: I would think that propaedeutic year would be especially good for seeing how well they can get along with others and things like that.

Bishop 1: Oh, yeah, that's very good about that. What's good about it is that their first year is not being tainted by the little cliques in the seminary that are cliques around certain different — the seminarians' idea of what true formation should be like. And those little things start building in a seminary if you don't watch it. And young guys can come in very innocently and get pulled into them. So, with the propaedeutic year, they're formed outside the seminary. So, they come in with a whole different point of view and some sense of what kind of priest they want to be. And one of the experiences we had in one of our seminaries is that when they would go to visit in the main body of the seminary at different events, otherwise they're separate, they'd say, why are they so angry over there? Why are they so mad? Because they were having — just enjoying their life of spiritual life. And, yeah, they very quickly get schooled by the seminarians before them, so a certain culture can continue to develop. The propaedeutic year has the promise of maybe breaking some of that cycle.

Most of the vocation directors believe that while the psychological evaluations are an important part of assessing the suitability of candidates, they need to be complemented with many other things, including the vocation directors' interaction with the men, how well they can get along with others during the propaedeutic year, and the internal forum of a seminary.

Vocation Director 6: I found so far that the psychological evaluations have mostly been complementary to my own observations. Again, I've not been in it long, but I haven't found anything especially surprising from them. But they're helpful as a tool for communicating my intuitions with the applicants themselves or the new seminarians. So, this past fall I sat down with each of them and went through and I said, look, this is what came out on your evaluation so you're aware, and these are some things that we might put a focus on in your formation, stepping in. So, then they're aware of what we're working with and can put their efforts into some of those.

Vocation Director 2: In those circumstances, like the psychological report, so, we're saying likely it would be covered by the psych report. I would not use the psych report. I think in that case, it would tell me something I already know. Like if I'm working with a guy, accompanying a guy, a potential seminarian candidate, I talk to his pastor. I mean,

we get recommendations and, okay, recommendations, you choose people who tell ideally good things about you. But you talk to his pastor, you talk to the guy. Can he work a room, so to speak? And not necessarily work a room, but like a threshold we use is, all right, you're going to the wedding — this may be more Midwest folksy. You're going to the wedding rehearsal. Can you survive at the rehearsal dinner, hour and a half, and you only know the bride and groom, and they're not talking to you, they're talking to their friends? You don't know anybody there. Can you survive like an hour and a half in conversation? Because, I mean, we have guys who are socially awkward and generally we might give those guys a try. And if nothing happens, we say thanks, no thanks, as in if nothing happens, does your ability to relate with others form friendships with others? Does that change? If it doesn't, we say goodbye. So, there's a guy who's socially awkward and then there's a guy who's quiet.

## Rectors and Formators/Spiritual Directors

More than nine in ten rectors (100%) and formators/spiritual directors (94%) view the initial psychological evaluation is a necessary tool to identify areas of needed growth.<sup>30</sup>

**In your experience, how do you view the initial psychological evaluation in the context of assessing the suitability of a candidate to enter seminary formation?**

*Percentage responding*

|                                                        | <b>Rectors</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                                                        | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>                                         |
| Unnecessary                                            | 0              | 0                                                |
| A necessary tool to “check the box”                    | 0              | 6                                                |
| A necessary tool to identify areas of<br>needed growth | 100            | 94                                               |

<sup>30</sup> In addition, they were also offered the option of “I am not familiar enough with it to respond.” For the analysis in this table, those responses are grouped together with the non-responses. With not being familiar included, the non-response rate for rectors 0% and is 10% for formators/spiritual directors.

## **Interview Findings from the Rectors and Formators/Spiritual Directors**

Many of the rectors interviewed stated that the quality of the initial psychological evaluations they have viewed in recent years vary by dioceses. While they say that most of those they receive are good enough, some need better executive summaries with more practical recommendations. Other suggestions, presented in the excerpts below, include having better sexual histories and better testing for learning disabilities and men on the autism spectrum.

Rector 5: Well, I think, as you already alluded to, I think making sure that the intellectual assessment includes at least indications of their signs of autism, and perhaps it can't be assessed at this level, but a further assessment is necessary. I think that would be one. And again, we asked for it, but greater consistency in terms of sexual history and capacity for chaste living. A lot of times the focus is there's no sign of — it's like trying to get the likely offender off, but greater consistency there. And I think maybe the other piece is more than the information we're getting, there's inconsistency across dioceses and across the clinical psychologists are who doing the assessments. Do they debrief with the seminarian or the prospective seminarian? And the thing is, in most cases, unless it's been an assessment that says, this guy's whack, don't accept him — they usually don't use that language but unless there's a red flag — there's usually at least some yellow flags. And if they haven't done a debrief with the man and the vocation director, then the usefulness of it for helping the man to grow is lost. And so, something we do is we always have the coordinator of counseling services will meet with guys in their first few months, and with their formation advisor, to do a debrief herself. I'm going to share with you some of what the report says, does this ring true for you, this is how it can help you in formation. So, we make sure we've done it on our end. And anybody that we send who needs a further assessment for some reason, we always have a debrief with the evaluator. But I think that's an important piece that I would say is missing at least half the time.

Rector 6: Yes. For the most part, ADHD, yes. Although we're discovering that — or men are discovering it after they've been in seminary for a year or two that they have it, they get tested, they didn't really realize it. So maybe it's not coming up or it's not been asked. But the other one, being on the spectrum, yeah, there's a couple guys that it's just kind of noticeable. Now, they're new and, in fact, I think both of them, we're going to be asking them to leave. But it was never really flagged up in the psychs. But I would absolutely agree with that. Those would be great if we could have more of that at the beginning. [...] And quite a few men have some sort of learning disability, ADHD, and then a couple, as you know, either on the spectrum.

Other rectors advocated for having more than one psychological evaluation during a man's time in the seminary, especially for those who enroll in college. One of the two has a seminary that only enrolls those in his religious institute. A formator echoed their opinions.

Rector 6: Yeah, great question. So, we have a college and a theology here, so there's only a couple of us — maybe we're the only one, I think, that are here. So, most of our college guys don't stay for theology. They just don't. So, it's not an issue for us. But I would say if somebody's coming into a theologate or even they go from some program to ours, we would require a more recent psychological eval, because we don't know the person. So generally, I think before each new transition to a different seminary. So, a guy in pre-theology who stays for theology, we don't do that. It's only been two years, three years for propaedeutic and pre-theology. But I think if he was 17 and now, he's 23 or 22, like, yeah, we definitely would want to see a second.

Rector 7: So, we have two entry points for our community. One is our undergraduate program and then we have what we call postulancy, which is the year before the novitiate. Anybody entering the postulancy has a full — those folks are all postgraduate, so 22 years old or older. And so, there's a long-established kind of program that we've been using and updating as we go. So, we've been doing psych assessments over 30 years, if not 40 years, for our community. And so, it's a series of kind of assessments and then an interview with a psychologist. And then after they've entered the postulancy, there's usually a follow-up conversation with the psychologist to give them some of the feedback that they've received from the assessment. Ours is mostly kind of a screening process. We don't do kind of personality kind of assessment, like some of those other kind of things that give you more kind of information on like how do you deal with formation. It's a little bit more of a kind of a screening to make sure that there are not major things. And then some of the things like personality tests and other sorts of things, we do that later on in formation just as a — give the guys a chance to get to know themselves. For the guys entering the undergraduate program, similarly, it's a psychological assessment with an interview. [...] So, then what we do is they spend their first three years, usually freshman through junior year, college or undergraduate program, and then as a senior, they transition into the postulate year. So usually in that junior year, they take another assessment just to kind of benchmark where they had been, where they are now, and make sure just kind of, again, some of that maturing that happens between 18 and 21 years old, see what's going on there.

Two formators echoed a need for a second psychological evaluation, particularly for those men who last had one when they entered a college seminary.

Formator 2: And I think maybe one weakness of the psych eval process is often that the guys, especially here, often they get the psych eval when they're starting maybe college

seminary or pre-theology. But I'd be happy to see more of like another psych eval when they're starting the theologate after they've been in formation for four years. Sometimes some of the faculty have said, well, we see the guy every day. That can tell us more than what a psych eval can. And there might be some truth to that, but I — and we do get a new psych eval, usually if somebody's coming from a different seminary. But I think if a guy's been in college seminary for four years, a lot can happen in four years, and I think he matures and changes dramatically from 18 to 22. And so, I'd welcome another psych eval when he's starting the configuration stage, just to make sure that there have been no habits, bad habits that got formed or that some of these issues didn't come up maybe. Anyways, these are big changes in his life in four years.

[...]

Formator 4: I think that obviously what I feel as a growing edge for the church is how often they happen, right. So, when we have a man coming to us from college seminary, that psych eval was done when he was 17 or 18, and we get him at 21 or 22. I hope to God he's a very different person. So, I am firmly in favor of before entry to the theologate. Perhaps not the same battery in its fullness, but something significant to measure that growth across the time of his college formation. So, for a guy who comes to us for what used to be called pre-theology, right, philosophical studies after another degree program, of course it's much more current. But then I do believe that we need one more while in seminary before ordination.

Interviewer: Would you think that would be a general one? More targeted?

Formator 4: I think it would be another targeted one. So, a guy who comes up from college seminary. So, when he was 17 or 18, before entry to college seminary, 21 or 22 before entrance to the theologate, and then in third configuration before or whenever it happens, given the new PPF, before diaconate ordination.

In addition, four formators say that they would like to see some other areas covered better in the psychological evaluations, including anxiety, stress, resilience, rigidity, and if a man has a learning disability or is on the autism spectrum.

Formator 1: I would like to see more about the anxiety, stress, capacity — two things, capacity for handling ordinary stress, the kind of stress that is just going to be part of being a priest and is thus going to be part of seminary formation. I think stress, anxiety, things on that axis, as well as social skills. Social skills. One of the things we've often seen with propaedeutic seminarians — I entered as a college seminarian. You would have a measurable number of men, every year it would be in a cohort, 10% to 20% of men who really have serious maturity issues, seriously are unable to form authentic



friendships. They're not able to respond to social cues in an adequate way. I think social intelligence, emotional intelligence. Those would be my two.

Formator 2: No, no, I don't think it's covered well in the psych eval. [...] But I think that's something that we can assess as a seminary, and I think we could do — and I imagine we could assess that better than the psych eval in the sense that, yeah, again, if the psychologist isn't on the same page as us, like with respect to morals and whatnot, they might perceive as something rigid something which is not rigid, but maybe it's just like faithful Catholic teaching. But on the other hand, I think we can assess that well. I think we maybe could do better adding that as a category for our evaluation of the men. I don't know that — like, just even that category, moral and intellectual rigidity, there's not a box that we check for that on our annual evals. But I think it would be a profitable one to assess and to let, say, a bishop know that this man is, yeah, morally and intellectually rigid. So, no, I don't think that's assessed well with the psych eval. I don't know that it could be. And I think we could do a better job of assessing that.

Formator 5: Two, I think we need to get better at looking at spectrum-type, autism spectrum, and being clear about what's acceptable or not in that, because many of the dioceses that we've served have pushed guys through and who have been on the spectrum, and that's led to real frustration on the part of the lay faithful. Even where he's not committed serious errors or anything, no abuse or any of that, but just a lack of empathy and ability to roll with the messiness of parish life.

Formator 7: So, scrupulosity would be one, perfectionism would be another, OCD tendencies, just low self-worth, for example. And I think some of those are probably seen in the psychological, but for some reason, I don't know why we are not able to address them from the very beginning. For example, we have a guy who, he was in his second year of theology. [...] So, I was teaching him and he was having lots of difficulty in my class. And when you're chatting with him at table, he's a smart guy, but he was not doing well. So, I suggested, why don't we send this guy back to psychologists to do an educational testing just to test further things. And he did. And the psychologist came back with lots of good recommendations. And I was surprised that — I'm a layman in this area, but I could see something was off. And he was in his basically sixth year of formation, four years of college and then two years with us, and he was in his sixth year. And I am, as a layman, I'm the one who is saying, better check if he might have some issues. And they did. So, I'm not sure if we are catching some of those problems early enough to address them. I think in this case it came up as ADHD. In this case it was ADHD and I think anxiety. I would give a quiz and he'd just get stuck. He just, he can't do anything. And yet he's a smart guy. He's a smart guy. And the next time I give a quiz, he aces it because that day he happens to be in a different mood and so on, and he aces it. So those were the problems that were hindering his learning. Thankfully they figured out what to do with him and are helping him.

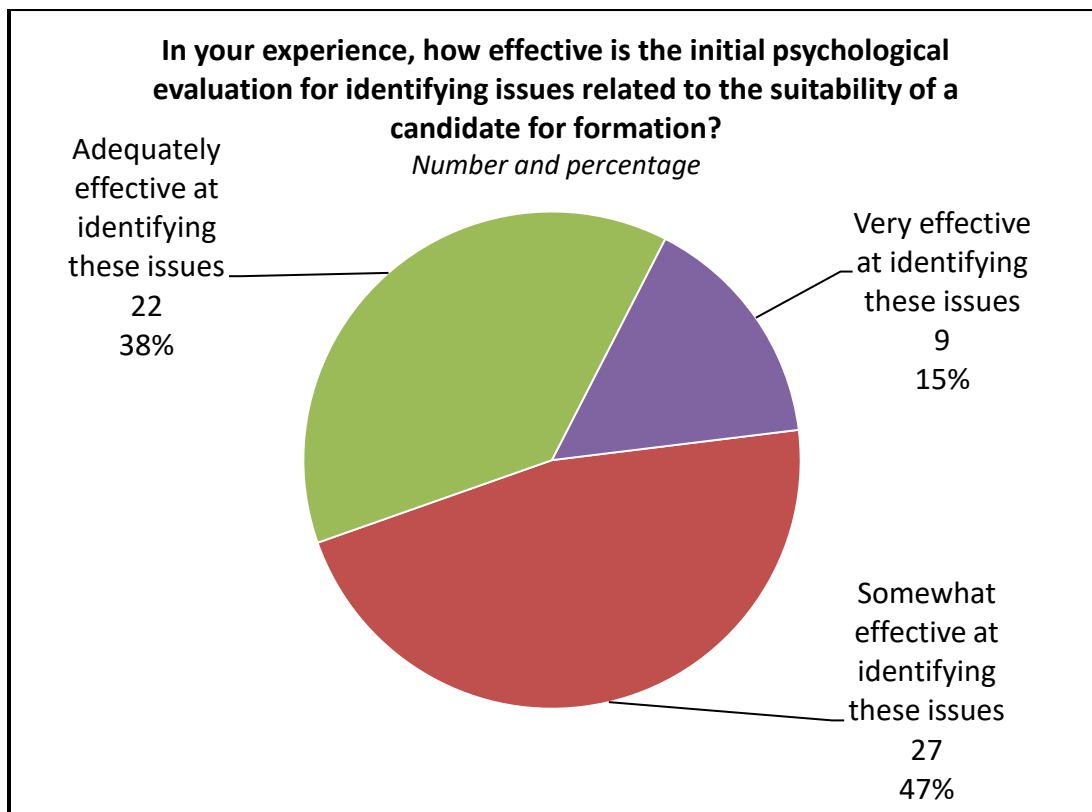
Finally, one formator from another country and another formator involved in preparing men for a religious institute also weighed in the need for better psychological evaluations that take the cultures of the candidates into account better.

Formator 7: Now, when I went to seminary, we didn't do psych evaluation, so I never went through one. But ones who are going through now, it's very rare to find a psychologist who is very familiar with different cultures and so on, and can read the nuances in the responses of the men. For Latinos, yes. Hispanics, you might find one every now and then somewhere. But other cultures, Asian, African, not so much. So, I guess one has to just do their best, given the information they have. Yes. Yes. A couple of international seminarians recently to some of the psychologists we use here, and yeah, they've given them the general battery of tests that are given to everybody, and I'm not sure that they always come back with a good read on the men. Yeah.

Formator 3: He also is handling, like for instance, we have some men who are international and didn't come with psych evals because apparently other countries don't value psychiatric interventions the same way we do and don't do it for their formation, which is baffling to us. But we're trying to get them some evaluations before they move on to the second year into novitiate. And he's been working on trying to find psych evaluations in their language, support them. He also is a liaison for people who are looking for more intensive psychiatric evaluation or counseling. And so, he sets up relationships with men to find counselors for them in the area and very loosely monitors with them, like, are you actually going?

## Mental Health Professionals

A plurality of mental health professionals say that initial psychological evaluations are “somewhat effective” for identifying issues related to the suitability of candidates for formation.<sup>31 32</sup> Combining the two most positive responses, 53% say the initial psychological evaluations are “adequately effective” or “very effective” at identifying those issues.



## Interview Findings from Mental Health Professionals

All of the mental health professionals interviewed were asked how best a mental health professional can get a good psychological evaluation from persons whose first language is *not* English, as many of the tests depend on how well the candidate understands what is being asked. One had a suggestion to go to the Catholic Psychotherapy Association to find someone fluent in the language to do the testing (presented first), with the others admitting they do *not* have a good suggestion of how to bridge those language and cultural gaps (following the first excerpt).

<sup>31</sup> Two percent of mental health professionals did not respond to this question.

<sup>32</sup> While “not effective at identifying these issues” was offered as a response choice, no one selected it.

Mental Health Professional 8B: Again, if, depending on their fluency in English and, you know, at what point they acquired English as their second language is always an important thing to know at the onset, initially, we do try, if possible, to find an examiner. So, I had somebody reach out who needed an individual of Vietnamese background. And so, through the Catholic Psychotherapy Association, I sent a message out in the listserv and I had, you know, responses that we're able to identify somebody in that area who could actually provide that assessment in the native language. So that usually is our first goal, is to see if we can have somebody provide that, particularly if it's going to be that first psychological assessment, because a lot of the measures are not going to give us the same accuracy. You know, the MMPI with all of kind of the nuanced English language is going to be very difficult. That one is available in several other languages, but a lot of the other ones may be Spanish, but that's typically it. And so generally just assessing again how long they have been, you know, acculturated what their fluency in English is, and then trying to find an examiner in their language.

Mental Health Professional 6: Yeah, that's a significant dilemma. Now, we have some where the person has had, the seminarian candidate has had a lot of ESL work done, and so they're pretty good. Maybe they're not ideal yet, but they're pretty good. And so, I just move slower and make sure that I'm understanding what they're saying. And I might reword it. That can be okay. Probably not ideal, but that can be okay. In some of the cultures, say Vietnamese, and we have some from Korea sometimes, and that can be more difficult, especially in the testing itself, and especially if the man does not speak fluent English yet. So, we've had a couple of candidates who are from Vietnam, who only recently came into the country, and it's been difficult to find a psychologist who can do some testing. We've been blessed with one or two Vietnamese psychologists who have helped in those kind of situations. But it is something that I'm continually learning more and more about the cultures that we have.

Mental Health Professional 3: Probably. I mean, I haven't done too many. I've done a few here and there, cross cultural evaluations. And I try to focus on the individual, not make any kind of cultural assumptions, but I also just try to situate myself in relation to the person in front of me. And so, if, you know, English is not their first language, I'm going to reflect on that. I'm not going to take each one of their words at face value. I'm going to think, okay, well, clearly there was a translation, so I'm not going to interpret this as heavily as I might with someone whose English is their first language. So, and I'm going to write that into the report as well. And so, yeah, and sometimes you can administer some of the tests in like, Spanish, for instance. I do not speak Spanish, so I like, don't do interviews in Spanish or anything like that. But you could always recommend or find an evaluator that does. And it depends on the person's fluency and their acculturation and all kinds of factors on whether or not that would be warranted. But with the Rorschach, for instance, there's not a ton of research on the cultural implications of it, but to me, it seems

that, you know, it is pretty broad and applicable more universally. You know, it's going to capture what's going on in the person's mind and sometimes cultural themes will emerge. You know, I just, I just had one recently where somebody was born in India and raised in India for like the first 15 years of his life. And I think that, that perhaps within that culture there's a little bit more of an emphasis on competition, being the strongest man kind of thing. And that came through on the Rorschach that he had those concerns on his mind and that he might like, infer a competition in a situation where there might not even be one. And that may be a cultural thing, but nevertheless it's still going to be on his mind as a particular individual. And I don't need to necessarily say that this is a cultural thing as much as I need to say, like, this is on his mind. These are the things that he's concerned about. But yeah, it's important to kind of take that into consideration, like whether something is cultural or not.

Mental Health Professional 5: Yeah. Well, I think that's an area that I can definitely personally use the most bolstering in, particularly there's such a — I mean, when possible, I will administer some of the tests like that are in Spanish, depending upon, with native speakers, if they're more comfortable in their native language. With Spanish, it's easy to find tests, like especially the personality inventories translated into it, but more difficult when you get either certain dialects. I think with seminaries from different African countries is kind of the big challenge. So, a lot of it is actually just kind of like trying to do my best and looking and doing research and figuring out what would be some factors or how things could be interpreted. But a lot of times what I'm stuck with is using the battery that I know and trying to just — and in writing up the results, being very cautious in the interpretation. Sometimes that's the best that we can have. If any questions come up, being able to consult specialists that can take a look and say, okay, this might be what you're looking at potentially and, like I was sharing, non-identified information. But I think also just understanding differences in particular. There's such a vast array of Latino and Hispanic cultures and just like, I think there's an assumption that there's a homogeneity in that. [...] But, no, I will definitely put my hand up and say that's an area that I'm weaker in.

Returning to the mental health professionals, some also stress how important it is that the feedback sessions include the seminarians and that they recognize what their goals are as a result of the psychological evaluation. Some also lamented that many vocation directors skip those feedback sessions and that it is to their detriment to do so.

Mental Health Professional 4: I really emphasize the working with the man himself. And so, when I do psych assessments for guys, I give the feedback to them directly first before there's any conversation with the formation. I'm open to a three-way conversation when there's a desire for that, but if a man's going to be the agent of his own formation, I think those are some little things, but really helpful things that can help with that where it's like

we're working with the guy directly. He has an opportunity to kind of take ownership of that.

Mental Health Professional 5: Yeah, I mean, and I do my utmost to honor that. Obviously, I have to professionally, but just in terms of the trust and the relationship. And so that's why it's delicate even when the man knows that some of that information is going to be shared with the rector because he's the one making the final decision on the votes. But I found that men really buy into that. They have to build trust with me first. And then I do assure them that I'm not going to share anything with the rector until I clear that with them. And occasionally at the time I was like, well, this piece of information needs to go, but we can discuss some particulars around it maybe. And then there's usually almost always buy-in on that. And I think that's helped them to really like, as much as they can, protect this space in terms of counseling, that they can really have it be their own.

Mental Health Professional 3: I'm not usually involved on the seminary side. I don't think I've ever heard from a seminary with the vocations directors once I give them the report, it's a mixed bag. Some of them will reach out to me if they have questions, some don't. Some want to be involved in the feedback session, some don't. So, it's sort of a mix. I'd say predominantly I don't hear from them very often, but there are a few dioceses where I have, so I do. And I should clarify, I do a mix of evaluations. So, I do some via telehealth remotely, and then I do some here at [Location] in person. And so doing it here in person. The diocese that we work with, they're a lot more communicative and they will kind of like ask for, you know, specific things or like be more attentive to who the man is. There's a little bit more conversational as we're doing it and even afterwards also, I find that post ordination evaluations. So, like once the guy's already been through seminary, usually, you know, the vicar, whoever's kind of making the recommendation, they tend to be a little bit more involved and kind of want to get in on the feedback session or have more conversations for clarity. I find with the vocation's directors, I have more upfront conversations about what the process is going to be and then once we kind of establish the arrangement and the agreement, what's going on. Oftentimes I will only hear from them when they have new people for me. And occasionally if something is like a little bit complicated or it's like a tricky case, they might reach back out. But a lot of times they kind of take it and run with it.

## Areas for Improvement of the Initial Psychological Evaluations

Four of the five survey groups were asked to write in what improvements they would like to see in the initial psychological evaluations as well as those produced during the course of the formation period. The bishops and vocation directors gave the most similar responses, and so their suggested improvements are presented side-by-side below. Analysis of the responses from rectors and formators are treated separately. In addition to the open-ended questions about what improvements are needed, relevant findings from the interviews are presented as well.

### Bishops and Vocation Directors

Bishops and vocation directors were asked to write in their suggestions for any improvements they would like to see in the psychological evaluations they receive either initially or during a candidate's time in formation. Unlike the closed-ended questions on the survey, this provided them with an opportunity to mention topics not specifically included in the survey. A comparison of the areas of improvement identified by both groups are presented in the table below, with the groups differing somewhat in the frequency in which they identified areas. A complete transcription of their suggestions is presented in Appendix II.

| <b>Psychological Evaluation Areas for Improvement:<br/>Bishops and Vocation Directors</b> |                      |                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of comments mentioning each area of improvement</i>                         |                      |                                     |
| <b>Area for Improvement</b>                                                               | <b>Bishops<br/>%</b> | <b>Vocation<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> |
| Revisions of the testing and/or the evaluation process                                    | 43                   | 36                                  |
| Improved assessments of the qualities needed for pastoral ministries                      | 30                   | 26                                  |
| More in-depth history and cultural background assessments                                 | 20                   | 19                                  |
| Greater focus on measures of maturity and growth                                          | 18                   | 38                                  |
| More frequent updates from seminaries about areas of concern                              | 9                    | 24                                  |
| Help identifying competent psychological evaluators                                       | 9                    | 14                                  |
| Enhanced assessments of problematic mental health areas                                   | 7                    | 14                                  |
| Better assessments of a candidate's capacity for formation                                | 5                    | 19                                  |

## **Bishops**

Bishops were asked to write in a response to this question: *Briefly, what improvements would you like to see in the psychological evaluations you receive initially and/or during the course of a man's formation period?* Sixty-five percent (67 of the 103 bishops) responded.

Eleven, who are excluded from the analysis below, praised the evaluations and/or offered no areas for improvement (16%). Below are some examples of these comments:

The reports I receive are detailed and comprehensive.

My experience in reviewing psychological evaluations is that they are good for weeding out the truly damaged candidate and should not be admitted to formation.

I am satisfied with the evaluations I receive. That said, they are a snapshot of the candidate, and however comprehensive, the evaluation is a tool to support the essential with the one-on-one formation, spiritual direction, which together with pastoral experience assess suitability for ministry.

Ours seem to be thorough from what I can tell. It is hard to predict what happens when someone reaches 40 when others factors seem to lead to mid-life crisis in vocation. Most weather it. Some need additional help and knowledge of useful tools to assist them in this next phase of life.

The 56 remaining responses mention areas for improvement that have been grouped into the nine categories below:

- Revisions of the testing and/or the evaluation process – mentioned in 43% of responses
- Improved assessments of the qualities needed in pastoral ministries – 30%
- Greater focus on measures of maturity and growth – 18%
- More in-depth history and cultural background assessments – 16%
- More frequent updates from seminaries about areas of concern – 9%
- Help identifying competent psychological evaluators – 9%
- Enhanced assessments of problematic mental health areas – 7%
- Better assessments of a candidate's capacity for formation – 5%
- All other improvements – 4%

A more detailed description of each of the categories and some sample responses are presented below.



## Revisions of the Testing and/or the Evaluation Process

Among the 56 responding bishops, 24 mentioned revisions of the tests or of the evaluation process more generally. Areas for improvement include having tests that better predict future behaviors, more frequent testing throughout the formation period, improved ways of conducting feedback sessions, more clear language in the written evaluations, and concrete recommendations that detail how they can be followed up on. Below are some examples.

- Identify key obstacles to healthy function and how they are determined and assessed - Identify steps taken to address/manage/improve these areas - Prognosis of long-term improvement, updated regularly - Likelihood of response to resources - Conditions at first assignment to facilitate long-term success.

Concrete and direct statements especially when the seemingly optimistic language is more "fingers crossed" hopeful than the candidate can go forward and succeed.

To the extent possible (and many psychologists/psychiatrists shy away from this), being slightly more prescriptive and not just descriptive in their assessment. Maybe not as a direct part of the psychological evaluation, but to include a personality assessment tool such as Culture Index would help to round out the portrait of the individual, in terms of assessment, as well as how to best accompany and motivate the man throughout his time in formation.

A better projective test as the results of the Rorschach don't always seem to fit the person.

Evaluation can tend to be too theoretical. Need to be specific, grounded in reality.

Specifics regarding any manner of follow-up with the candidate following the assessment (i.e. review of the assessment results).

Prefer face-to-face with the evaluator or with the seminarian present for the evaluation.

I would like new evaluations every 2 years.

Updating the original psychological test at some point in formation would be helpful.

Need for more practical suggestions as follow-up.

I would like to see a clear plan of action on the recommendations given in the psychological evaluation to help the candidate move forward.

### Improved Assessments of the Qualities Needed in Pastoral Ministry

Seventeen bishops mention the need for better measurement of the aptitudes and skills needed in pastoral ministries after ordination. They include those below.

Better prognostication during the course of formation – how he will function and relate (or not) with his brother priests and in the context of parish ministry.

Specific comments about whether or not this man presents a profile that is problematic to the people of God. Can this man live out and understand "obedience"? Can he live in community?

Great information on communication skills and human formation.

I would appreciate a deeper assessment of the candidates' ability to work with women.

More emphasis/evaluation of emotional intelligence, and ability to work with people, and to socialize appropriately in a group and individually.

Evaluation of a strong work ethic, not living from day off to day off, vacation to vacation. The ability to make a life-time, forever commitment.

The tendency towards clericalism needs to be addressed more effectively during formation. It would be very helpful to identify the psychological motivators that lead candidates to easily adopt an attitude of moral and social superiority together with a sense of entitlement.

Overall, quite satisfied. If there are instruments that bring into sharper focus an applicant or seminarian's propensity to adopt rigid views regarding ecclesial life, including devotion, liturgy, moral teaching and social justice, that would be helpful.

### More In-depth History and Cultural Background Assessments

The need for more in-depth histories of the candidates and how their cultural backgrounds will affect their candidacy and post-ordination life is mentioned 11 times by bishops. The comments below illustrate the kinds of suggestions made.

I think a more thorough examination of transitory versus non-transitory same-sex attraction would be helpful. Additionally, I think some tool to examine the long-term effects of pornography use on a candidate's suitability and freedom/capacity for self-giving would be useful. I think psychological instruments that might account for country of origin/cultural/ and linguistic issues will be more necessary as the diocese becomes more diverse.

Every active homosexual lies on their history. They say they are straight and their only sexual activity was once or twice with a woman.

I would like to learn more about a candidate's family of origin and on issues that he has taken on due to his parents' backgrounds. Also, more in-depth analysis on one's ability to make a lifelong commitment would be helpful.

Immediate and prolonged examination of a candidate's family of origin and an exploration of any challenge found therein.

More focus on an individual's psychosexual history.

Better cultural competence, so many candidates have limited English language.

A consistent way to evaluate both Anglo candidates and candidates from other countries.

#### Greater Focus on Measures of Maturity and Growth

Ten bishops suggested having a greater or improved focus on measures of maturity and growth ten times. Areas mentioned include their coping skills, being resilient, the ability to trust, the capacity to be obedient, and the ability to make long-term commitments. Some examples of these comments appear below.

More in depth examination of human "maturity."

Greater awareness of growth towards affective and psychosexual maturity.

Ability to process one's own human emotions and express them appropriately.

Ability for emotional growth. Maturity.

Continue to assess a man's needs and ways in which healthy coping skills can be taught. Develop healthy trusting relationship between a young man and bishop.

-More in-depth examination of human "maturity" -More in-depth examination of family of origin issues + mechanism preemption/evaluation -Issues relating to tendencies to enhance, participate or encourage "parallel formation" by social media, groups or self-outside seminary formation.

### Help Identifying Competent Psychological Evaluators

Among the 56 responding bishops, five mentioned help in identifying a better pool of evaluators who understand the mechanics of and goals of the formation process and what is required to live as a cleric.

Quality of the evaluation depends on the doctor who administers it.

More Catholic psychologists needed to perform the evaluations. Long wait times + delays in getting results.

The psychological results are only as good as the psychologists who reads and interpret the results. Always good to give seminarian feedback from psychological test. Does he accept it?

### More Frequent Updates from Seminaries about Areas of Concern

Five bishops wrote in the need for an improvement in how well seminaries update dioceses about their seminarians' areas of growth and of concern. They include these:

I would like to see discussion areas where a candidate has stalled, i.e. where he is not making further progress.

We need psychologists. None willing to issue updated reports on students' progress on the face of claimed confidentiality constraints. Practice differs among providers.

We are finding that most of our seminarians desire a therapeutic counseling experience. Our seminaries do not have counselors on staff so we are spending more money for them to receive counseling. It might be nice for our seminaries to have therapists on staff.

### Enhanced Assessments of Problematic Mental Health Areas

Concerns about the overall mental health and areas where mental problems might develop are mentioned four times by bishops, including in the comments presented below.

More information on these IQ Intellectual abilities. Capacity for leadership. Major psychological issues. Same-sex attraction. Ability to handle stress.

The conclusion/recommendations are not specific. Be more specific. The evaluations need to indicate if further testing is needed to ascertain basic suitability (ADHD, autism, executive function disorder, narcissism, dyslexia).

More studies of narcissism and bipolar issues on ministry.

### Better Assessments of a Candidate's Capacity for Formation

Three bishops mention the need for improvement in areas affecting a candidate's capacity to be formed well during their time in the seminary. The comments include these:

Whether or not problems uncovered can be addressed, corrected, and healed.

#61 of the new Program of Priestly formation states the thresholds of human formation. Psychologist should address these in their evaluation. Also, there have been psychologists who try to predict how a man will act in the future due to his evaluation. I do not like this type of judgement, almost predetermining if a man should be accepted to seminary or not. That has to be room for grace and even miracles, if we are going to follow a healthy Christian pedagogy.

### All Other Improvements

Two bishops mentioned areas for improvement that do not fit easily into the categories described above.

I do not receive any of these evaluations and thus, I did not answer #8. It would be very useful to me as the Diocesan Bishop to have them.

I recommend mandatory mental health evaluations for priests and laypersons involved as seminary faculty members in the formation of seminarians. These evaluations could help ensure that those guiding future clergy are emotionally and mentally prepared for the challenges of the role. Identifying and addressing potential mental health concerns early could improve the formation environment and the protection of seminarians.

### ***Vocation Directors***

Vocation directors were asked to write in a response to a similar question: *Briefly, what improvements would you like to see in the psychological evaluations you receive initially and/or during the course of a man's formation period? Please be specific.*

While a total of 45 wrote in a response (85% of the 53 vocation directors responding), three, who are excluded from the analysis below, praised the evaluations and/or offered no improvement areas (7%). Examples are below.

I think that so far, they are good as far as they go!

Typically, we receive two psych evals during a man's time in seminary. One at the application stage. Most of our applicants are young, late teenage to middle 20s. I cannot think of what improvements I would want. We spend a fair amount of time getting to

know the man before the psych eval, and so the eval is an expansion on each man and what is specific to him, as well as making sure we did not miss anything glaring. More detail is always good, but also recognizing at this stage, there is still much to be formed. By the second eval, right before theology, we know the man even better and it is a chance to check against our assumptions and understandings of the man.

The 42 remaining responses mention areas of improvement that have been grouped into these eight categories:

- Greater focus on measures of maturity and growth – mentioned in 38% of responses
- Revisions of the testing and/or the evaluation process – 36%
- Improved assessments of the qualities needed in pastoral ministries – 26%
- More frequent updates from seminaries about areas of concern – 24%
- Better assessments of a candidate's capacity for formation – 19%
- More in-depth history and background assessments – 19%
- Help identifying competent psychological evaluators – 14%
- Enhanced assessments of problematic mental health areas – 14%

A more detailed description of each of the categories and some sample responses are presented below.

#### Greater Focus on Measures of Maturity and Growth

Sixteen vocation directors identify an area for improvement in the area of measuring maturity and growth more effectively. Below are some examples of their suggestions.

Regarding ongoing psychological evaluations for men receiving counseling and/or therapy, I would like to see better plans regarding needed growth and realistic expectations of the process to make that growth. Sometimes I've seen seminarians spend 5-6 years in seminary working on the same thing in counseling. There has to be a greater insistence on whether the individual actually possesses the capacity for the growth needed.

Psychological evaluations of seminarians should go beyond basic personality tests to assess emotional resilience, stress management, and relationship skills. Using clinical interviews and standardized tests provides a comprehensive understanding of a candidate's psychological profile, enabling better discernment and formation of mature and spiritually grounded priests.

Initially, I feel that the reports are exceedingly thorough; so much so that it is difficult to track everything with every man throughout his years in initial formation. I would like to see evaluations that follow-up specifically on the recommendations from the initial report

so that a man's growth (or lack thereof) can be documented and applied to any assessment of readiness for orders. Also, given my understanding that personality disorders do not develop in men until their mid to late twenties, a screening for personality disorders might be added to the readiness assessment prior to ordination.

I would like the psychological evaluation to be done in person and not over Zoom. I would also like to see a better follow-up from the seminary faculty on what the psychological report recommends for the seminarian. Another psychological evaluation in the second or third years theology might be helpful for the seminarian to know more his desires, areas of growth and development.

I think the psychological evaluations we use are helpful. They're not magic, and they're part of a broader relational process. I think we can do better in helping the candidates themselves learn from the results so that they form a starting point to an ongoing process of growth.

I would like the initial report to clearly identify areas of concern and areas of strength. And I'd like some general recommendations on how to support the seminarian in both of those areas.

#### Revisions of the Testing and/or the Evaluation Process

Improvements in the areas of testing and/or other parts of the evaluation process are mentioned by 15 of the vocation directors, including these suggestions.

Greater practicality in recommendations made for growth would be helpful. For example, instead of simply indicating that further counseling would be helpful for a particular area, more detailed guidance on what the goals of that continued counseling should be, how future ministry would be impacted if not addressed, and how future ministry may be impacted if adequately addressed.

I would like the language in psychological evaluations to be more uniformly frank and honest. Some evaluators do this and are very upfront about their concerns with a candidate, but others couch the language and make it difficult to utilize the evaluation as a tool.

I think it would be helpful if psychological reports give concrete suggestions for what needed to be worked on along with a suggested time frame of when it would generally be addressed.

The most helpful improvement that I would like to see would be availability of the psychologist to provide direct feedback to the man. Scheduling a meeting with him and

the Vocation Director or at least directly with the man rather than a brief phone call would be beneficial.

The content and recommendations of the psychological evaluations we receive are consistently strong and helpful. The biggest improvement that I would like to see is in the timeliness of being able to schedule these evaluations and in receiving the final reports. The limited availability of trained psychologists who understand the Church and seminary formation often means that it takes not only weeks but months to move through the psychological evaluation process, from initial contact to reception of final report.

No improvements desired for the initial eval. Maybe it would be helpful to receive a more formal psychological evaluation as an assessment halfway through formation.

### Improved Assessments of the Qualities Needed in Pastoral Ministries

Eleven vocation directors mention a need for improvement in the areas of measuring the qualities needed in pastoral ministries. Examples include the comments below.

Identifying potential issues about rigidity, clericalism, and ultraconservatism. Identifying if the man understands collegiality and obedience and live it and is willing to obey the bishop and work with others: priests, parishioners, women, etc.

More specifically how any issues might hinder their ability to function as a priest.

Emotional intelligence and common sense. Is this man able to relate to people well and will he be perceived as "normal" by the parish community?

I would like to see some improvements on the topic of affective maturity, particularly around assessing 18-25 year olds and 25+ year olds. Also, it would be really helpful to get a sense on how to respond to those applying to seminary who are likely or definitely on the autism spectrum. Lastly, it would be nice to see evaluations address not just the man's capacities, but also "likely outcomes" for things like living a life of chaste celibacy, being available to serve and lead people, etc.

Evaluations should test a candidate's ability to manage change, disappointment, and the pressures of ministry. More precise tools to detect underlying issues such as narcissism, scrupulosity, deep-seated anxiety, or difficulty with obedience and authority.



### More Frequent Updates from Seminaries about Areas of Concern

Ten vocation directors mention improvements in the ways seminaries assess and communicate how much candidates are growing. Below are some examples.

I am very fortunate in our diocese that the initial psychological evaluation has been very beneficial to know the applicant and identify some areas of growth. However, I would love to see a better use of the results in the formation process at seminary. In particular with follow-up from the seminary psychologist.

I would like my men to meet with the house psychologist periodically AND receive reports on my seminarians. Once they are accepted, they don't get another psychological evaluation. This would help me to see the amount of growth over the years of formation.

The major theologate our diocese use does not share clinical reports with the diocese of the seminarian. This is extremely frustrating for me, and it has been shared with the seminary. The seminary counters that sharing the clinical report would hinder the freedom the man and therapist have to be able to work together and bring healing. When a man is seeing a therapist prior to seminary admission, we get more information from that man's therapist (after he signs the release), than we do from the therapists used by our seminary. Please have therapists employed/contracted with seminaries provide full clinical reports to the seminarian's diocese.

I would like the communication between the seminary and the diocese to be concrete in their suggestions/areas of concern. Not always, but with enough regularity the vagueness of the concern leads me to believe the formators are putting down suggestions/areas of concern just to cover their bases, not because they actually see the vague concerns they indicate. Be concrete.

### Better Assessments of a Candidate's Capacity for Formation

A need for better assessments of candidates' capacity for formation is mentioned by eight of the vocation directors. Some examples appear below.

I would like there to be more focus on those first couple of areas. Our partners that provide our psychological testing provide a 'spiritual director' element to the evaluation, where I think more focus could be placed on the capacity for 'being formed,' rather than a more elementary discourse about 'who God is for you?' As seminary goes along, I believe it is crucial that the external forum directors (formation advisors) are gifted and able to help the seminarian learn how to work on things they may be struggling with in the internal forum in the external forum as well. This builds trust and helps the man to be a better man of community with his brother priests after ordination and helps him encourage his people to be open and honest about their own brokenness with him, not just

in confession. I would like to see more concrete tools that help us to encourage men to 'open up,' properly and within reason, and if they are not doing so, make this a serious point of discussion and discernment. I believe that the Institute for Priestly Formation is an incredible resource that teaches healthy vulnerability, and there are pre-seminary programs like 'High Calling,' that give men tools to share what is going on with them outside of the internal forum. The propaedeutic year is designed to focus on these skills as well, and I have found that our men who have done the propaedeutic are typically more comfortable with healthy self-disclosure. I know that many external formators in seminary are focusing on this. Having been ordained in 2018, I can say that one of the most transformative parts of my formation was when my rector stated, 'anything you are struggling with in confession can, and should, be brought out healthily and appropriately into the external forum.' This was a game-changing statement for me in the early 2010s, as I was still influenced by a culture that was more 'just hide what you are struggling with and deal with it in confession.'

I would like to see ADD and ADHD addressed more. Also, I would like the area of past traumas to be investigated. It would also be helpful to have psychologists trained in the understanding of what the church is looking for regarding benchmarks/thresholds for acceptance.

#### More In-depth History and Background Assessments

Eight vocation directors seek improvements in how in-depth the measurement of the candidates' history is conducted, such as these comments.

An increased focus on family of origins and relational identify. Use of Internal family systems formation and healing therapy.

For the initial evaluation, it would be helpful to specifically address a candidate's previous sexual experiences to have some understanding of how pervasive the behaviors may be in the main. For the initial evaluation, it would be helpful for the psychologist to have some sense of affective maturity and how the assessments given to the candidate speak to the main level of this important characteristic.

Depth measure, from minor to grave, for same sex attraction and activities.

#### Help Identifying Competent Psychological Evaluators

Six vocation directors say help in finding competent evaluators to conduct the evaluations is needed. Their comments include those below.

It has less to do with the evaluations and more to do with the evaluators. When I first started, I heard from the seminary that the psychological evaluations we were getting

were basically useless, so I had to work hard to find good psychologists who would put more effort and attention into the evaluations. They have produced great evaluations which have proved incredibly useful.

I am not sure that the psychological evaluations, per se, are what needs improvement. It is difficult in our area of the country to find a clinical psychologist who has a Christian anthropology that allows them to provide the feedback that would be helpful to us. With all of the changes over the last 25 years in the mental health field regarding same sex attraction, sexual activity, etc., some topics of interest to us may be minimized or even left out in the final report.

The greatest difficulty that we have faced is not simply finding experts (psychologists, counselors, psychiatrists, psychological experts) but those who not only share our faith but also our understanding of the Human Person. Many psychological experts are Catholic; however, due to their own limited formation in Christian Anthropology, they make recommendations or analyze the data collected through the lens of anthropological schools and structures that run counter to our Christian anthropology. Currently, we have found wonderful partners. However, we foresee a need to provide education and formation to the psychological experts we use to ensure they approach the psychological evaluation with a clear understanding of both the Human person and the psychological factors that play into the discernment of the priesthood.

I think that psychologists could receive more direction from the USCCB on how to conduct evaluations and explain them to us.

### Enhanced Assessments of Problematic Mental Health Areas

Finally, six vocation directors identify improvements needed in the assessments of problematic mental health areas. Below are some examples.

Additional testing regarding potential leadership qualities and interaction with others. Also, more in-depth testing regarding personality traits and disorders inconsistent with or compromising healthy ministry.

Specific tests that test for narcissistic personalities or tendencies. The underpinnings of "will this man be able to live in the joy and freedom of Obedience... or whether it'll be a cross for him, will he fight back, etc."

I would like to see the areas that I left unchecked in the previous answer. [Editor's note, these were: Psychosexual history, Inclination to sexual activity with a minor, Sexual orientation, Trauma history, Psychopathic deviance, Physical and medical concerns, Intellectual limitations, Severe learning disorders, Family of origin issues.]

## Interview Findings from the Bishops and Vocation Directors

When asked how the psychological evaluations could be improved, the sole bishop who was interviewed also noted that he wishes there was more than one testing period for psychological evaluations during the years a man is in formation.

Bishop 1: Just that psychology is the kind of thing that I really think is a good thing, but you just kind of have to take it as it is. But you have to know your instruments. I think some of these are, like I said, they work. They can be very revealing. Only the time they made the biggest effect is when the discoveries through the testing were so different than what I — that's the really advantage. You will miss stuff that I think it can pick up some things. And then, of course, when they got into the seminary, as they became amplified, I'd say, oh, these are really big problems. This is not just — they said tendency towards. No, this is pretty core to his personality. Now we got to decide what to do with it. So, it does keep your eyes open. Now, if they disappear, it kind of goes out of my mind. And all the places I've been, we've only tested once. We didn't test again at the very end. The very end is too late. That's unfair. I have a little place that I did interviews, and maybe College of Theology, they'd have a psychological interview with someone, going over the previous tests, and maybe some testing, but very little as a kind of way to mark the transition. But doing one, to me, do one like a month before the academic year or a year before, but already that's — I guess it's okay to do it, but I don't know.

Interviewer: It'd make more sense if it was something targeted to a specific area rather than like a general?

Bishop 1: I think by that time you should be able to see the issue. But of course, like I said, sometimes — now, I think if the guy came to you and you're using someone else's psychological test, then I would definitely, at some point in the future, do what — if you didn't do one right away, do another one because you don't know what circumstances that happened.

The vocation directors also mentioned in their interviews some areas where they would like to see improvements in the psychological evaluations. Two are advocates for there being more than just the initial psychological evaluations over the course of a man's time at the seminary:

Vocation Director 1: So, we use two evaluations, one at the beginning, to help us ascertain suitability for formation. Is the man capable of being formed? And then we do a second one looking at and asking the question of how has he grown and what does he need to be aware of kind of going forward. And if we see regression rather than growth, then it raises a couple of flags for us that we have to explore to figure out what are we

discerning then with the man. Like, does he continue or not? But yeah, we use two, sometimes three, depending on the particularity of the man or what was highlighted in their evaluation.

Vocation Director 4: I think the biggest thing for me is more of a gut feeling thing than anything from my particular experience. But I'm going to put a lot of emphasis on the front end, like before they enter seminary, and I thought about some of the, especially like the young men just graduating high school, it's like, how much scrutiny can we put on this guy? How much is he going to change over the years before we get there? So, for me, a big topic and thing that I'm trying to consider how to really evaluate is where do we put the, how do I want to say it, the gate a little bit further down the road as far as moving some of that initial assessment to enter the seminary into a little bit farther down the road. So, that's that where, once a guy's really matured and grown through formation, they'll say, okay, now let's really take a very scrutinized look at him before candidacy or before diaconate ordination, something like that. That's my biggest thing as far as assessment goes. Because even with the psychological evaluations and things, it's a great thing to see that at the beginning, but then we don't repeat that necessarily closer to ordination. And, so, I think if we did some of those things, repeated closer to ordination, that might help us to pick up a couple of things that maybe we weren't paying attention to that will have a great effect further on down the road.

Two vocation directors wish the reports were more user-friendly with a better written recommendations section, one of whom is excerpted here:

Vocation Director 1: I think they're probably more on the esoteric level than they are on the level of like — it's more like we'll talk about forming rather than actually forming. So, I think sometimes, especially for the man, it can be super challenging.

Two other vocation directors had noted that not all mental health professionals do adequate evaluations and how important it is to have ones who understand seminary formation, celibacy, and the Catholic priesthood. One explains why below:

Vocation Director 7: Yeah. So, for the initial psychological evaluation, it would be good for the psychologists that do those evaluations to have an understanding of the parameters of what the Church is asking. That's for the whole of everything, the parameters of the stages of seminary formation, just an understanding of it. I've had different psychological evaluations and one of them was for someone who understands. This lady is part of this Catholic Psychological Association and she's in a little cohort with other psychologists who do screenings for candidates, applicants. And so, she has an awareness of what's being asked from a psychological perspective. And I've had other psychologists who haven't had that awareness, and it was not very helpful at all. And so, what I would want

is a general understanding of what it is from a psychological standpoint that would be disqualifying for someone to enter seminary, or if it's not a red flag that disqualifies them, that they would give suggestions of what the man would need on a psychological level and how that might play out in a seminary.

An area that vocation directors wish were covered better in the psychological evaluations is autism.

Vocation Director 5: Honestly, not really. I mean, I'm just kind of looking forward to, God willing, to even make it. But even if I couldn't, just the fruits of it. But one thing though that I've been kind of pondering is just like candidates who either have formally been diagnosed with autism or experiencing some sort of kind of autistic traits, if you will. It just seems like autism is increasing in the wider society, and I'm seeing more candidates who seem to have the capacity to serve as priests, but also exhibit these kind of autistic traits that may kind of, as one priest put it on our admissions board, and we just interviewed a guy who was formerly diagnosed with Asperger's years ago, like, he doesn't have all the equipment, so to speak. And so we were trying to look at is like, well, do we still think he has the capacity of priesthood? And so anyways, it'd just be helpful if we had some — like we have for a number of other things, like what are some kind of best practices. I mean, the autism spectrum isn't linear. I've learned a lot about that last year. But still, like, how much autism is too much autism. Kind of like other stuff, like, can a guy be bipolar and be a priest and et cetera. So that's one that's sticking out where I don't feel like I have a lot of tools to work with when I'm working with these candidates.

Interviewer: So, you haven't seen that area covered, for example, on a psych eval that you would receive from your diocese.

Vocation Director 5: Right. [...] Yeah. I mean, it gets noted, but not in the kind of detail that I think would be helpful. [...] It's primarily social. Yeah. That's the opportunity to kind of enter into kind of depth of relationship with people, social cues, in some cases. Yeah, so the kind of social, also kind of the fixations. Like, there's one guy I'm working with right now who, he can bounce around to different topics, but then I remember one conversation, I almost fell asleep as he kept coming back to altar serving. And I asked eight questions that were wildly different than altar serving and he found a way back every single time. And so, with a parishioner, they're not going to just sit through that. They're just going to walk away. So, anyways, yeah, so primarily social. The guys with maybe the intellectual, it's maybe easier to kind of ferret that out, so to speak. But social is, it's murkier.

## Rectors

Seminary rectors were also asked to write in a response to this question: *Briefly, what improvements would you like to see in the psychological evaluations you receive initially and/or during the course of a man's formation period? Please be specific.*

While a total of 23 wrote in a response (85% of the 27 rectors responding to the survey), one praised the evaluations and two wrote in responses that did not identify any areas for improvement. These three comments below are excluded from the analysis below.

I am pleased with the assessments that are a part of our application process. It is an assessment that has been in place for decades and has been evaluated and adjusted on an ongoing basis. We have a psychologist who works with our vocations office to stay on top of trends and needs.

I am working now with Doctor [Name] to improve our initial psychological evaluation that will help to tailor our formation according to what has been identified in the evaluation.

In the previous answer, I responded based on a kind of average report that I had in mind. Some reports are much better and some worse. We give these instructions to dioceses to share with their psychologists [Website listed]. Some follow them much better than others.

The 20 remaining responses mention areas for improvement that have been grouped into the four categories below:

- Establishing universal standards for the testing, reporting, and recommendations – mentioned in 35% of responses
- More extensive testing in specific areas – 30%
- Adding a second psychological evaluation during the formation period – 10%
- All other improvements – 25%

A more detailed description of each of the categories and some sample responses are presented below. A complete transcription of these comments appears in Appendix II.

### *Establishing Universal Standards for the Testing, Reporting, and Recommendations*

Seven rectors mention improvements in the area of standardizing the testing, reports, and recommendation formats for psychological evaluations. The lament that the quality of the assessments varies so greatly. Below are some examples.

I would like to see a more specific and universal rubric to be used by all to ensure that each candidate is being evaluated equally.

Normally a guideline for a psychological evaluation is provided in the admission packet. Unfortunately, not all the vocation directors consider the diversity of tests as necessary for admissions. Vocation directors do not read those evaluations to discern the men they are sending to the seminary. This situation provokes tensions between admissions and dioceses.

The psychological reports received initially at admissions vary in quality. In some cases, they are superficial and insufficiently attentive to psychological disorders or unhealthy behavior incompatible with the vocation. In ideal circumstances, our seminary would make use of a single resource or team of clinicians with whom our admissions board could interact and delve more deeply into the backgrounds of particular applicants. At the present time, the dioceses and communities of apostolic life and consecrated life make use of different resources for psychological screening, and our board does not typically have access to them after the written report has been submitted to us.

Standardization of testing provided; overall improvement of quality and depth of the reports (the quality varies dramatically from diocese to diocese).

More consistency among evaluators from the different sending dioceses. Sometimes we have to ask for more or specific kinds of testing to be used, for example, a projective test.

While most of the psychological reports we receive are thorough, the formats that they use vary. This can make it hard for someone not trained in psychology to follow. Some reports perhaps go into excessive detail.

### *Improved or Deeper Testing in Specific Areas*

Six rectors ask for improved testing in some specific areas, including: affective maturity, base personality, intellectual abilities, sexual orientation, narcissism, their motivations in applying, and any occultism in their backgrounds. Some of these topics are mentioned in the comments below.

Issues relating to affective maturity need greater emphasis.

I would like to see more about the motivations of applicants in entering a seminary, especially along intellectual and affective lines.

Some seminaries are asking for an IQ test or another test to verify intellectual ability or need for support. We have not specifically asked for this as of yet.



Include a base personality evaluation combined with a clear explanation of areas to pay attention to and how the formators can help the young men work on his weak areas and blind spots, together with clear suggestions of skills to develop. Include a clear evaluation of any significant psychological difficulties together with an explanation of how this might play out over time, things to pay attention to, what the young man needs to do or work on and how the formators can help and accompany him in this endeavor.

Degrees or shades of Narcissism, which narcissistic tendency can the seminary work with, and which ones are red flags.

More extensive cognitive testing would be helpful in ascertaining a candidate's ability to successfully accomplish coursework and other demands of intellectual formation. In addition, greater attention to and concern about same-sex attraction would be helpful. For example, better assessment would enable me and my colleagues to better ascertain whether the same-sex inclinations are 'transient' or 'deep-seated.' Additionally, while this does not fall specifically in the domain of psychological assessment, greater attention to the occult (history, connections, activity) is needed.

While the questions about the acceptance of men with deep-seated same-sex attraction are primarily theological, more can be provided through the psychological evaluations. I have also found that we need more information from a candidate who identifies as "heterosexual," or "homosexual." A further description of what a candidate means by that would be very helpful for his propaedeutic formation.

#### *Adding a Second Psychological Evaluation during the Formation Period*

Two of the rectors say a second psychological evaluation to be added during the formation period:

The psychological reports we receive for a candidate's admission to the seminary vary greatly. Some are good, others terrible. We have sought uniformity (making certain tests obligatory) and common standards. We have instituted a second supplementary psychological exam in Theology II. I have found this helpful. Among other things, this second test looks at possible personality disorders.

In addition to the initial psychological evaluation at the time of application to the seminary, I would like to see a second evaluation at the end of Third Configuration. Having been encouraged to grow in self-awareness, especially in the areas of human and spiritual formation, there are some men who become aware of matters that need the more attention and the assistance of counseling before they are ordained.

### *All Other Improvements*

Finally, five rectors identify other areas for improvement.

I believe that our psychological evaluations are comprehensive and helpful for developing formation plans for our seminarians. We have two psychologists who complete the initial evaluations and a staff psychologist who completes the evaluations during the formation period. The only improvements are related to the staff psychologist's ability to accurately assess the individuals without personal bias.

Important that formation directors have access to psychological information – keeping in mind the requirements of the law.

A clear diagnostic of the psychological assessment of the candidate.

Greater multicultural and multi-ethnic sensibility.

Besides recommending different kinds of counseling, I would like to be proposed with concrete benchmarks and practices that can be addressed and take place in the context of general formation.

### **Formators and Spiritual Directors**

Seminary formators and spiritual directors were also asked to write in a response to this question, which differs from those presented above: *Briefly, what improvements would you like to see in the psychological evaluations you have had knowledge of or reviewed initially and/or during the course of a man's formation period? Please be specific.*

While a total of 71 wrote in a response (64% of the 111 formators responding to the survey), nine, who are excluded from the analysis below, praised the evaluations their seminary uses (13%) and six more say they cannot respond because they have no access to the evaluations due to their role in their seminary (8%). Some of these comments are presented below.

So far, I think the psychological evaluations that I have seen meet the benchmarks for today's unique challenges for priestly formation.

With respect to the psychological evaluations we receive I believe we have overcome such concerns. We submit all admissions psychological evaluations to an independent highly qualified clinical psychological with significant seminary formation experience who reviews the psych eval for quality and completeness and provides us with his opinion and recommendations. We share the results with the diocese and will not admit the candidate unless the recommendations are followed and, if necessary, a new evaluation completed and provided to us.

The Formation Faculty does not review a man's psychological evaluation. The Diocesan Vocation Director may highlight a concern when presenting a review of the men to the faculty.

Most formators at my seminary do not have access to seminarian psychological evaluations. These are reviewed only by seminary administrators and a select group of formators who are on the seminary admissions committee. Due to my relative ignorance of these evaluative instruments, I do not have any specific improvements to suggest.

The 55 remaining responses mention areas for improvement that have been grouped into the nine categories below:

- More extensive testing in specific areas – mentioned in 29% of responses
- Improved formats for the reports and recommendations section – 20%
- Establishing universal standards for the testing, reporting, and recommendations – 13%
- Greater access to the information in the evaluations for formators – 11%
- Training of formators to better utilize the information in the evaluations – 7%
- Training dioceses to vet candidates better before sending them to a seminary – 7%
- Better integration of mental health professionals into seminary formation – 5%
- Training the evaluators who conduct the evaluations – 5%
- All other improvements – 11%

A more detailed description of each of the categories and some sample responses are presented below. A complete transcription of these comments appears in Appendix II.

### *More Extensive Testing in Specific Areas*

Sixteen formator and spiritual directors mentioned the need for more extensive testing in specific areas, with some of their suggestions presented below.

More information about any history of trauma in the candidate. In addition, I wonder if it is possible to assess and communicate the likelihood of whether certain psychological conditions would improve in a formation setting. Or whether they need to be dealt with previous to entering formation. We had the case of a seminarian who consistently displayed academic problems, i.e. poor performance and inability to complete assignments on time. This seemed to stem from deeper issues. He was given "second chances" over a period of two years and finally dismissed. There had been no improvement at all; and I think it would have been to our benefit and his benefit to have recognized earlier that his condition was not able to be dealt with in the seminary formation setting.

Cover things like attachment disorders, actually ask men their sexuality, family of origin issues, learning disabilities, anxiety and perfectionism.

A more thorough exploration of familial relationships, especially those which might bear on the candidates personality development, e.g. sibling relations, parents marital interactions (abusive or domineering). I think a shift in attitudes toward psychosexual development is needed so candidates can honestly explore their self-knowledge and maturely interact with members of both sexes.

Identifying pathological mental conditions that would require perennial medication and thus preclude acceptance into the formation program. E.g., clinical depression, autism, bipolar, schizophrenia, et al.

Instruments to test mental dexterity/toughness.

I would like to see evaluators include the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III (MCMI-III) to assess personality tendencies that may be difficult to identify via interview.

### *Improved Formats for the Reports and Recommendations Section*

The need for improved formats for the evaluation reports and the recommendation sections is mentioned by 11 of the formators. Some examples are below.

Analysis of a candidate's capacity for self-awareness/acceptance/possession/gift, more extensive report on family of origin, report on how the candidate is disposed to receive correction/encouragement/formation. I find the psychological assessments we receive to indicate relatively little about the man himself outside of whether or not major psychological issues (whatever they may be) are present. Reports that indicate MERELY the absence of major psychological issues do not assist me in dealing with the seminarians I work with.

I would like to see a more balanced approach in psychological evaluations. In some cases, the final recommendations seem to emphasize the negative results of one particular test, while overlooking the positive outcomes from another test that assesses similar areas. This can create an imbalanced or skewed view of an individual's overall psychological profile. A more integrated interpretation that considers both strengths and challenges would provide a clearer, more accurate picture of the individual's mental health. Additionally, I think reports would be more helpful if they included concrete, actionable proposals for addressing any identified issues, where possible. Instead of focusing primarily on counseling, it would be beneficial to incorporate strategies for development within the broader context of the person's overall formation and personal growth. This could include practical recommendations for improving skills like

emotional regulation, resilience, or interpersonal communication, which could be applied in everyday life or personal development programs.

Not all psychological evaluations are created equal. I appreciate reports that go beyond ruling out red flags. The best reports incorporate information from the individual's developmental history along with the results of the psychological testing. Concrete recommendations about how to address certain issues and insights into the history and nature of those issues can be very helpful in formulating a formational plan.

Consistency and guidelines for specific areas of growth. Also, offer guidelines to the formation team on: How should the formator read the psychological report?

Some reports use auto-generated comments on things like ink-blot tests or other tests, and these are often very general and even somewhat contradictory. Pages and pages of computer-generated analysis are much less helpful than the evaluation and comments on the interview. Specific discussion of the candidate's religious perspective and some indication of the candidate's flexibility in matters of personal piety and clerical culture would be helpful in assessing theological "rigidity." Discussion of the candidate's exposure to and engagement with other cultures and languages would be helpful. Similarly, the candidate's exposure to and engagement with other socio-economic groups, international travel.

### *Establishing Universal Standards for the Testing, Reporting, and Recommendations*

Seven formators identified a need for establishing universal standards for testing, reporting, and offering recommendations. Some of these comments appear below.

Perhaps there can be further standardization of language and terminology for seminary applications as an addendum to the USCCB guidelines, as characterizations of presenting issues might vary based upon the clinician or institution performing the assessment.

A standardized psychological assessment and reporting program to include psychometrics to address all aspects pertinent to priestly formation.

That there is a consistent format used and that the types of testing (i.e., specialized tests given to the candidate) are followed across the numerous dioceses that send men to the seminary.

### *Greater Access to the Information in the Evaluations for Formators*

Six formators say that granting greater access to the evaluations to formators would improve the evaluation process. Some of these are below.

I would be very grateful if the psychological information gained from the initial on boarding process was shared more broadly with formators, specifically, with the man's formation advisor.

With a sensitivity to the confidentiality of the psychological evaluations, sharing greater detail with formators that will assist them in journeying and evaluating progress in areas of deficiency.

Formators should access this information before any issues arise, just so that we know what we might need to be attentive to when meeting with the seminarian.

### *Training of Formators to Better Utilize the Information in the Evaluations*

A need for training for the formators to better utilize the evaluations is mentioned by four formators as a way to improve the process.

More clarity regarding the boundaries of use of psychological evaluations. There is tension within the formation team about the use of evaluations in formation and the level of training the formator would need to use the evaluation effectively.

Evaluations could be improved with general suggestions for appropriate interventions; formators are not psychiatrists and are not in therapeutic alliances with seminarians, so they/we need advice about what kinds of further therapy, evaluation, or other constructive help would be appropriate for different kinds of difficulties. Too often we "wing it" based on outdated pop psychology, and can end up doing seminarians a serious disservice.

### *Training Dioceses to Vet Candidates Better before Sending Them to a Seminary*

Four formators say the improvement needs to be at the diocesan level, with them better vetting candidates before sending troubled individuals to the seminary for the formation staff to sort out. Below are some of these comments.

Sending dioceses need to do a better job of vetting men and addressing psychological and all others issues before sending to seminary and expecting the seminary to do their due diligence and fix the man so they can be ordained.

The primary area where I see room for improvement is in regards to those who are admitted. Some dioceses seem to admit anyone into formation while leaving the seminary to sort out the issues. This is an injustice to the seminary and the Church. Someone who

shows significant relational and human affective maturity weakness should not even be permitted to enter a propaedeutic program, much less the developmental stage of formation. Neither place is the appropriate venue for those issues to be resolved.

### *Better Integration of Mental Health Professionals into Seminary Formation*

Three formators mention the need to have mental health professionals better integrated into their seminary life, with some of these comments below.

It would be great to have a psychological professional working with our seminarians to periodically report to the faculty at regular meetings.

There should be a full-time position of director of counseling.

### *Training the Evaluators who Conduct the Evaluations*

Better training for the evaluators who conduct the psychological evaluations was mentioned by three formators, with two of the comments appearing below.

The professionals who evaluate should do so according to the integral formation (4 dimensions) of seminary formation - this would be very helpful.

A concise opinion of the person performing the evaluation about whether or not the person is capable to serve people and the Church. While the evaluator does not make the decision regarding admissions, their professional opinion is valued and necessary.

### *All Other Improvements*

Finally, six formators wrote about other areas for improvement, with some of those comments presented below.

We currently do a second psychological evaluation in the second year of theology. I would like to see that second evaluation more openly compared to the initial one looking for evidence of growth and the needs for ongoing care.

Tailoring them to minority cultures such as Black, Native-American, Latino, as well as foreign-born seminarians.

After a man has been accepted and continues with counseling while in seminary, I would like to have a clearer understanding of his progress in counseling or lack thereof and whether the counselor thinks he has the freedom and ability to move forward in seminary formation.

## Interview Findings from Mental Health Professionals

Mental health professionals who participated in the interviews were asked what should be better included in the psychological evaluations. They mention improvements of what topics should be better covered. Two mental health professionals especially mention areas that are not adequately covered in the psychological evaluations they see as well as other areas they see that need improvement.

Mental Health Professional 5: I would say that the things that come out the most would be really two things. And I think this was where it's missed at least in history, is there's a lack of depth of psychosocial history, particularly with family. Someone doesn't have to know or be trained in like the adult attachment interview, but at least developing hypotheses about different attachment styles or problems potentially within the family is really helpful. I just get such little information in those sections. And then psychosexual, I think it seems like a lot of clinicians treat that in a very cursory manner. They ask general questions and just like give breadcrumbs, but they don't go into depth of detail. They can actually really help provide some good clinical information upfront to kind of like really know the extent of the issue and maybe what are some potential underlying psychological factors that facilitate and maintain their attachment beyond the obvious chemical issues in terms of hormones and neurotransmitters and all of that. So, yeah, I mean, it's not comfortable, but I think there's a lot of squeamishness about really diving deep into content of fantasies, what they're focusing on, how they access the materials, what materials they're looking at. Because you get just too much of general cursory like struggle with pornography and masturbation, it was daily in middle school, high school, but now it's under control.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Well, the thing the vocation directors were mentioning and their frustration was that it wasn't tested for initially, but as the guy went on, ADHD or being mildly on the spectrum, and they spent so much time and energy dealing with the symptoms rather than the underlying cause.

Mental Health Professional 5: No, it's not often assessed. I would agree with that. Yeah, that's a great point. I would say the autism spectrum symptoms are much more significant in terms of a rule-out potentially. And I think ADHD, there's a lot of debate on that, but that one's some kind of — I mean, I think some of the test assessments in terms of adding to the battery, I think it's good as a follow-up, particularly if I'm assessing somebody and there's just some discrepancies in terms of their academic history and what I see in their IQ test. Oftentimes in IQ tests, their poor performance, like on processing speed is usually connected with their personality and being more obsessive-compulsive and perfectionistic. And so, their efficiency is down, but that doesn't mean they have attention issues. But yeah, I would say that there just seems to be a growing number of candidates that are showing more autism spectrum symptoms. And so, yeah, that makes sense from



the formation advisors. Yeah, we've requested additional testing, but that hasn't been part of a standard battery.

[...]

Mental Health Professional 6: One is overall affective maturity. And I know we look at that and we have various definitions and certainly the PPF-6 helps us with that. But the integration of the man in terms of his ability to handle emotions, recognize emotions, be self-aware, understand what their weaknesses are, what their strengths are, and if there's been trauma in the past, that they have worked through a lot of that. I mean, it'll always be some scar and maybe a vulnerability, but that they've worked through it enough that they would recognize it if it started to reveal itself in interactions or some of the work they would be doing. Within that is the psychosexual integration. And that, frankly, is what concerns me, is that we don't have a good way, not really, to be able to assess how ready they are that way. Certainly, in terms of pornography use, we — now I'm talking widely because I don't have all the external ability to do things. But internally and a little bit external, especially if they come in in admissions with an issue, then that's made known externally and then the formators can follow that. And it should be followed up each year, et cetera. Anyway, I worry that we don't have a good way or good benchmarks early enough in their journey to understand how they're doing and whether they will have that interior freedom to be able to not only discern correctly, or discern, but also to live a life of a holy, happy priest. Now, I'm not saying that I'm worried about everybody that goes through, but there are concerns that there's not a way to really, really gauge that. Some are starting to repeat psychological testing before ordination to the transitional diaconate. We're very much in favor of that, but it's diocese by diocese. We don't require it. Even that might not help 100%, but it might help with some of the affective maturity questions and trauma and integration and that type of thing.

One mental health professional mentions that an organization he belongs to has had a meeting of vocation directors to try to learn how the reports themselves could be improved to make them more valuable and useful for dioceses. Another suggested that the recommendations sections of the report should be much more practical than they are.

Mental Health Professional 3: So, I try to write recommendations that are practically useful. And so, one of the reasons why I, like, I'm trying to facilitate more conversations with people on the other side is because I'm like, is this useful? Like, you know, I want to find out if it's actually practically helpful because what's the point of me doing all this if it's not actually implementable or if it doesn't make sense for the seminary side? So, but I try to think of, like, ways. For example, I'll write in my recommendations, ways the formators can address this person that will make it easier for them to build rapport or gain access to that person's trust or, you know, if the person is more guarded or if the person is

more dependent, like, let's say, and this is kind of common, we'll see dependency traits frequently. So, this is a frequent recommendation that I end up writing is like, you'll notice that the person will acquiesce and say yes, a lot. And actually, one of the challenges for them is going to be able to say no, which is difficult in a life of obedience. So, how can you facilitate conversations where you're allowing the person to be assertive and make decisions on their own while at the same time encouraging obedience. Right. Like, that's tricky. But I talk about how the person might need reassurance from formators at first, might need, you know, structured guidance, like, here's what you should do. And then over time, after they build good close relationships, then the formator might say to the person like, oh, you know, I wonder if you want to choose the reading that would help you with this? Or kind of like encouraging them to make their own decision. Or like, how do you think you could grow in this area to like help them take ownership? Because one of the things is they're always looking outside of themselves for that sense of direction if they have those dependent traits, for example. So, writing a recommendation like that, that like walks the formator through, how can you help get this person from point A to point B? Right. Other recommendations might be like emotion regulation. That's something that sometimes people have trouble. They may not acknowledge all of their feelings. So, we might write a recommendation of an exercise they could do to begin acknowledging their feelings or how a journaling thing that they could do or books that they could read that would facilitate that. A lot of times we'll recommend therapy. And I've been trying to be more clear because I've noticed this is an issue if we recommend therapy. I mean, I feel like we could recommend therapy for anyone. And when they receive that, they're like, oh, he needs therapy and they start to think that there's like this, you know, chronic issue that can't, you know, be addressed or whatever without therapy. So, I've been trying to be more clear that like, this person doesn't need therapy to sustain their functioning, but they could benefit from therapy to better understand themselves, grow in self-awareness, or have a therapist kind of walk along with them to help them understand how to handle their emotions, how to express anger, how to deal with conflict. You know, these different things that we see common commonly.

Another mental health professional suggests that, ideally, a psychological evaluation report should read like a plan for an individual for their human formation when at a seminary.

Mental Health Professional 2: I think in an ideal world, they should be coming up with like a human formation plan for each individual seminarian. That you get out of it where a guy struggles, what his weaknesses are across the board and really, like I said, tackle that. I feel like often, at least here, human formation is like a PowerPoint presentation. You and I know that that's not how people are formed, right. If my formation growing up was my parents reading me a PowerPoint slide, I don't know how formed I would be,

right. It's those interactions. It's watching my dad, watching how hard he worked. Okay, hard work is important. That's a value in my house. Not because it was on a PowerPoint slide, but because I saw it in action. In this house we confront each other. I see that. I see that firsthand. It's not something that is taught to me. It's not something I read in a book. It's something that I've experienced. And so that's kind of where I see, like, we need to get away from PowerPoint. These guys are in PowerPoint presentations all day. They're being lectured on the intellectual pillar all day long. Human formation should look different. It should be more of like a discussion, grappling with, interaction with, and not just presented with materials.

Finally, two mental health professionals think dioceses and vocation directors need to work better with the mental health professionals doing their psychological evaluation to figure out what their purpose is in getting them and how they plan to use them. The two were interviewed together.

Mental Health Professional 8B: Well, I think, you know, one of the important things at the onset is to clarify the purpose of this assessment. You know, we generally will ask if the seminary or religious order has certain criteria or certain questions they want to ensure are answered by the psychological assessment. So again, ensuring that all parties are on the same page of understanding. Again, the purpose of this assessment, and I really do feel that it needs to be comprehensive, you know, across multiple domains and then the utility of it, you know, can we make it useful to the formators, not only, you know, for entrance, but then also for growth information?

Mental Health Professional 8A: I would concur with all that. I think on my end, since we are doing vocational assessments with fairly devout people in the faith and using purely secular measures, which is what we're doing, which, which there's obviously lots of merit to that. But there has been there has in my mind I would like to see more of the, the blending or the overlap of the human and spiritual domains in the vocational assessment reports. And, and there's ways to measure those kinds of things and how they overlap well. The other thing I would say is the, the feedback itself when it comes to the assessments in my mind it needs to be somehow connected to a human formation mentorship program in order for it to have sticking power, so to speak. So that would include not only informing each of the key stakeholders, such as the vocations director or whoever is in charge there, and also the candidate, but also to some extent how these areas of human formation might be limited or strengths thereof, and then how that can be augmented through a mentorship program that, with someone that can accompany them in that in order to prevent future challenges and to have a helpful ear to talk to.

Mental health professionals have differing opinions on how important it is for those creating the psychological evaluations to understand Catholicism and Catholic anthropology. That translates into how well they understand lifestyles such as chastity and how healthy they believe homosexuality is. Below are some of their thoughts on the matter:

Mental Health Professional 5: I think that's definitely an issue. You can kind of tell in a way in the reports. But, again, we're a small number but I try and help diocese find clinicians, even if they have to travel multiple states, that have ideally their own Catholic anthropological view of the person and that they are familiar with the Ratio, Pastores Dabo Vobis, the Program for Priestly Formation, the use of psychological guidelines for the use of psychological assessment. Our guidelines in [Seminary] are very specific that the assessor should be familiar with these, and that what the final report should contain, and that we're really looking for recommendations for different areas for growth beyond like obviously there's any glaring issues, we want that, but we also want the report to speak to finer tuned things that can really help the men, whether it's going to be addressed in counseling or a combination of formation advising, spiritual direction and that.

Mental Health Professional 3: I think for the thing that I'm passionate about is trying to make sure that vocations directors and diocese are working with competent evaluators. And that can be tricky to determine because there's no standardized training. There's no real standardized measures or reports. So, what I'm trying to do in the field is to help at least bring the knowledge that we have together, collect resources and be a leader in the field to help other professionals that are wanting to do this work learn how to do it well, because that's something that, in the field of psychology is a bit of a gap. But I also think there's a gap in connecting the vocations directors with adequately trained...so, I'm kind of looking at both of those things, trying to help facilitate that within the CPA. So, what I would want diocese and religious orders to know is that there are a lot of professionals who do this and do it well, and they can find them if they contact the CPA, because we have a seminary assessment special interest group where there's a lot of professionals that participate that are doing ongoing education and training and trying to kind of more. Get more standardized, at least like baseline, hey, this is what you want to see in an evaluation. This is what makes a person competent to do this, so that the people doing it actually know what they're doing. And the evaluations that they get on the other side are actually worthwhile and helpful for both the candidate and the diocese.

Mental Health Professional 4: I think Catholic psychologists are too deferential to the church. And it happens a lot where vocations directors and bishops will, like, be instructing us. And of course, there's a value to that, and at the end of the day, it's the bishops that's making the call. But I think what we are missing in our deference to hierarchy is that psychologists have a science that we can help the church with. And so instead of the church telling us how to do psychology, I think psychologists — I would love to see the church more receptive to the wisdom of psychology. [...]

## How Effectively Seminaries Assess the Suitability of Men for Formation and Orders

All five surveys have questions about how effectively the seminaries they have attachments to assess the suitability of men for formation and/or Holy Orders. Bishops and vocation directors are asked one set of questions, with the other groups asked another set.

### Bishops and Vocation Directors

#### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

Approximately nine in ten bishops (92%) and vocation directors (90%) agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that overall, they are satisfied that the seminary they use is adequately assessing the suitability of men for formation and Orders.<sup>33</sup>

| <i><b>How much do you agree with these statements?</b></i>                                                                            |                |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined</i>                                                                    |                |                  |
|                                                                                                                                       | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation</b>  |
|                                                                                                                                       | <b>%</b>       | <b>Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                       | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>         |
| Overall, I am satisfied that the seminary we use is adequately assessing the suitability of men for formation and Orders              | 92             | 90               |
| The intermediate and final recommendations we receive from the seminary adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest | 68             | 65               |

About two in three bishops (68%) and vocation directors (65%) agree that the intermediate and final recommendations they receive from the seminary adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest.

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<sup>33</sup> The non-response rates for the bishops for these two questions is 0% to 2%, with 4% of vocation directors not responding to either question.

*“Strongly Agree” Only*

Roughly three in ten bishops (34%) and vocation directors (27%) “strongly agree” that overall, they are satisfied that the seminary they use is adequately assessing the suitability of men for formation and Orders.

| <i><b>How much do you agree with these statements?</b></i>                                                                            |                |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i>                                                                                         |                |                  |
|                                                                                                                                       | <b>Bishops</b> | <b>Vocation</b>  |
|                                                                                                                                       | <b>%</b>       | <b>Directors</b> |
|                                                                                                                                       | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>         |
| Overall, I am satisfied that the seminary we use is adequately assessing the suitability of men for formation and Orders              | 34             | 27               |
| The intermediate and final recommendations we receive from the seminary adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest | 7              | 10               |

About one in ten vocation directors (10%) and bishops (7%) “strongly agree” that the intermediate and final recommendations they receive from the seminary adequately predict how well a man later functions as a priest.

## **Rectors, Formators/Spiritual Directors, and Mental Health Professionals**

### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

Nearly three in five rectors (58%) agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that they know of instances where a seminarian was previously in formation for another diocese or at another seminary program (or their own), was turned away, but was accepted by another diocese/seminary and who ultimately proved to be suitable for ordination.<sup>34</sup> In comparison, about two in five formators/spiritual directors (44%) and mental health professionals (38%) agree they know of such instances.

| <i><b>How much do you agree with these statements?</b></i>                                                                                                                                                                                                |                     |                                                       |                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined</i>                                                                                                                                                                                        |                     |                                                       |                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Rectors</b><br>% | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b><br>% | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b><br>% |
| I know of instances where a seminarian was previously in formation for another diocese or at another seminary program (or our own), was turned away, but was accepted by another diocese/seminary and who ultimately proved to be suitable for ordination | 58                  | 44                                                    | 38                                              |
| In our seminary, there have been men who were initially referred for counseling, but who ultimately ended up receiving little or none at all                                                                                                              | 27                  | 17                                                    | 57                                              |
| We have advanced men to ordination in the past five years who have had serious issues that were not adequately recognized by our formation team’s evaluative measures                                                                                     | 24                  | 25                                                    | 54                                              |

More than half of mental health professionals (54% to 57%) agree that there have been men at their seminaries who were initially referred for counseling, but who ultimately ended up receiving little or none at all and that they have advanced men to ordination in the past five years who have had serious issues that were not adequately recognized by their formation team’s evaluative measures. In comparison, between one-sixth and one-fourth (17% to 27%) of rectors and formators/spiritual directors agree with each of these statements.

<sup>34</sup> Between 4% and 7% of rectors did not respond to this series of questions, with 7% to 14% of formators/spiritual directors and 41% to 49% of mental health professionals also not responding.

*“Strongly Agree” Only*

Rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals are more similar in what proportion “strongly agree” with the three statements below. They are most likely (12% to 19%) to “strongly agree” that they know of instances where a seminarian was previously in formation for another diocese or at another seminary program (or their own), was turned away, but was accepted by another diocese/seminary and who ultimately proved to be suitable for ordination.

| <p><b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b><br/> <i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i></p>                                                                                                                                      |                     |                                                       |                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Rectors</b><br>% | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors</b><br>% | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b><br>% |
| I know of instances where a seminarian was previously in formation for another diocese or at another seminary program (or our own), was turned away, but was accepted by another diocese/seminary and who ultimately proved to be suitable for ordination | 12                  | 13                                                    | 19                                              |
| We have advanced men to ordination in the past five years who have had serious issues that were not adequately recognized by our formation team’s evaluative measures                                                                                     | 4                   | 5                                                     | 14                                              |
| In our seminary, there have been men who were initially referred for counseling, but who ultimately ended up receiving little or none at all                                                                                                              | 0                   | 3                                                     | 7                                               |

- Mental health professionals (14%) are somewhat more likely than rectors (4%) and formators/spiritual directors (5%) to “strongly agree” that they have advanced men to ordination in the past five years who have had serious issues that were not adequately recognized by their formation team’s evaluative measures
- No rectors “strongly agree” that, in their seminary, there have been men who were initially referred for counseling, but who ultimately ended up receiving little or none at all. About one in 20 mental health professionals (7%) and formators/spiritual directors (3%) “strongly agrees” that there have been men who did not receive adequate counseling.



## **Interview Findings from the Rectors and Formators/Spiritual Directors**

Several rectors noted that the seminarian candidates they are receiving are qualitatively different from those they received in past years. One notes that they are more open to formation and counseling than past generations, another that so many of the young men come with no dating experience and higher anxiety than previous generations, and yet another two that they are less mature as young men in their 20s than previous generations. This is having an effect, all three say, on how well seminaries are able to form seminarians.

Rector 2: Yeah. I think this would be backed up by others. There's been a real change with Gen Z. I don't find kind of ideological resistance to formation as I think was sometimes present in the past. I find them pretty transparent. I also, do find kind of high levels of anxiety, and the anxiety, depression range of mental health challenges. I think for me, perhaps not for all of my colleagues in the field, but for me, the Jonathan Haidt book, *The Anxious Generation*, I was reading that and plugging in seminarians as I was reading through it. So, those would be kind of my points of emphasis that I would like to see tested in the study and whether that's true or is it just bound up with the type of seminarian we serve at [Seminary Name]. I'd like to know if it's a more widespread kind of dynamic. [...] I mean, this sounds like cheerleading, which rectors often have to do a lot of cheerleading, but they also — there's a real honesty about them, I think a particular kind of integrity, because they are in the system, they are being formed for the priesthood, sometimes without the support or much support at all from family and friends, lay friends, in their backgrounds. And it's a poignant thing. Pope Francis's word, accompaniment, has really stuck with many of us in this particular community, the importance of our accompanying them throughout the seminary, being present to them. I think a seminary is at its best when the faculty truly live with the seminarians as brothers, and develop that kind of fraternity, because openness kind of follows from that. Trust flows from that. And I do find a pretty high degree of that here. And that is in contrast to my earlier time in the seminary.

Rector 6: Just staying with this one issue, because it's not the most important issue or the only issue, but it is just in line with the same-sex attraction. They tend to ask a very simple question, are you heterosexual or homosexual? And I think there should be a little bit more an open-ended question regarding to that, and maybe a little bit more about dating history. So, one thing I noticed in the last few years especially is that a number of the men are entering seminary with no dating experience. None. They've never been on a date. And these are not just men that are coming in at 18, but you have guys that are 22, 23, and they've never been on a date. I mean, those things have to be opened up. It could just be, well, I was discerning your vocation by the time I was five and the blessed Mother told me directly, well, okay. Even then I'd still say, well, I think you should date. But I guess that's the kind of question. And then there's all sorts of issues. We're finding kind of a new one in regards to scrupulosity. Not necessarily like the sinful scrupulosity

that some people might have with OCD, or sexual or anything like this, but across the board, just a scrupulosity and anxiety. We see that anxiety is really an almost across the board issue that could be dealt with. And the quality just isn't there. We have some small rural diocese. They're very limited in who they can get. We have some exceptionally big diocese with some exceptional psychologists. And that's why I think whatever we get, our staff psychologist will review every one of those, write up his own summary report, and then allow us to fill in whatever still needs to be done.

Rector 1: Where I think there are challenges, and just speaking in general, not particularly about [Seminary Name], though we see it here, and not particularly about any given diocese, we see it all over, is a broader change in the level of personal maturity, human maturity that people bring when they come to the seminary, especially those who come right out of college or like in early 20s. So, I'd say that's my general observation, that assessment of suitability is good, it can always improve, and especially in that area of looking at personal maturity. Just preparation for life in general, not even really preparation for seminary or priesthood, but to be a well-adjusted professional person.

All of the rectors (and some of the formators) that talked about the counseling the men receive at their seminaries to address issues had the seminarian sign a waiver so the therapist could share their assessments with seminary personnel.

Rector 3: No, no. The update is different. So, it's not just the rector. Here it is. Okay. No, it's very, very different. Okay, so this is it. I hereby consent and authorize the release of any results, evaluations, reports generated by a qualified psychologist performing an evaluation of my suitability for the priesthood to the president-rector of [Name] Seminary. I hereby grant access to those materials, along with all admissions material, to the president-rector, and understand and agree that the rector may share those testing results with the psychologist or other appropriate professional retained by [Name] Seminary. I also hereby grant access to the president-rector, the vice rector and priest formators, the recommended formation goals that are created by the psychologist or other appropriate professional retained by [Name] Seminary. These formation goals will be created from the seminary and psychological evaluation by the psychologist or other appropriate psychological professional retained by [Name] Seminary. And so, I don't have to read everything.

Rector 6: We have a great psychologist. So, he's involved from the very beginning. He reviews all the documents, the psychological documents. He sits in on the interview. And then he's also available for counseling for the men that they themselves may choose to participate in. We don't know who's doing that, but he's available for that. There's another aspect that we call — it's just a term we've used here since even before I came, called

logistical referral.<sup>35</sup> So, if a seminarian comes in with some real issues that are flagged up, we ask the man to do logistical referral, which is at least a minimum of six sessions with the counselor, our counselor. And it could be anything. It could be anxiety, it could be pornography, it could be learning, whatever it might be. But the difference there is he signs a release in which the psychologist is able to share what they've discussed with the formation team, and then we're able to work with him in that way. Or a man in formation already, some things come up, we say, look, we need a little bit more information, we want to do logistical referral. And the man signs a release and it's shared in confidence with the rector and the vice rector and possibly the formator as well.

Formator 1: So, at our institution, any seminarian who's referred for counseling will be asked to sign a release allowing that psychologist to make a report. And our director of counseling services right now, I forget the exact title, the point person for that role, he counsels some of our seminarians. And so, he'll make a report, usually it's directly to the rector. He may well share something to the formation team. For those seminarians who have a different counselor, a written report will be submitted to the rector, and the rector will share it with us at his discretion.

### **Interview Findings from the Mental Health Professionals**

Some of the mental health professionals interviewed believe that there needs to be more than one psychological evaluation, with one especially valuable just before they are okayed for ordination.

Mental Health Professional 6: One is overall affective maturity. And I know we look at that and we have various definitions and certainly the PPF6 helps us with that. But the integration of the man in terms of his ability to handle emotions, recognize emotions, be self-aware, understand what their weaknesses are, what their strengths are, and if there's been trauma in the past, that they have worked through a lot of that. I mean, it'll always be some scar and maybe a vulnerability, but that they've worked through it enough that they would recognize it if it started to reveal itself in interactions or some of the work they would be doing. Within that is the psychosexual integration. And that, frankly, is what concerns me, is that we don't have a good way, not really, to be able to assess how ready they are that way. Certainly, in terms of pornography use, we — now I'm talking widely because I don't have all the external ability to do things. But internally and a little bit external, especially if they come in in admissions with an issue, then that's made known externally and then the formators can follow that. And it should be followed up each year, et cetera. Anyway, I worry that we don't have a good way or good benchmarks early enough in their journey to understand how they're doing and whether they will have

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<sup>35</sup> A term has been changed to shield the identity of the seminary.

that interior freedom to be able to not only discern correctly, or discern, but also to live a life of a holy, happy priest. Now, I'm not saying that I'm worried about everybody that goes through, but there are concerns that there's not a way to really, really gauge that. Some are starting to repeat psychological testing before ordination to the transitional diaconate. We're very much in favor of that, but it's diocese by diocese. We don't require it. Even that might not help 100%, but it might help with some of the affective maturity questions and trauma and integration and that type of thing.

Mental Health Professional 8A: I would throw one thing, one thing that I had worked with [Names] and I don't know, 8 to 10 years ago is in psychology, outcomes, the thing that has helped the most in kind of a trans theoretical approach to improving outcomes for clients in the last 10, 15 years is called routine outcome metrics. And the idea is that if you measure things more frequently and give feedback more consistently and tailor things to that feedback, you're going to have better outcomes. So, I would float in there. Not only the longitudinal kinds of things we're talking about here with the larger vocational assessments, I might even float to think outside the box a little bit, but I would float even like maybe even early on in their formation, maybe in the pre theologate having something like an annual kind of briefer assessment that would have an eye to the previous evaluations that they've done. But also look at these changes that you talked about, [Interviewer name]. Like just the, there's so much formation and changes going on just in the first few years. You have a very different person by the time they get to the theology, or at least we should. Right. In some ways. And so, so I think especially during those times, it would be nice to have more routine outcome metrics more frequently.

## How Same-sex Attraction Affects the Suitability of Candidates

Assessing how same-sex attraction affects candidates' suitability for formation or Orders was a topic on all five surveys.

### Directly Asking Candidates about any Same-sex Attraction They Have Experienced

Those in all five roles were asked if they directly ask candidates about any same-sex attraction they have experienced.<sup>36</sup> Mental health professionals (94%) are most likely to agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that, in their capacity in their roles, they do directly ask candidates about any same-sex attraction they have experienced. In addition, they are the group most likely to “strongly agree” (47%) that they have.

| <b>How much do you agree with this statement: <i>In my capacity, I directly ask candidates about any same-sex attraction they have experienced</i></b> |                               |                                 |                    |                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                        | <i>Percentage responding</i>  |                                 |                    |                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Do Not<br/>Agree<br/>%</b> | <b>Somewhat<br/>Agree<br/>%</b> | <b>Agree<br/>%</b> | <b>Strongly<br/>Agree<br/>%</b> |
| Mental health professionals                                                                                                                            | 3                             | 3                               | 47                 | 47                              |
| Rectors                                                                                                                                                | 42                            | 19                              | 8                  | 31                              |
| Vocation directors                                                                                                                                     | 13                            | 17                              | 40                 | 30                              |
| Formators and spiritual directors                                                                                                                      | 25                            | 30                              | 29                 | 17                              |
| Bishops                                                                                                                                                | 48                            | 15                              | 19                 | 17                              |

- Seven in ten vocation directors agree (70%) that, in their capacity as vocation directors, they directly ask candidates about any same-sex attraction they have experienced. Three in ten “strongly” agree (30%) that they have.
- Four in five rectors agree (39%) that, in their capacity, they directly ask candidates about any same-sex attraction they have experienced. Three in ten “strongly” agree (31%) that they have.
- Nearly half of formators/spiritual directors agree (46%) that, in their capacity, they directly ask candidates about any same-sex attraction they have experienced. One in six “strongly” agrees (17%) that they have.
- About a third of bishops agree (36%) that, in their capacity as bishops, they directly ask candidates about any same-sex attraction they have experienced. One in six “strongly” agrees (17%) that they have.

<sup>36</sup> Ten percent of bishops, 11% of vocation directors, 4% of rectors, 9% of formators/spiritual directors, and 39% of mental health professionals did not provide a response to this question.

## **Interview Findings from the Bishops and Vocation Directors**

The sole bishop who was interviewed was asked if candidates should be directly asked about their sexual orientation and provided this response:

Bishop 1: Only thing they gave me was that usually the question was asked pretty directly in the evaluations. And of course, it depended on the honesty of the candidate. That whole question really depends on the honesty of the candidate. In younger guys, guys that were coming out of high school who aren't kind of clued into the system, so to speak, would answer pretty honestly. Other guys might be more guarded, who know it's an issue. That's something that did come out sometimes in the psychological evaluation and in conversations with me is — because that would come up. I would ask about their dating life and things like that, somewhat indirectly at the beginning, and then ask them if they had any kind of homosexual experiences in their life. But again, the other issue with that is that sometimes as a rector, that actually emerged in the seminary. And so, someone that didn't think much about it, the questions began to emerge there. And that was a whole another kind of this thing of formation. Unfortunately, a lot of times it emerged by them acting out in some way inappropriately. And then it's really hard to assess that in a seminary.

A vocation director also mentions how important it is to ask candidate's directly about their same-sex attraction, dating history, and usage of pornography.

Vocation Director 2: Here's how I want to answer that. Because guys right now, like we flat out ask, when was the last time you were sexually active? When was the last time you looked at pornography? What is your frequency of looking at pornography? Our seminary house asks, what is your screen time on this thing? So, we ask those questions, we kind of get that information, and I think guys are a lot more comfortable sharing that than I would have been. I mean, maybe not comfortable, but maybe more free sharing that. So, we ask then, based off like the guy who comes to us, we do ask psychologists or like be aware, are there any concerns of like same-sex attraction or any concerns of like gender identity? We do ask those questions, and I don't know if like psychologists or the therapists are able to — I mean, we've heard answers. I have no concerns of acting out on same-sex attraction or something. So, I mean, if we ask that to a guy, like if a guy's previously been in therapy and we want to ask him that question, the therapist that he sees pre-seminary, I mean, that therapist addresses that. So, I appreciate that. I don't know how effective that is though. And I don't know if that answers that question.

## Bishops and Vocation Directors

### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

Roughly two in three bishops (62% to 69%) agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) with each of the first three statements about same-sex attraction in the table below. Vocation directors are slightly less likely to agree, with 53% to 57% agreeing with these statements.<sup>37</sup>

| <i><b>How much do you agree with these statements?</b></i>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                     |                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined</i>                                                                                                                                                                                           |                     |                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Bishops</b><br>% | <b>Vocation<br/>Directors</b><br>% |
| At least one of our seminarians has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction                                                                                                                                                                             | 69                  | 53                                 |
| I find the 2005 “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” from the Congregation for Catholic Education to be useful when determining the suitability of candidates for Orders | 68                  | 57                                 |
| At least one of our seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction, overcame it, and was no longer experiencing it at the time he was ordained                                                                                             | 62                  | 56                                 |
| I am comfortable ordaining a man who experiences deep-seated same-sex attraction as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy                                                                                                                               | 22                  | 9                                  |

Bishops (22%) are about twice as likely as vocation directors (9%) to agree that they are comfortable ordaining men who experience deep-seated same-sex attraction as long as they are firmly committed to celibacy.

<sup>37</sup> Between 8% and 42% of bishops and between 11% and 36% of vocation directors did not provide a response to this block of questions. The question with the highest non-response is the third one down in the table.

*“Strongly Agree” Only*

A quarter of bishops (24%) and vocation directors (24%) “strongly agree” that they find the 2005 “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” from the Congregation for Catholic Education to be useful when determining the suitability of candidates for Orders.

| <i><b>How much do you agree with these statements?</b></i>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                     |                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                     |                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Bishops</b><br>% | <b>Vocation</b><br><b>Directors</b><br>% |
| I find the 2005 “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” from the Congregation for Catholic Education to be useful when determining the suitability of candidates for Orders | 24                  | 24                                       |
| At least one of our seminarians has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction                                                                                                                                                                             | 20                  | 17                                       |
| At least one of our seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction, overcame it, and was no longer experiencing it at the time he was ordained                                                                                             | 22                  | 18                                       |
| I am comfortable ordaining a man who experiences deep-seated same-sex attraction as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy                                                                                                                               | 10                  | 0                                        |

- About two in ten bishops (20% to 22%) and vocation directors (17% to 18%) “strongly agree” both that at least one of our seminarians has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction *and* at least one of their seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction, overcame it, and was no longer experiencing it at the time he was ordained.
- One in ten bishops (10%) “strongly agrees” that they are comfortable ordaining a man who experiences deep-seated same-sex attraction as long as they are firmly committed to celibacy. None of the vocation directors “strongly agree.”



## Rectors, Formators/Spiritual Directors, and Mental Health Professionals

### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

More than seven in ten mental health professionals (85%), rectors (80%), and formators/spiritual directors (73%) agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that they are aware historically of at least one of their seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction.<sup>38</sup> In a related finding, fewer (41% to 58%) agree that they are aware historically of at least one of their seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction, overcame it, and was no longer experiencing it at the time he was ordained.

### ***How much do you agree with these statements?*** *Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Rectors<br/>%</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals<br/>%</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| I am aware historically of at least one of our seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction                                                                                                                                              | 80                   | 73                                                     | 85                                               |
| I find the 2005 “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” from the Congregation for Catholic Education to be useful when determining the suitability of candidates for Orders | 68                   | 63                                                     | 36                                               |
| I am aware historically of at least one of our seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction, overcame it, and was no longer experiencing it at the time he was ordained                                                                  | 58                   | 41                                                     | 53                                               |
| I know of bishops who send men to our seminary who are comfortable ordaining a man who experiences a deep-seated same-sex attraction as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy                                                                           | 42                   | 33                                                     | 47                                               |
| I am comfortable recommending (or encouraging) that a man who experiences deep-seated same-sex attraction be ordained as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy                                                                                          | 16                   | 12                                                     | 17                                               |

<sup>38</sup> Between 4% and 11% of rectors, 9% and 14% of formators/spiritual directors, and 41% and 49% of mental health professionals did not provide responses to this block of questions.

- While about two-thirds of rectors (68%) and formators/spiritual directors (63%) agree that they find the 2005 “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” from the Congregation for Catholic Education to be useful when determining the suitability of candidates for Orders, compared to about a third of mental health professionals (36%).
- Between a third and half of mental health professionals (47%), rectors (42%), and formators/spiritual directors (33%) agree that they know of bishops who send men to their seminary who are comfortable ordaining a man who experiences a deep-seated same-sex attraction as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy.
- About one in seven mental health professionals (17%), rectors (16%), and formators/spiritual directors (12%) agree that they are comfortable recommending (or encouraging) that a man who experiences deep-seated same-sex attraction be ordained as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy.

*“Strongly Agree” Only*

About a quarter of rectors (28%) and formators/spiritual directors (26%) “strongly agree” that they find the 2005 “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” from the Congregation for Catholic Education to be useful when determining the suitability of candidates for Orders. In comparison, 3% of mental health professionals “strongly agree” that they find it useful.

| <p><b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b><br/> <i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i></p>                                                                                                                                         |                      |                                                        |                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Rectors<br/>%</b> | <b>Formators<br/>and Spiritual<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals<br/>%</b> |
| I find the 2005 “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” from the Congregation for Catholic Education to be useful when determining the suitability of candidates for Orders | 28                   | 26                                                     | 3                                                |
| I am aware historically of at least one of our seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction, overcame it, and was no longer experiencing it at the time he was ordained                                                                  | 25                   | 14                                                     | 19                                               |
| I am aware historically of at least one of our seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction                                                                                                                                              | 24                   | 30                                                     | 51                                               |
| I know of bishops who send men to our seminary who are comfortable ordaining a man who experiences a deep-seated same-sex attraction as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy                                                                           | 15                   | 14                                                     | 20                                               |
| I am comfortable recommending (or encouraging) that a man who experiences deep-seated same-sex attraction be ordained as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy                                                                                          | 4                    | 3                                                      | 3                                                |

- Half of mental health professionals (51%) “strongly agree” that they are aware historically of at least one of their seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction, compared to 30% of formators/spiritual directors and 24% of rectors. In a related finding, a quarter or fewer rectors (25%), mental health professionals (19%), and formators/spiritual directors (14%) “strongly agree” that they are aware historically of at

least one of their seminarians who has experienced “transitory” same-sex attraction, overcame it, and was no longer experiencing it at the time he was ordained.

- Roughly one in seven mental health professionals (20%), rectors (15%), and formators/spiritual directors (14%) “strongly agree” that they know of bishops who send men to their seminary who are comfortable ordaining a man who experiences a deep-seated same-sex attraction as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy.
- Between 3% and 4% “strongly agree that they are comfortable recommending (or encouraging) that a man who experiences deep-seated same-sex attraction be ordained as long as he is firmly committed to celibacy.

### **Interview Findings from Rectors and Formators/Spiritual Directors**

Rectors and formators/spiritual directors were asked in the interviews how helpful they find the Congregation for Catholic Education’s 2005 document “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies” to be. While almost all find it at least somewhat helpful, most do wish that the terms “transitory” and “deep-seated” were better defined, including examples. That said, some find the vagueness useful as they believe such distinctions should be used as more of a backdrop for assessing the “whole man” instead of a checklist telling you whether to accept him into formation or reject him. Below are some of these observations.

Rector 1: Deep-seated, yes. I think that distinction is helpful. I think also it might have been helpful in that document if it had mentioned that any person with, quote, deep-seated tendencies toward identifying themselves according to their sexual orientation, homosexual or heterosexual, that could be a problem. If you have a person who's trying to be an ultra-masculine man, that's a problem. If somebody's primary personal identifier, in my mind, is so closely tied to their sexuality, whatever that may be, that indicates a problem. And I don't think that was brought out in that document. It was more or less solely about folks with homosexual inclinations, be they transitory or deep-seated. That I thought made it a little less useful than it could have been. But nonetheless, it's an earnest effort, and I found it somewhat helpful. It may be helpful for you to know, that I recall, at a 2017 conference by the then Congregation for the Clergy in Rome, which a lot of American seminary formators, about 100, were invited to. I bet a lot of them would be responding to the CARA survey you're working on, though that's eight years ago now. The question, what does deep-seated mean, came up, and it was systematically avoided. I remember one official, an archbishop from the Congregation for the Clergy, saying, it's a very important question, and in order not to give it, my words, not his, short shrift, we'll take that up in our next session, because the question came toward the end. It never came up. Somebody pressed the question again, it never came up. It was carefully avoided. So, in a way, I get that. That's the way the Church works at times. Kind of put something out

there and see what happens rather than make a very strong declaration. But it was a little frustrating that the Holy See provided guidance, but then wouldn't, I don't know, maybe wouldn't commit to it or wouldn't tie themselves, this is what we mean and we're sticking to it, or we're open to change. So, I don't know if anybody else has mentioned that to you. That was a major international conference back in June of 2017.

Rector 3: "Seminary Formation and Transitory Same-Sex Attraction." I believe it's very faithful. It's from Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, published in 2019. I have multiple copies of this. I'd say that this makes a distinction, as that document does, between transitory and permanent. I know it's hard to categorize, but most of life, you can't categorize things anyway. They're often Venn diagrams. I mean, there's fuzziness in life. So, understanding it more of as a spectrum rather than categories that don't overlap, then I find the document from Rome as very vague in my mind. But this is the one would be a practical application from understanding, which I have used and referenced. Does that help? Maybe it's more of a personality approach to life as I am a personality that is more comfortable than maybe others in having fuzziness in life and knowing that there is gradation and sometimes things, you can't really classify something fully in one category than another thing and fully another category. So, I'm like more comfortable sometimes when I read documents where everything is not nice and tidy.

Rector 2: Yeah. The topic comes up now and then, and the 2005 CDF document is always invoked. I think it is theologically sound. I think, as with many documents, including conciliar documents, it is the task of every generation to reformulate without losing the substance. So, I think we can flesh out the nuances having to do with same-sex attraction and an applicant's identity being very much tied up with the LGBTQ cultures of our time. So, I think it would be a good thing if it were looked at by an episcopal conference or by the Dicastery for Clergy for an assessment of it, and then maybe a rearticulation of the principles, the guidelines themselves. [...] Yeah. I use it and I would appreciate complementary restatements of it. Flesh it out a little bit more. How would our counselors, our network of psychologists, psychiatrists, flesh out what deep-seated means given — and again, in looking beyond our own community and seeking help from the mental health profession. Unfortunately, there's a certain ideological bias. Why are you even asking that question? Our efforts could be undermined if — and yet there may be some helpful resources in the psychiatric, psychological community that could shed some further light on it. So, to answer your question, again, I think it's a valid distinction and it remains part of our own thinking when approaching applicants with same-sex attraction, but I think additional complementary ways of speaking about this distinction would be helpful.

Rector 4: Yeah. In talking to vocations directors and bishops also, in terms of client dioceses, they also demonstrate familiarity with the document. And at the same time, they're like, well, what are your thoughts? And insofar as it allows for discernment on the

part of the diocese and the seminary, still, even though it provides some guardrails or some bumpers, if you will, it still, I think, while giving some common language to things, I think it still allows for quite a bit of leeway on the part of dioceses and seminaries as to how to apply that. And I think that's just commensurate with the science that you're dealing with in terms of psychology. So, there have been attempts. I think Kenrick-Glennon probably is the one that has kind of stuck their neck the furthest in terms of saying these are the things that we consider like deep-seated or what have you. But aside from that, most dioceses still interpret the document as having enough leeway as to be up to kind of personal discernment. So, I wouldn't say that it's unhelpful. I just think that if you're looking for, okay, what do you consider someone who's not eligible or someone who should not be in formation, I think most bishops and vocations directors agree on like, okay, if the guy is actively going to clubs and is on social media as advocating, I mean, besides the totally obvious, there's a whole range still there that still you could argue is acceptable. And it just depends on the bishop or vocations directors as to how comfortable they are with that. But none of them have really — I've never experienced as a rector, them holding their feet to the fire and saying, I want to know exactly what your standards are. They presume familiarity with the document and they say, well, it's up to your discernment as to how to handle that if you encounter it.

Rector 6: Well, I definitely find it to be very useful and helpful. Overall, I think it's a very good policy. If I had to add anything to it, I would say two things is that I do think it's important to interpret the document, the policy — it's not Church teaching — the policy through a theological lens. I think one of the issues we may struggle with is we want to interpret it purely psychologically. And first of all, we know that psychologists, as a general rule, would not accept this. They would not accept the Church's teaching on homosexuality. It's not a disorder anymore, according to their handbook. But I do think the policy is best and most helpful when it's understood through a theological lens, but also accompanied by psychology. And so, these are theological terms about celibacy, chastity, continence. Those are the primary lens that I look through, find it very helpful. If there was anything that we could do with more clarity, it would be, once again, I would say a theological discussion on what these terms mean. What is deep-seated? What is not deep-seated? I think that some of the other things are clear, the lifestyle. It's really that question of, what does it mean to have a deep-seated same-sex attraction. And I think that ultimately, I use the theological terms to put that into effect. But I find it very helpful and a good policy.

Formator 1: I think the short answer is yes, I find it useful, but it's only so precise. The distinction it makes between deep-seated homosexual tendencies and transitory homosexual tendencies, it's -- I understand it in practice, but trying to define the bright line — figure out which is which is tricky. What I am happy about it, what it does well is it gives formators a clear basis for discussing issues of sexual attraction. One of the things

I find myself often doing with our seminarians, at least for my advisees, is talking how do they experience love and being loved. So, I think the document's been helpful, but it might well be that the definitions need a little more work. [...] I don't think the psychological testing is letting us down. I think these questions — at least when I read psychological reports, they ask the question and the reporting has been adequate. What I think does happen sometimes, especially with younger seminarians, is that they'll squint to see what they want to see. Some of it may well be what you suggest, that they don't know themselves well enough, they're not able to make that discernment on their own. And some of that might well be the criteria aren't sufficiently well-defined. But a second part of that is if you're on that borderline, if you're getting close to — like, suppose you have a young man who's, say, 20 years old, has had some kind of same-sex thoughts in the past, never had an encounter though, he'll say, okay, these are transitory, let's not stress about that. And he may well be right about that. But then you get a little bit closer to somebody maybe at age 16, in high school. We all do dumb things in high school. And I'm not justifying it, but I'm saying that I'm also not willing to judge what the adult is going to do based on what the high school student did.

## **How Seminary Personnel Determine That Someone Has Worked Through Trauma Sufficiently Enough to Be Eligible for Ordination**

Rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals were asked to write in a response to this question (or a variation on it): *How do you determine that a man has or has not worked sufficiently through trauma to be eligible for ordination?*<sup>39</sup> Nineteen rectors, 59 formators/spiritual directors, and 32 mental health professionals wrote in usable responses.<sup>40</sup> Few wrote in just one way to determine that someone has worked through trauma sufficiently, with most writing in multiple measures they would want to witness.

The ways rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals suggested help them determine that someone has worked sufficiently enough through trauma to be ordained can be grouped into these two larger stages or categories:

- Positive signs while going through the process of healing from the trauma
- Positive signs that a man has healed from a trauma sufficiently to be ordained and function as a priest

Signs from the second stage/category are far more frequent than the first. More detailed descriptions of each of the categories and examples of each are presented below, with the suggestions of all three survey groups mixed together in the analysis.

### **Positive Signs While Going Through the Process of Healing from the Trauma**

Overall, these positive signs were identified by responding rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals among those most important from a seminary candidate while he is going through the process of healing from the trauma:

- The seminarian shows a willingness to address the trauma
  - Willingness to bring it to the internal forum
  - Willingness to meet with a therapist:
    - Consent to share must be granted
    - Can be with or without consent
- When it must be resolved:
  - If serious enough, must take time off to work on it full time
  - Must be resolved by the time they enter the Configuration Stage of formation
  - Must be resolved before ordination
- Willingness to bring it to the external forum
- Showing progress in therapy or with formators and spiritual directors

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<sup>39</sup> The non-response rates, including those who did provide a usable response to the question, are 30% for rectors, 47% for formators/spiritual directors, and 46% for mental health professionals.

<sup>40</sup> Some wrote in that they do not know or gave responses that just repeated a variation on the question itself.



- Is processing his emotions, gaining insights into how the trauma has affected him and continues to affect him
- Is beginning to articulate about how he is being healed

From that longer list above, some signs came up more frequently than others in the written-in responses from the rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health workers. A summary of those most common positive signs is below.

- The seminarian shows a willingness to address the trauma and bring it into the internal forum
- Is willing to meet with a therapist, with the seminarian consenting for the mental health worker to be able to share about the seminarian's progress or lack thereof with the seminary
- Sufficient healing must take place before ordination, but preferably by the time they enter the Configuration stage; if necessary, the man may need to leave the seminary for a period to work on resolving the issues full time
- He shows progress in therapy or more extensive treatment and is gaining insights into how the trauma has affected him and continues to affect him; he can articulate how he is being healed

Below are some representative comments. Formators and spiritual directors are most likely to have comments that fit into this stage, as they specify what a traumatized seminarian should be working on to resolve the trauma. Among the mental health professionals giving responses that fit into this stage, they are particularly likely to mention specific kinds of tests the seminarian should be subjected to. In addition, some respondents rely primarily on the self-report of the seminarian while others have mandated procedures. To view all of the comments written in, please see the parts of Appendices III to V with complete transcriptions of the comments from the rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals.

I would never allow a man to progress beyond discipleship stage if there was unresolved/unhealed trauma in his life. No one in Configuration Stage should still be working through this. If it happened that a trauma was discovered while a man was in the Configuration Stage, I would require him to step away from seminary formation to work to bring healing. An example of this would be someone in the Configuration Stage who developed symptoms and was ultimately diagnosed with depression. Keeping a seminarian in formation impedes progress in other aspects of human formation. *[Rector]*

Although I treat our psychological services as mainly an internal forum, I occasionally will mandate counseling with a report. The seminary is not a place for ongoing therapy. *[Rector]*

As a spiritual director, I look for how the man allows Jesus into the trauma he has experienced. This begins with his awareness and desire to bring this forward for healing. Following this is supporting the man by teaching him how to pray with traumatic memories and/or utilizing healing prayer and deliverance ministry to assist the man. As he prays through his trauma, continued openness to counseling and formation is vital to bring in the other aspects of formation. Finally, the man being able to narrate where he was, how Jesus has healed him, where he is now, and desirous of greater freedom are all things I look for in his suitability for advancement. Further evidence of this healing should be witnessed in human, pastoral, and academic formation with the ability to be more free in relationships, pastoral assignments, and academic work. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

The yearly self-evaluation of the seminarian and his yearly composite/report from his formation advisor is a very good tool for determining how much a man has worked or has not worked sufficiently through any concerns before ordination. These often are true reflection of the man's openness to formation and how much he has grown through the years. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

If he has made use of counseling/psychological services; if he is open and vulnerable about it in external formation advising and reflected how it will help or hinder his ministry as a future priest; if he has talked about it with some brother seminarians. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

With the referral for psychological treatment, receive written permission from the candidate to allow the treating psychologist/psychiatrist to share an evaluation of progress in treatment as well as capacity to make the lifelong commitment to priesthood with the stresses involved. I would also raise the issues that the person is discussing in counseling during individual meetings with myself. If the person has not processed things enough to be able to talk at all in an external forum, the person has not processed them enough to be ordained. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

We ask our staff counselor on formation staff to help us understand what the person is going through. If we have serious concerns with a man and we send him to counseling, we might tell him that we are requiring his counselor to sign off on certain benchmarks in his treatment. Of course, we asked for his consent. But without his consent, he may be dismissed. So, there is intrinsic pressure on him. But he also should understand that we are seeking his health and wholeness. So, the pressure is mitigated by our sincere concern for his growth. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

Psychological testing can reflect whether traumatic events are still actively distorting or negatively impacting his interpretations - relying on the Rorschach, Adult Attachment Projective, and close attention paid to the way in which he tells his story. If it remains

disorganized, incomplete, partial, or superficial it is likely that fragments remain unintegrated and are a potential liability. This of course all depends on the severity and intensity of the trauma, degree of resilience, and adaptive nature of defensive processes. If the person still has unintegrated trauma history but demonstrates high resilience and healthy coping with a commitment to keep progressing in treatment - this is a good prognosis. If the person has poor coping, lacks awareness, or is unwilling to address past issues and there is evidence to suggest it impairs his ability to form relationships, function well, or engage in formation/be receptive to feedback that would render a recommendation to step back and engage in depth oriented psychotherapy for a spell (1-3 years depending). *[Mental Health Professional]*

Unresolved trauma generally will manifest itself during a thorough initial psychological assessment that includes psychodiagnostic testing, a lengthy personal history-taking, and an interview with an experienced, licensed psychologist. Other interviewers and those who have had some ongoing contact with the applicant may also cite behavioral observations that elicit goodness-of-fit concerns. When applicants present with unresolved trauma as noted above, acceptance to a seminary formation program should be delayed until the resolution of the trauma. A man needs to be free of psychological baggage from his past in order to fully embrace and engage in a vocational discernment process without distraction. The long-term counseling needed to resolve trauma is not appropriate during the vocational discernment process. Should behavioral concerns indicative of trauma (addictions, relationship difficulties, psychosexual deviancy, etc.) present themselves AFTER seminary admission, formation should be interrupted until the underlying trauma has been addressed and resolved outside the vocational discernment process. A man seeking ordination who reports past trauma and shows no behavioral concerns, should be able to tell the story of his trauma and its resolution in a transparent and appropriate manner that is genuine, credible, and without emotional upset. If the resolution of the trauma has included professional counseling, the applicant for ordination should sign a release of information for the seminary rector or his designee to speak with the counselor in order to verify the resolution of the trauma. *[Mental Health Professional]*

No more Unresolved status on the Adult Attachment Projective. Little signs of reactivity to trauma-related cues. Greatly diminished or absent compulsive behaviors used to contain or cope with traumatic wounds. Able to tell a coherent story about what happened to them with good insight and emotion regulation. Forgiveness of offenders. *[Mental Health Professional]*

## **Positive Signs that He Has Healed from the Trauma Sufficiently to be Ordained and Function as a Priest**

Overall, these behaviors were identified by responding rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals among the important positive signs from a seminary candidate that he has sufficiently worked through the trauma well enough to be ordained and function as a priest:

- The seminarian has completed therapy and, sometimes, therapist has okayed him to continue in formation or for ordination
- Functioning well along all four dimensions of formation
  - Demonstrates self-care
  - Demonstrates emotional maturity
  - Can form appropriate relationships/friendships
  - Not engaging in victim mentality
  - Not narcissistic
  - His body language is appropriate for one at peace
  - Sets healthy boundaries
  - Not experiencing flashbacks, dissociation, unconsciously reenacting the traumas
  - Not experiencing serious anxiety or discomfort
  - Handles conflict appropriately
  - Has an appropriate response to authority and criticism or to being corrected
- Healthy coping mechanisms, free from compulsions and medications (in relevant cases)
  - Able to handle stress appropriately / demonstrates resilience
  - No compulsions, addictions or dependency issues
- Able to talk openly about the trauma and its effects on his life
  - Does not avoid the subject
  - Demonstrates self-awareness
  - Demonstrates self-acceptance / is able to forgive himself
  - Is not ashamed of what happened to him
  - Is able to forgive his offender/s
  - Demonstrates insights into his trauma
  - Acts appropriately when triggers to the trauma arise
  - Can articulate the healing that has taken place
  - Has successfully brought the experiences into his prayer and spiritual life
  - Trauma has been transformed into something lifegiving that will positively impact his ability to minister to others
- Willing to meet with the rector for an interview on the trauma
- Can function well as a priest
  - Can minister to others in a healthy manner
  - Can function as a leader
  - Able to minister to another with a similar trauma
  - Able to minister to an offender in the area of the trauma

From that longer list above, some signs came up very frequently in the written-in responses from the rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health workers. A summary of those most common positive signs at this stage is presented below.

- The seminarian has completed therapy and his mental health professional has okayed him to continue in formation
- He is able to function well and grow in all four dimensions of formation, which includes demonstrating self-care, having appropriate relationships and friendships, setting healthy boundaries, not experiencing inappropriate levels of anxiety or discomfort, and being able to handle authority and being corrected appropriately
- He can handle stress well, shows resilience, and can cope with the trauma and other stressors without compulsions or medications
- He is able to talk openly about all stages of his trauma, without that triggering an episode, including how he has experienced healing and how it has affected his life and ministry; he demonstrates both self-awareness and self-forgiveness, and is able to forgive himself
- He has successfully brought his experiences with the trauma into his prayer and spiritual life and can articulate how those experiences will positively impact his ability to minister to others
- He possesses the ability to function well as priestly minister who can minister to others without having it trigger him reenacting the trauma, including ministering to those with a similar trauma or someone who has a history of being an offender in the area of the trauma

Below are some representative comments. The signs that a man has sufficiently worked through trauma mentioned by rectors and mental health professionals are particularly likely to have fit into this stage or category. Further, the bulk of all responses best fit into this category. Similar to those in the previous stage above, some respondents say there needs to be mandated procedures while others suggest that simple observation by the formators can reveal how well a man has worked through a trauma. To view all of the comments written in, please see the parts of Appendices III to V with complete transcriptions of the comments from the rectors, formators/spiritual directors, and mental health professionals.

In most of the areas described in the previous questions, it would be wearing blinders not to care about them, but context would be necessary to evaluate where the man is. I would rely on reports from his psychologist (in most cases there would be one), what we see in terms of his sharing with his formation advisor, the behaviors that are manifested in the community, and what we see in pastoral assignments. I can think of a case of a man who had same-sex attractions and addictive behaviors related to pornography and masturbation. He saw a counselor, went on weekend intensive program, and continued in counseling. He spent a year out of the seminary, to allow the work to continue, without the pressure of an impending ordination date. He then was able to move on to pastoral year and back to formation. His openness allowed us to trust him enough to recognize the growth and see readiness. *[Rector]*

I rely on the Formator to keep me informed but I also meet with the candidates individually twice a year to discuss any concerns that I might have. For example, a seminarian has exhibited a high level of anxiety, is receiving counseling for this, and I am sensing that this is still present. I will have a meeting with the seminarian in the presence of his Formation Advisor and Spiritual Director (who just observes and listens) and engage the man directly. *[Rector]*

First and foremost, he should be capable of fulfilling his role as a priest. Additionally, he must have the ability to connect with others and minister to their lives, without allowing his own past experiences to cloud or distort his perception of others and their intentions. He needs to rediscover his trauma as a meeting point with God, in such a way that it becomes a strength rather than a weakness. *[Rector]*

I look for emotional, spiritual and human maturity revealed in a person's ability to accept his past and articulate it in a free, enlightened and respectful manner. The ability to integrate past episodes in the overall context of his life. The maturity of understanding that trauma, when processed, healed and integrated is not an obstacle to growth and service, but can be helpful for service if steered in the proper manner. *[Rector]*

Is he aware of how the trauma affects him? Can he talk about it in a healthy and appropriate way with superiors and formators? Is he attentive to healthy ways of handling situations that are difficult or triggering? How is he affected by any self-recrimination related to the trauma? Are there ways that the trauma inhibits his capacity to act in particular situations or among particular populations? If he is aware, able to minister to the people of God in all the situations that will arise, able to notice problem situations and know how to get the support he needs, does not avoid addressing the emotions, thoughts and feelings associated with it - then he is probably in a space where he has sufficiently worked through the trauma. *[Rector]*

A man is considered to have worked sufficiently through trauma when it no longer distorts his perception of reality, people, and relationships. Trauma should not continue to shape his worldview in a way that leads to negative or skewed interpretations of others or situations. Additionally, I look for evidence that the individual has confronted and integrated their past trauma in the light of faith. This means that, rather than allowing their trauma to foster resentment toward God or others, they have accepted it as part of their story and learned to rely on God more deeply as a source of healing and strength. Trauma, in this sense, becomes a point of transformation—where the person's faith grows, and their dependence on God deepens, rather than remaining a stumbling block to their spiritual and emotional well-being. For example, I have seen individuals who, after facing deep personal suffering, come to a place of greater empathy and understanding, allowing them to minister to others out of their own healing. Their trauma no longer

controls them; instead, it serves as a means of drawing closer to God and being a more compassionate and resilient servant of the faith. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

We have a Psychologist and a Counselor. Both have extensive experience with seminarians, and extensive clinical experience (over two decades) working with priests and doctors who have "burned out." We take their recommendations when it comes to whether a man has or has not worked through his trauma. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

I would require evidence that the man has worked through the experience spiritually and emotionally. Namely, I would want him to demonstrate an awareness of the how the trauma affected him (his self-understanding, lies he believes, maladaptive coping mechanisms, issues with socialization, triggering realities, etc.) and an ability to describe his process of healing. A lack of transparency due to defensiveness or lack of insight would be significant counter-indicators of his readiness for ordination. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

We rely on our psychological team to make these assessments. It is known that our seminary considers them part of the confidential, but external forum. We have regular discussions (twice a month on average) with the Rector, Vice-Rector, and relevant Counselors about the seminarians, with the Director of Spiritual Formation in attendance, though strictly maintaining the internal forum. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

First, we look to the recommendations of the mental health professions assisting in the seminarian's assessment and formation plan (e.g. psych eval, regular counselor). Secondly, we assess how the seminarian is meeting all of the benchmarks of the four dimensions of formation. In particular with trauma wounds, we will pay particular attention to signs/behaviors demonstrating affective maturity, looking to these to give evidence of healing and integration. *[Formator/Spiritual Director]*

The first thing I consider is the depth of transparency: can the candidate clearly articulate his emotions surrounding past traumas, name specific triggers and how they affect him, and acknowledge successful/unsuccessful strategies for overcoming the triggers? Does he show growing comfortability in sharing answers (self-acceptance)? Can he demonstrate consistent pro-activity via outreach to a stable support system (e.g., support group, family, therapist)? Secondly, I consider his capacity for healthy relationships, both through talking with him about his relationships, but also observing his behavior in the seminary community. Peer evaluations as well as consultations with a pastor-supervisor and/or other supervisor in a pastoral assignment can be helpful. Does he have a close friend(s)? What does he do with him/them? Is he comfortable praying with his friends (preferably prayer beyond Liturgy of the Hours)? Does he have a tendency to isolate or withdraw? Thirdly, I try to measure a persistent level of burden caused by the trauma. How often is he occupied/entertaining thoughts related to the trauma? Ideally, he should

feel mentally free most days. Is he generally in a good mood? Is he interested in hobbies, spending time with people? [*Formator/Spiritual Director*]

Difficult but if the man is able to: 1. to recognize the effect that trauma has had on him i.e. development, emotional maturity, potential leaning on unhealthy mechanisms to cope with the past, 2. has been able to integrate psychological healing and spiritual/ deep prayer, forgiveness, etc., 3. That there is no overt projection onto other based on trauma (i.e. anger/ father wounds=/ issues with authority, strong dependency needs, narcissisms, 4. that the man recognizes potential triggers and past trauma or hypervigilance and has learned to cope in healthy manner, etc. [*Mental Health Professional*]

To "work through" a trauma involves at a minimum being non-reactive to it when it is provoked. At a more full level it involves having found meaning and identity in the trauma such that when provoked it becomes a source of spiritual and psychological strength. A common "false" healing that clients report (especially seminarians) is that they have "worked through" the trauma, but are not able to name the evil things that occurred in it without defending others or undercutting themselves. (e.g. "Yeah my mom beat me, but I really had it coming and she was a saint.") A third and more complete level is to work through even the side-effects of the trauma. "So now we've healed the father wound and you can look on him with love naming all his faults. What would have looked different in your romantic relationships as a teenager if your father had never had those faults?" This is a deeper level of secondary healing. The client has to be opened up to this, but does not need to have exhaustively hunted all the secondary damage out. That's the work of the Holy Spirit throughout their life. [*Mental Health Professional*]

If he continues to be in a state of fight or flight frequently. If his capacity for accurate trust has not been repaired. If he cannot talk through the story of his abuse. If he is showing a lack of capacity to form close friendship. If his capacity to trust authority is evidently impaired. A recent example is a man who is a survivor of abuse and is showing a lack of awareness of his impact on others, and is continuing with some frequency to be operating out of a sort of victim mentality not readily owning his own power with peers. Can be either stubborn or appeasing with authority at times. He can be in physiological tension and fight or flight (which he manages with constriction vs integrated expression). However, his pastoral sensitivity and relating has appeared sensitive and appropriate in a variety of settings. There are also cultural issues that add complexity (not a US citizen). [*Mental Health Professional*]

I evaluate and observe how he responds to situations, particularly relational situations, that trigger emotions/thoughts/experiences related to the trauma. I want to see that he is aware of how/when he is triggered and that he is able (and on a continued growth path) to regulate his emotions well within himself when under stress and in relational experiences in order to be emotionally present and responsive to others in



fraternity/community/authority and in ministry. I want to see him have awareness of and demonstrate and be on a growth path of healthy boundaries in relationship. I want to see him demonstrating health self-care as a way of managing his daily life, stress and relationships. *[Mental Health Professional]*

One of many factors that I assess over the course of formation is the ways in which how they speak about their past trauma has changed (is it more integrated? What is happening in their body language when they speak about it?). In a particular way I am interested in how it is brought up when they are confronted with pastoral situations that could trigger past memories, experiences, etc. Are they still able to engage meaningfully in pastoral work (and with those around them in formation) or is there a quick cycle of re-engaging in past memories & experiences? In most healthy men, there comes a point where they do not hide their past trauma/behaviors out of shame for it disqualifying them from Holy Orders, but realize that in a well-integrated individual it can be part of their own story of healing, growth, and redemption. *[Mental Health Professional]*

When the memories of trauma no longer trigger emotional responses that lead to problematic/compulsive behaviors, anxiety, and avoidance. Consequently, the seminarian should be able to freely experience sorrow and grief for these past experiences, but not feel threatened by them (e.g. by no longer expressing doubt about their ontological goodness and reduced/eliminated fear of others and their environment, expressed through heightened physiological arousal). This applies to individuals with either a history of Trauma or complex traumas (repeated neglect, emotional manipulation, etc. without presence of a single traumatic episode of severe physical, sexual, or emotional abuse). Overall, sufficiently working through traumas (via memory repair, often accomplished through modalities such as EMDR and Internal Family Systems) involves the individuals having a freedom to experience their emotions without being captured/overtaken in them. As a result, they are able to demonstrate better quality of interpersonal relationships, less distortions in their non-conscious images of God/Virgin Mary, greater resiliency in face of various hurts and disappointments in life. *[Mental Health Professional]*

If the trauma is resolved the man doesn't view life through that lens. He is able to pastor to all people regardless of their sins or traumas they have inflicted. *[Mental Health Professional]*

If the man is not having triggering reactions to things, people, or situations that used to trigger him. For example, if the man used to get stress/anxious when discussing the topic of childhood abuse because he was abused as a child and now that he has worked through his childhood trauma he is not having those stress/anxiety attacks anymore. The man is not requiring psychotropic medications for managing the trauma response is another way I would determine that the man has worked sufficiently through trauma. *[Mental Health Professional]*

In order for a man to have sufficiently worked through past trauma to be eligible for ordination should have completed psychotherapy. The seminary should have a written statement from the treating therapist that the issues he presented with are sufficiently resolved to the point that they are no longer negatively impacting his day to day functioning, and that he is capable in the opinion of the therapist to be ordained. Behaviorally, he should be perceived as capable of empathy and compassion, be free of addictions, engage in self-care, be socially mature and capable of mature relationships. He should report that the experiences of his past have helped him to understand the impact of abuse on people's lives. He should receive a psychological evaluation prior to ordination. *[Mental Health Professional]*

The man has sufficient affective maturity, self-awareness, and evidence of good relationship skills and boundaries. He is self-confident, but not egotistical. He does not seek recognition or affection from others, but rather has a realistic understanding of himself. His sexuality is integrated into his sense of self. He can recognize and express emotions in healthy and effective ways. He can ask for help and support rather than thinking he should be able to handle everything by himself. He can accept criticism and consider others' opinions without being overly threatened. Be aware of trigger and how he may act to "soothe" himself in harmful ways, e.g. alcohol, pornography, and have proven ability to choose and do other healthy options to cope. These are probably not going to be fully realized and will vary over time but are areas or "signs" of continued healing- or the need for additional work towards healing. *[Mental Health Professional]*

## Factors Impacting the Judgment about the Suitability of Men for Formation and Orders

In addition to the questions about how same-sex attraction and trauma affect the suitability of candidates, all five surveys contain a series of questions about how much 15 factors impact their judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders.

### Bishops

The responses from the bishops is presented below, ordered from those factors most likely to be seen as disqualifying (the third column of numbers) to those least likely to be seen in this way.<sup>41</sup> Notably, there are *no* zeroes in the table, meaning there are a variety of opinions among bishops about each. More than two-fifths say the following factors alone are disqualifying for being ordained:

- After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition – 55%
- A dominant attraction to those of the same sex – 45%
- Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex – 45%

#### **Bishops: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders?**

*Percentage of bishops responding*

|                                                                                                             | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>This Would<br/>Impact my<br/>Judgment<br/>%</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition | 4                                                            | 23                                                                            | 55                                                                      | 18                                                                           |
| A dominant attraction to those of the same sex                                                              | 2                                                            | 48                                                                            | 45                                                                      | 5                                                                            |
| Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex                                            | 2                                                            | 42                                                                            | 45                                                                      | 10                                                                           |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive behaviors (e.g., unhealthy alcohol use, gambling)                                  | 1                                                            | 62                                                                            | 29                                                                      | 8                                                                            |
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for depression or anxiety                  | 5                                                            | 60                                                                            | 27                                                                      | 8                                                                            |

<sup>41</sup> The non-response rate for the bishops for this series of questions ranges from 4% to 9%.

The table showing the response from the bishops is continued below.

**Bishops: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders?**

**CONT'D**

*Percentage of bishops responding*

|                                                                                          | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>This Would<br/>Impact my<br/>Judgment<br/>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Are high-functioning on the autism spectrum (e.g., they miss some important social cues) | 4                                                            | 57                                                                            | 20                                                                      | 18                                                                           |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse as an adult                                            | 1                                                            | 73                                                                            | 18                                                                      | 8                                                                            |
| An attraction to those of both sexes                                                     | 1                                                            | 68                                                                            | 18                                                                      | 12                                                                           |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse when they were minors                                  | 1                                                            | 76                                                                            | 15                                                                      | 8                                                                            |
| Were victims of extreme past physical abuse                                              | 1                                                            | 72                                                                            | 15                                                                      | 11                                                                           |
| Were victims of extreme past emotional abuse                                             | 1                                                            | 76                                                                            | 14                                                                      | 8                                                                            |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive sexual behaviors (e.g., porn use once a month or more)          | 1                                                            | 74                                                                            | 13                                                                      | 12                                                                           |
| After ordination, will need to remain in counseling                                      | 11                                                           | 66                                                                            | 13                                                                      | 10                                                                           |
| A history of past alcoholism or drug addiction                                           | 4                                                            | 82                                                                            | 9                                                                       | 5                                                                            |
| A transitory attraction to those of the same sex                                         | 14                                                           | 80                                                                            | 3                                                                       | 3                                                                            |

On the other end of the scale, more than one in ten say these two factors would *not* be treated as worrisome by responding bishops:

- A transitory attraction to those of the same sex – 14%
- After ordination, will need to remain in counseling – 11%

## Vocation Directors

The responses from vocation directors about how worrisome factors are is presented below.<sup>42</sup> Looking at the third column of numbers (factors alone disqualifying for being ordained), these three are most likely to be disqualifying, the first two of which were also listed highly among the bishops:

- After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition – 71%
- A dominant attraction to those of the same sex – 60%
- Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex – 56%

### ***Vocation Directors: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders?***

*Percentage of vocation directors responding*

|                                                                                                             | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>This Would<br/>Impact my<br/>Judgment<br/>%</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition | 0                                                            | 18                                                                            | 71                                                                      | 11                                                                           |
| A dominant attraction to those of the same sex                                                              | 2                                                            | 33                                                                            | 60                                                                      | 4                                                                            |
| Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex                                            | 0                                                            | 38                                                                            | 56                                                                      | 7                                                                            |
| Are high-functioning on the autism spectrum (e.g., they miss some important social cues)                    | 0                                                            | 67                                                                            | 22                                                                      | 11                                                                           |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive behaviors (e.g., unhealthy alcohol use, gambling)                                  | 0                                                            | 78                                                                            | 20                                                                      | 2                                                                            |
| An attraction to those of both sexes                                                                        | 2                                                            | 73                                                                            | 20                                                                      | 4                                                                            |
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for depression or anxiety                  | 4                                                            | 71                                                                            | 18                                                                      | 7                                                                            |

<sup>42</sup> The non-response rate for the vocation directors for this series of questions ranges from 15% to 17%.

The table showing the results from the vocation directors survey is continued below.

**Vocation Directors: How do the following factors impact your judgment  
of the suitability of a man for Orders? *CONT'D***  
*Percentage of vocation directors responding*

|                                                                                 | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>This Would<br/>Impact my<br/>Judgment<br/>%</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After ordination, will need to remain in counseling                             | 13                                                           | 67                                                                            | 11                                                                      | 9                                                                            |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive sexual behaviors (e.g., porn use once a month or more) | 0                                                            | 93                                                                            | 7                                                                       | 0                                                                            |
| A history of past alcoholism or drug addiction                                  | 2                                                            | 91                                                                            | 7                                                                       | 0                                                                            |
| Were victims of extreme past physical abuse                                     | 0                                                            | 82                                                                            | 7                                                                       | 11                                                                           |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse when they were minors                         | 0                                                            | 80                                                                            | 7                                                                       | 13                                                                           |
| Were victims of extreme past emotional abuse                                    | 2                                                            | 86                                                                            | 5                                                                       | 7                                                                            |
| A transitory attraction to those of the same sex                                | 9                                                            | 84                                                                            | 4                                                                       | 2                                                                            |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse as an adult                                   | 0                                                            | 82                                                                            | 2                                                                       | 16                                                                           |

Two of the factors are seen as not worrisome by about one in ten vocation directors, which were also the two seen as least worrisome in the bishops survey:

- After ordination, will need to remain in counseling – 13%
- A transitory attraction to those of the same sex – 9%

## Rectors

The responses from the rectors survey about how worrisome factors are is presented below.<sup>43</sup> Looking at the third column of numbers (factors alone disqualifying for being ordained), these four are most likely to be disqualifying, the first three of which were also listed highly among the bishops and/or vocation directors:

- After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition – 61%
- Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex – 56%
- A dominant attraction to those of the same sex – 46%
- Cyclical semi-compulsive behaviors (e.g., unhealthy alcohol use, gambling) – 42%

**Rectors: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders?**  
*Percentage of responding*

|                                                                                                             | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>I Would<br/>Handle<br/>This<br/>%</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition | 0                                                            | 35                                                                            | 61                                                                      | 4                                                                  |
| Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex                                            | 4                                                            | 32                                                                            | 56                                                                      | 8                                                                  |
| A dominant attraction to those of the same sex                                                              | 4                                                            | 46                                                                            | 46                                                                      | 4                                                                  |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive behaviors (e.g., unhealthy alcohol use, gambling)                                  | 4                                                            | 54                                                                            | 42                                                                      | 0                                                                  |
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for depression or anxiety                  | 8                                                            | 54                                                                            | 31                                                                      | 8                                                                  |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive sexual behaviors (e.g., porn use once a month or more)                             | 0                                                            | 76                                                                            | 24                                                                      | 0                                                                  |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse as an adult                                                               | 0                                                            | 62                                                                            | 23                                                                      | 15                                                                 |
| Were victims of extreme past physical abuse                                                                 | 0                                                            | 81                                                                            | 15                                                                      | 4                                                                  |

<sup>43</sup> The non-response rate for the rectors for this series of questions ranges from 4% to 7%.

The table showing the results from the rectors survey is continued below.

**Rectors: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders?**

**CONT'D**

*Percentage of responding*

|                                                                                          | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>I Would<br/>Handle<br/>This<br/>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After ordination, will need to remain in counseling                                      | 12                                                           | 61                                                                            | 15                                                                      | 12                                                                 |
| A history of past alcoholism or drug addiction                                           | 0                                                            | 88                                                                            | 12                                                                      | 0                                                                  |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse when they were minors                                  | 0                                                            | 77                                                                            | 12                                                                      | 12                                                                 |
| An attraction to those of both sexes                                                     | 4                                                            | 69                                                                            | 12                                                                      | 15                                                                 |
| Are high-functioning on the autism spectrum (e.g., they miss some important social cues) | 8                                                            | 81                                                                            | 8                                                                       | 4                                                                  |
| A transitory attraction to those of the same sex                                         | 16                                                           | 80                                                                            | 4                                                                       | 0                                                                  |
| Were victims of extreme past emotional abuse                                             | 0                                                            | 96                                                                            | 0                                                                       | 4                                                                  |

Two of the factors are seen as not worrisome by about one in ten rectors, the two also listed as the two least worrisome by the bishops and vocation directors:

- A transitory attraction to those of the same sex – 16%
- After ordination, will need to remain in counseling – 12%



## Formators and Spiritual Directors

The responses from the formators/spiritual directors survey about how worrisome factors are is presented below.<sup>44</sup> Looking at the third column of numbers (factors alone disqualifying for being ordained), these three are most likely to be disqualifying, all of which were also listed highly among the bishops, vocation directors, and/or rectors:

- After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition – 62%
- A dominant attraction to those of the same sex – 58%
- Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex – 52%

### ***Formators and Spiritual Directors: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders?***

*Percentage of responding*

|                                                                                                             | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>I Would<br/>Handle<br/>This<br/>%</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition | 1                                                            | 27                                                                            | 62                                                                      | 10                                                                 |
| A dominant attraction to those of the same sex                                                              | 4                                                            | 36                                                                            | 58                                                                      | 2                                                                  |
| Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex                                            | 3                                                            | 41                                                                            | 52                                                                      | 4                                                                  |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive behaviors (e.g., unhealthy alcohol use, gambling)                                  | 1                                                            | 68                                                                            | 30                                                                      | 1                                                                  |
| Are high-functioning on the autism spectrum (e.g., they miss some important social cues)                    | 4                                                            | 64                                                                            | 24                                                                      | 8                                                                  |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive sexual behaviors (e.g., porn use once a month or more)                             | 2                                                            | 74                                                                            | 23                                                                      | 1                                                                  |
| An attraction to those of both sexes                                                                        | 4                                                            | 66                                                                            | 20                                                                      | 10                                                                 |

<sup>44</sup> The non-response rate for the formators/spiritual directors for this series of questions ranges from 13% to 14%.

The table showing the results from the formators/spiritual directors survey is continued below.

***Formators and Spiritual Directors: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders? CONT'D***  
*Percentage of responding*

|                                                                                            | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>I Would<br/>Handle<br/>This<br/>%</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for depression or anxiety | 14                                                           | 63                                                                            | 19                                                                      | 4                                                                  |
| After ordination, will need to remain in counseling                                        | 16                                                           | 62                                                                            | 13                                                                      | 9                                                                  |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse as an adult                                              | 0                                                            | 75                                                                            | 12                                                                      | 12                                                                 |
| Were victims of extreme past physical abuse                                                | 1                                                            | 80                                                                            | 9                                                                       | 9                                                                  |
| A history of past alcoholism or drug addiction                                             | 5                                                            | 87                                                                            | 6                                                                       | 2                                                                  |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse when they were minors                                    | 2                                                            | 84                                                                            | 6                                                                       | 8                                                                  |
| Were victims of extreme past emotional abuse                                               | 2                                                            | 85                                                                            | 5                                                                       | 8                                                                  |
| A transitory attraction to those of the same sex                                           | 15                                                           | 78                                                                            | 5                                                                       | 2                                                                  |

Three of the factors are seen as not worrisome by about one in ten rectors, two of which also listed among the least worrisome by the bishops, vocation directors, and/or rectors:

- After ordination, will need to remain in counseling – 16%
- A transitory attraction to those of the same sex – 15%
- After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for depression or anxiety – 14%

## Mental Health Professionals

The responses from the mental health professionals survey about how worrisome factors are is presented below.<sup>45</sup> Generally speaking, mental health professionals are relatively less likely to identify any factors as alone disqualifying for being ordained (the third column of numbers) with less than half identifying any factor. These two are most likely to be disqualifying, both of which were also listed highly among the bishops, vocation directors, rectors, and/or formators/spiritual directors:

- After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition – 47%
- A dominant attraction to those of the same sex – 42%

| <b><i>Mental Health Professionals: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders?</i></b><br><i>Percentage of responding</i> |                                              |                                                           |                                                         |                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>I Would Not Treat This as Worrisome %</b> | <b>This Is Worrisome But Alone Is Not Disqualifying %</b> | <b>This Alone Is Disqualifying for Being Ordained %</b> | <b>I Am Not Sure How I Would Handle This %</b> |
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for a more serious psychological condition                                                             | 0                                            | 47                                                        | 47                                                      | 6                                              |
| A dominant attraction to those of the same sex                                                                                                                          | 5                                            | 49                                                        | 43                                                      | 3                                              |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive sexual behaviors (e.g., porn use once a month or more)                                                                                         | 0                                            | 68                                                        | 32                                                      | 0                                              |
| Had a significant past relationship with someone of the same sex                                                                                                        | 3                                            | 65                                                        | 30                                                      | 3                                              |
| Cyclical semi-compulsive behaviors (e.g., unhealthy alcohol use, gambling)                                                                                              | 0                                            | 65                                                        | 30                                                      | 5                                              |
| An attraction to those of both sexes                                                                                                                                    | 3                                            | 81                                                        | 14                                                      | 3                                              |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse as an adult                                                                                                                           | 5                                            | 76                                                        | 14                                                      | 5                                              |
| Are high-functioning on the autism spectrum (e.g., they miss some important social cues)                                                                                | 3                                            | 81                                                        | 13                                                      | 3                                              |

<sup>45</sup> The non-response rate for the mental health professionals for this series of questions ranges from 37% to 39%.

The table showing the results from the mental health professionals survey is continued below.

| <b><i>Mental Health Professionals: How do the following factors impact your judgment of the suitability of a man for Orders? CONT'D</i></b><br><i>Percentage of responding</i> |                                                              |                                                                               |                                                                         |                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>I Would<br/>Not Treat<br/>This as<br/>Worrisome<br/>%</b> | <b>This Is<br/>Worrisome<br/>But Alone Is<br/>Not<br/>Disqualifying<br/>%</b> | <b>This Alone Is<br/>Disqualifying<br/>for Being<br/>Ordained<br/>%</b> | <b>I Am Not<br/>Sure How<br/>I Would<br/>Handle<br/>This<br/>%</b> |
| Were victims of past sexual abuse when they were minors                                                                                                                        | 0                                                            | 84                                                                            | 11                                                                      | 5                                                                  |
| After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for depression or anxiety                                                                                     | 19                                                           | 65                                                                            | 11                                                                      | 5                                                                  |
| After ordination, will need to remain in counseling                                                                                                                            | 22                                                           | 62                                                                            | 11                                                                      | 5                                                                  |
| Were victims of extreme past physical abuse                                                                                                                                    | 0                                                            | 87                                                                            | 8                                                                       | 5                                                                  |
| Were victims of extreme past emotional abuse                                                                                                                                   | 0                                                            | 87                                                                            | 8                                                                       | 5                                                                  |
| A history of past alcoholism or drug addiction                                                                                                                                 | 0                                                            | 84                                                                            | 8                                                                       | 8                                                                  |
| A transitory attraction to those of the same sex                                                                                                                               | 16                                                           | 81                                                                            | 0                                                                       | 3                                                                  |

Three of the factors are seen as not worrisome by roughly one in five mental health professionals, all three of which are also listed among the least worrisome by the bishops, vocation directors, rectors, formators/spiritual directors:

- After ordination, will need to remain in counseling – 22%
- After ordination, will need to remain on psychiatric medications for depression or anxiety – 19%
- A transitory attraction to those of the same sex – 16%

## Disagreements between Dioceses and Seminaries in Assessing the Suitability of Men for Formation and Orders

All five surveys asked questions about what happens when dioceses and seminaries have different opinions about the suitability of men for formation and Orders.

### Bishops' and Vocation Directors' Experience with Candidates Turned Away from Another Program or Diocese

#### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

Bishops (38%) are about twice as likely as vocation directors (17%) to agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that after their Diocese admitted a seminary candidate who was turned away by another Diocese or formation program, the candidate proved to be suitable for ordination.<sup>46</sup> That said, less than two in five bishops agree with the statement.

| <i><b>How much do you agree with these statements?</b></i>                                                                                                      |                     |                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined</i>                                                                                              |                     |                                          |
|                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Bishops</b><br>% | <b>Vocation</b><br><b>Directors</b><br>% |
| After our Diocese admitted a seminary candidate who was turned away by another Diocese or formation program, the candidate proved to be suitable for ordination | 38                  | 17                                       |

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<sup>46</sup> Thirty-nine percent of bishops and 32% of vocation directors did not respond to this question.

*“Strongly Agree” Only*

Again, bishops (14%) are about twice as likely as vocation directors (6%) to “strongly agree” that after their Diocese admitted a seminary candidate who was turned away by another Diocese or formation program, the candidate proved to be suitable for ordination. About one in seven bishops “strongly agree.”

| <b><i>How much do you agree with these statements?</i></b><br><b><i>Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”</i></b>                                              |                      |                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Bishops<br/>%</b> | <b>Vocation<br/>Directors<br/>%</b> |
| After our Diocese admitted a seminary candidate who was turned away by another Diocese or formation program, the candidate proved to be suitable for ordination | 14                   | 6                                   |

**Frequency Bishops’ and Vocation Directors’ Have Disagreed with the Recommendation of a Seminary**

Most bishops (78%) and vocation directors (67%) say they have never disagreed with the *negative* recommendation of a seminary and advanced a seminarian to the next stage of formation or Holy Orders. Among the others, they have almost all done so once or twice (21% to 33%).<sup>47</sup>

| <b>In the past ten years, how often have you [for Vocation Directors: has your Bishop] disagreed with the <u>negative</u> recommendation of a seminary and advanced a seminarian to the next stage of formation or Orders?</b><br><b><i>Percentage responding</i></b> |                    |                                |                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Never<br/>%</b> | <b>Once or<br/>Twice<br/>%</b> | <b>Three Times<br/>or More<br/>%</b> |
| Bishops                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 78                 | 21                             | 1                                    |
| Vocation directors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 67                 | 33                             | 0                                    |

<sup>47</sup> They were also offered the option of responding “I am not sure.” For the analysis in this table, those not sure are grouped with the non-respondents. The non-response rate, including those not sure, for bishops is 8% and for vocation directors is 26%.

Similarly, most vocation directors (79%) and bishops (69%) say they have never disagreed with the *positive* recommendation of a seminary and advanced a seminarian to the next stage of formation or Holy Orders. Among the others, they have almost all done so once or twice (18% to 30%).<sup>48</sup>

| <b>In the past ten years, how often have you [for Vocation Directors: has your Bishop] disagreed with the <u>positive</u> recommendation of a seminary and decided <u>not</u> to advance a seminarian to the next stage of formation or Orders?</b><br><i>Percentage responding</i> |              |                      |                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Never</b> | <b>Once or Twice</b> | <b>Three Times or More</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>%</b>     | <b>%</b>             | <b>%</b>                   |
| Bishops                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 69           | 30                   | 1                          |
| Vocation directors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 79           | 18                   | 3                          |

#### **Frequency Rectors', Formators'/Spiritual Directors', and Mental Health Professionals' Have Had a Diocese Disagreed with the Recommendation of a Seminary**

Seminary personnel are more likely that bishops and vocation directors to know of instances where bishops have disagreed with the *negative* recommendations of a seminary. A majority (61% to 94%)<sup>49</sup> say they know of at least one instance.<sup>50</sup>

| <b>In the past ten years, how often has a bishop disagreed with the <u>negative</u> recommendation of your seminary and advanced someone to the next stage of formation or Orders?</b><br><i>Percentage responding</i> |              |                      |                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Never</b> | <b>Once or Twice</b> | <b>Three Times or More</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>%</b>     | <b>%</b>             | <b>%</b>                   |
| Rectors                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 39           | 52                   | 9                          |
| Formators and spiritual directors                                                                                                                                                                                      | 24           | 47                   | 29                         |
| Mental health professionals                                                                                                                                                                                            | 6            | 69                   | 25                         |

<sup>48</sup> They were also offered the option of responding "I am not sure." For the analysis in this table, those not sure are grouped with the non-respondents. The non-response rate, including those not sure, for bishops is 10% and for vocation directors is 26%.

<sup>49</sup> Calculated by summing the percentages of "once or twice" and "three times or more."

<sup>50</sup> They were also offered the option of responding "I am not sure." For the analysis in this table, those not sure are grouped with the non-respondents. The non-response rate, including those not sure, for rectors is 15%, for formators/spiritual directors is 41%, and for mental health professionals is 73%.

Compared to the percentages knowing of at least one instance in the past ten years where bishops have disagreed with the *negative* recommendations (61% to 94%) from seminaries shown above, a majority of seminary personnel have never known of an instance in the past ten years where a bishop has decided *not* to advance or ordain someone despite the *positive* recommendation of a seminary (64% to 73%).<sup>51</sup>

| <b>In the past ten years, how often has bishop disagreed with the <u>positive</u> recommendation of your seminary and decided <u>not</u> to advance someone to the next stage of formation or Orders?</b><br><i>Percentage responding</i> |              |                |                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Never</b> | <b>Once or</b> | <b>Three Times</b> |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>%</b>     | <b>Twice</b>   | <b>or More</b>     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>%</b>     | <b>%</b>       | <b>%</b>           |
| Rectors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 64           | 36             | 0                  |
| Formators and<br>spiritual directors                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 73           | 21             | 5                  |
| Mental health<br>professionals                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 69           | 31             | 0                  |

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<sup>51</sup> They were also offered the option of responding “I am not sure.” For the analysis in this table, those not sure are grouped with the non-respondents. The non-response rate, including those not sure, for rectors is 7%, for formators/spiritual directors is 42%, and for mental health professionals is 78%.



## Dioceses' Prioritizing the Quantity of Candidates Over the Quality According to Seminary Personnel

### *“Agree” and “Strongly Agree” Combined*

Mental health professionals (65%) are more likely than rectors (48%) and formators/spiritual directors (44%) to agree (“agree” and “strongly agree” combined) that, in their experience, some dioceses prioritize the quantity of candidates over the quality of candidates when assessing their suitability for Orders.<sup>52</sup>

#### ***How much do you agree with these statements?*** *Percentage responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” combined*

|                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Rectors</b><br>% | <b>Formators/<br/>Spiritual<br/>Directors</b><br>% | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b><br>% |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| In my experience, when assessing their suitability for Orders, some dioceses prioritize the quantity of candidates over the quality of candidates | 48                  | 44                                                 | 65                                              |

### *“Strongly Agree” Only*

About a quarter of all three survey groups (21% to 24%) “strongly agree” that, in their experience, some dioceses prioritize the quantity of candidates over the quality of candidates when assessing their suitability for Orders.

#### ***How much do you agree with these statements?*** *Percentage responding “Strongly Agree”*

|                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Rectors</b><br>% | <b>Formators/<br/>Spiritual<br/>Directors</b><br>% | <b>Mental<br/>Health<br/>Professionals</b><br>% |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| In my experience, when assessing their suitability for Orders, some dioceses prioritize the quantity of candidates over the quality of candidates | 24                  | 21                                                 | 24                                              |

<sup>52</sup> Seven percent of rectors, 11% of formators/spiritual directors, and 42% of mental health professionals did not respond to this question.

## Interview Findings from Bishops and Vocation Directors

The bishop who was interviewed shared his thoughts about how dioceses sometimes rely too heavily on the seminaries to sort out potential issues with candidates, drawing from his experiences from when he himself was a seminary rector:

Bishop 1: When I was a rector, it was sometimes surprising some of the people vocation director would send to me. One particular idea, sometimes we get what I call the heavyweight. Okay. When I first started the seminary, we had about four or five guys that were really obesely obese. I mean, obese. After a while, I learned what to do. I called the vocation director and said, look, you tell me. If you want them to lose weight, then I'll make that an issue. But if they don't lose weight, then I'm going to ask them to leave. If you don't make it an issue, I won't make it an issue and I'll just judge them as they act, okay? And I had to kind of come up with an idea, what was this vocation director's desire? Because if you don't make it happen, you can't — they'll just keep getting pushed on. It will never be addressed. That's a very obvious kind of way in which you may wonder. I had a situation where a guy was — it came out in the seminary that he was homosexual. And the way he described himself, I thought, you really can't continue here. He said, I have no real friends in the seminary. The only real friends I have are those in the gay community who know me for who I am. Well, that was already developing a split in his life and that was not going to work. So, I sent him back. I told the diocese; we can't take them. They sent him to another place. So that was up to — you know. And so, he never got ordained. No, I think he did get ordained actually, and then left. But that was something — I see that happening from time to time. The only situation where I've had a difference is when they passed a guy but said, he's still going to need to work on these things. And I thought those are really pretty important things. So, I would delay the next step. I would delay it. And then I never really — if they said, no, we don't believe he should be ordained, most of the time we were on the same page on that. But when they gave me kind of the, we think you can pass him on, but these — sometimes that's a way of seminary saying, we don't want to make the hard decision, Bishop, you make it. But for me, those things, several times I would say, no, I think he needs to wait a semester before we ordain him, or bring him back to the diocese for a semester to work in a parish to see what we got. And so, in my case, now, I have accepted — when I was in Shreveport, I accepted a man that had been let go of a seminary. And every time they would describe the situation to me, I just did not see what the problem was. I really didn't. So, I did accept him after two years, and he's still doing a great job. I sense there was something about the relationship between the vocation director and him, and I don't know what it was. But he proved to be a very good priest for us. But I have other times I've received people, they come to me because they've been kicked out, and then a simple call tells me, I'm not touching that. And I always make that call.

## **Interview Findings from Rectors and Formators/Spiritual Directors**

One rector and one formator agreed that some dioceses prioritize the quantity of the candidates over their quality, with another taking the opposite opinion, saying that vocation directors seem to be succeeding at sending higher quality men to his seminary.

Rector 8: I think I mentioned to my email to you, about quantity versus quality. Especially for priests and it's hard-baked in. Because even now, what I hear most often from bishops is, oh, we're having a lot of vocations, we're doing great. But I know who those vocations are and I have pictures and I say, you may not want that many vocations. But then when men don't turn out, they become problems. This is a defect in the system. They blame it on the seminary.

Formator 5: I would say a few things. One is all of us in formation, so bishops, vocation directors and seminary formators, need to I think recognize in a greater, greater way, and I say this to myself as well, that what's going to be best for the man himself is always what's best for the church, which means, I think, greater courage in delaying or saying no. And that's where I find myself leaning more and more and more, because the pressures and challenges of priesthood do not allow time and space for a man to do work in priesthood. So, if there's serious work of any sort that a man needs to do, that should be done before priesthood, otherwise he's going to need to take time later. And that just causes trouble for the faithful, for everybody, right.

Rector 4: I think that the standards for admission, I think it's safe to say, have been elevated over the years, and also that vocations directors play a crucial role in it. And I think as dioceses pay attention to who they place in that position, then that makes our job a lot easier insofar as they're familiar with the standards that they should be following. As years go on since 2001, I would say, as those standards continue to increase or there's greater accountability in that regard, I think the quality of candidate that reaches our threshold is much higher. We have greater confidence, I think, than maybe in years past that they have already, in being accepted as a seminarian for a diocese — at least that's true in our part of the country. But generally speaking, that we can be confident that they've followed the whole procedure such that they're not just some guy coming off the street, but they really have gone through the wringer. Maybe that's motivated by dioceses wishing to make sure they're not taking on any major liabilities. But even if there's turnover in those offices, it seems to be clear that in the handoff, it's like these are the procedures that need to be followed before they even get to applying to a seminary. So, I think the crucial role that vocations directors play, apart from seminary admissions, is something to be focused on or I mean, emphasized in terms of importance, but also lauded insofar as I think generally speaking, those standards have been raised over the years.

## **Cases When Seminaries and Dioceses Have Disagreed with Recommendations**

Bishops and vocation directors were asked to write in responses to two very similar questions:

- *Bishops: If you have disagreed with a seminary's recommendation (either positive or negative) for advancement or ordination in the past ten years, please briefly describe the situation, your concerns, and what has happened since. Please be specific.*
- *Vocation directors: If your Bishop has disagreed with a seminary's recommendation (either positive or negative) for advancement or ordination in the past ten years, please briefly describe the situation, his concerns, and what has happened since. Please be specific.*

Altogether, 36 bishops (35% of the 103 responding) and 21 vocation directors (40% of the 53 responding) wrote in responses. As their responses do not provide enough detail to discern any real patterns, all of their responses will be presented below, grouped into these three categories:

- Cases where a seminary's negative recommendation were overrode by a bishop
- Cases where a seminary's positive recommendation were overrode by a bishop
- Other comments about the topic

### **Cases Where a Seminary's Negative Recommendation Were Overrode by a Bishop**

Thirteen bishops and 12 vocation directors wrote in examples of when their bishop overrode a seminary's *negative* recommendation about allowing a seminarian to continue. Their descriptions appear below.

#### *Bishops*

There was information that came to my attention during his second year in the seminary that led me from allowing him to continue with formation in this diocese.

Two men were expelled from a seminary for an inappropriate relationship. The seminary acted hastily, did not listen to any of the story of either even though one self-reported and sought help. Both are outstanding ministers and committed to celibacy.

A new rector recommended waiting and therapy, but the grounds were vague and everyone else disagreed. He has been a good priest for ten years. I wouldn't do that with a definite "No", this was vague.

After a treatment and working on issues, candidate turned out to be very good, so I sent him to another seminary, where he has thrived.

Seminarian had some slight anxiety issues. Right medicine helped a lot.

On one occasion I allowed a seminarian to advance for another year despite a negative evaluation. I felt the additional experience of formation would give us a better feel for his potential and his areas of needed growth. He continued through another year of formation, but we chose to release him at the end of that year.

The seminary rector was only concerned with identifying problems with the candidate that were minor in nature (moderate introversion) and had little concept of forming or helping the candidate, who had no moral failings or character issues. Sometimes, rectors can develop prejudices that are not appropriate for screening out otherwise healthy candidates. After transferring the seminarian to a different seminary, he excelled. This candidate went on to be ordained and is thriving in his second year of priesthood.

Sometimes I felt seminary overreacted with a bit of rigidity.

When the seminarian was in 4th theology, he challenged a lay member of the development staff about her public comments regarding the seminarians. She called them "lazy" because she felt they weren't stepping up and helping at the annual fundraiser. The new rector was angry and felt the seminarian should be delayed in his ordination. I am very aware of the seminary staff and administration and told the rector that the seminarian would be ordained as scheduled. I ordained him as planned.

The seminary could not vote to recommend ordination to the diaconate. I worked with the seminarian until I was satisfied with his readiness to be ordained.

Seminary was deeply concerned about developmental woundedness in candidate impeding pastoral ability to lead and not simply please or placate others; a pastoral year, unconventional (PE placement), and further psychological counseling has led me to ordain the man who is flourishing in first year of priesthood under a strong pastor, which he himself may not achieve, but he may prove to be a dedicated curate of souls.

For QM, our Director of seminarians and I felt that a candidate had not been evaluated properly by seminary formators and caused indeed anxiety and stress, which we did not see when the candidate come home for summer breaks or pastoral internship.

The seminary cautioned the diocese. We give benefit of the doubt. The young man is no longer in ministry.

### *Vocation Directors*

In one instance, the negative recommendation from the seminary was weighed against the positive pastoral experiences that the man had had in the diocese, as well as a seemingly

strong internship year. It turns out that the seminary's cautions were accurate, though not exactly for the reasons they indicated. The seminarian had been dishonest with the seminary and the diocese, and he was eventually dismissed.

The circumstances of the situation were thoroughly investigated, and it was determined that the negative recommendation was more of a personal clash between the seminarian's formator and the negative impact due to a change in rectors.

This was before my time, but a man was dismissed from one seminary (and then formation). He re-entered 3 years later and was ordained after finishing his time in formation. He was recommended by his second seminary. He is not doing well in his parishes (staunchly traditional, inflexible, does not accept correction/guidance, entitled).

In the last ten years, in two instances a man was not recommended for advancement by the seminary and continued in formation. In one case he did a pastoral year, demonstrated improvement in the areas of concern, and returned to the same seminary and was subsequently ordained. In another instance, the man did a pastoral year, demonstrated improvement in the areas of concern, and finished seminary at a different seminary. Sadly, in the first instance the man was removed from ministry some years later (for issues not related to the concerns during formation) and in the second instance the man has left the Church to join a schismatic group (as far as I know). I would say in both cases the formators were picking up on things, but the deep issues were actually different than what was identified by the formation team. However, the negative judgment turned out to be sound overall, just not accurate in detail.

In one instance a seminarian was not recommended for diaconal orders due to a false accusation from another seminarian who was later dismissed himself (not sexual). The seminarian was given a pastoral year and ordained a deacon at its conclusion. He was later ordained a priest upon the seminary's recommendation.

This has not happened in my time as vocation director, however I am aware of one situation where a seminarian for us was not recommended for diaconate and was ordained a deacon regardless by our bishop. To the bishop's defense, the seminary brought some struggles to his attention very late and after he had been in formation for years. The seminarian was ordained a deacon and has since been in the process of the renewal of his promises.

Once or twice a situation has arisen where the seminary is hesitant or has reservations of a man but is willing to allow his continuance and the bishop has recommended he take time off to sort through issues. These have been issues related to capacity for leadership and social ability to engage future parishioners.

On one occasion a man was not approved from the seminary. There were some maturity issues which manifested in not showing up for all obligations. Some of this was unhealthy sleep schedule which resulted in tardiness for prayer or easily falling asleep in prayer. The man has done well all things considered. He is sincere so people give him the benefit of the doubt. He has by and large been received well by the people he serves. But he certainly continues to have room for growth.

A man was halted in his seminary process because he was seen as unapproachable and not able to connect with people. After the Diocese helped the man through a year's process in a pastoral assignment and we had seen great growth, the seminary was reluctant to take the man back. So, we sent him to a different seminary.

The situation arose through the negative recommendation from a seminary about a candidate's suitability for orders, based in large part of the evaluation of a particular pastor. However, the rector of the seminary disagreed with the recommendation from the larger faculty. Through relationships with other priests in the diocese, he was encouraged to contact our diocese. We went through significant accompaniment and discernment with the man, including a new psychological evaluation. It was determined that the capacity for formation was present, along with an authenticity to the call to priesthood, but that perhaps the culture of the previous seminary was not the right fit. The man was accepted and assigned to a different seminary community where he thrived in his formation, was ordained to both the transitional diaconate and priesthood, and has been honorably and successfully serving in a parish.

The seminarian presented himself to the seminary faculty as combative and ultra conservative. He would challenge the faculty on some teaching that were given. We agree that students should not be combative and regularly challenging faculty. That does express some signs of possible issues. However, there was not an acceptance, from the seminary, on just how concerning some faculty members were regarding their teaching. The difficulty is that the seminarians would react to questionable theology and these seminarians would often be referred to the seminary counselor as having issues. It's true that in one particular case. Our main issue was this. The faculty spend the most time with seminarians. If the seminarians lose trust in the faculty due to poor theology, they will implicitly lose trust in the formation team. When the formation team automatically sides with the faculty without really giving the seminarian a fair hearing, this creates a very challenging dynamic for the seminarian and the diocese. Some seminarians will push back and fight for their vocation. Others will simply go quiet and go underground. This leads to the "underground seminary" formation, which is not helpful. It was a case such as this that we dealt with and moved forward with ordination despite the seminary recommendation.

It was before my time as vocations director, so I don't know the details and if the candidate received a negative recommendation, or if the faculty simply abstained in giving one. In any case this particular man transferred seminaries for two years and then ended up discontinuing due to a negative recommendation.

### **Cases Where a Seminary's Positive Recommendation Were Overrode by a Bishop**

Fifteen bishops and six vocation directors wrote in examples of when their bishop overrode a seminary's *positive* recommendation about allowing a seminarian to continue. Presented below are their descriptions of these situations.

#### *Bishops*

The seminary was more open to a candidate moving forward for another semester to address some issues. After conversations, I/we determined that it was not likely just a semester's worth of work, so we asked the candidate to step away, leaving the door open to return if/when their personal issues were addressed.

For academic performance.

Another candidate was overly interested in externals and had his serial relationship, yet was a "darling" at the formation team.

Prior addiction issues precipitated not ordaining

An old vocation that proved he was too set in his ways and displayed a lack of prudential judgment especially in his speech and verbal communication.

The seminarian's recommendation of the candidate was positive. A pastoral year showed that he was not suitable for our diocese. He withdrew from our formation program when it became clear I was about to drop him. He applied to at least one other diocese but, after talking with me, the bishop did not accept him.

A promising young man with good recommendations has been denied by two bishops (including me) because of his friendship with a dangerous priest.

I held a candidate up for two years due to maturity issues. He is doing well now.

The faculty recommended a deacon for priestly ordination after he had been caught cheating.

There have been some occasions where I have received a positive recommendation from the Seminary, and yet some other issue was discovered during internship or at a ministry



apostolate, that I have decided to either post-pone or stop the ordination of a seminarian. In these situations, I have always received the support of the seminary for my decisions.

Have attempted to work with the seminarian and to get him additional help to improve his chances of success. In one particular case it clearly failed.

Man was a deacon. I chose not to ordain him a priest. Showed a pastoral and mental instability. Gave him another pastoral year. After this, I concluded he should not be ordained a priest. I am presently trying to laicize him due to his disobedience to my orders.

Seminary faculty raised serious questions about the deacon to be but still voted him on. We said "no".

A seminarian received "satisfactory" in his evaluation but demonstrated serious holes in his human formation at least. The seminary evaluation was not accurate. The seminarian was asked to spend a year in the dioceses with a priest formator. The seminarian is now back in the diocese.

The young man had problem from time I ordained him to the day he was laicized two years later. Vocation Directors and formation teams of the seminary recommended him but I had my doubts but I was alone in my opinion.

### *Vocation Directors*

On another occasion, the man was recommended for continued formation, but with some information from the man's past that came to light for the diocese, we decided to dismiss him from formation, again for his lack of honesty about his past.

On an occasion of an older man in theology the seminary was willing to see him progress to the next year. However, we became aware of some very emotionally immature emails he had sent to his fellow seminarians. It was decided this fit a pattern we had seen and there had not been sufficient growth, nor was it believed the man would be able to leave the baggage behind. We decided not to continue forward. After two years the man joined another diocese struggling more than us with vocations, was ordained and to my knowledge is serving adequately in a parish.

There was a seminarian that was recommended to move forward, but the bishop felt that he had significant issues with discretion and decided to dismiss him.

We had a candidate who was from Nigeria who came in with some previous formation, etc. The seminary recommended him for orders, but the Director of Vocations at the time in the diocese delayed his ordination as long as possible because he saw issues that

concerned him in terms of the man's ability to minister in our diocese; the bishop agreed in the delay. Eventually the seminarian garnered the favor of power player priests in the diocese and they persuaded the bishop to ordain him. The man was ordained, and within two years returned to Nigeria because he was ineffective in his ministry and did not work to become more enculturated. This was a source of frustration because the bishop, the DOV, and a majority of those who knew the candidate well knew he was going to be poorly suited for the diocese, but the power brokers in the diocese had their way.

The bishop disagreed that a particular seminarian should be readmitted into college seminary/discipleship stage. That particular seminarian struggled at the seminary, and had a run-in with a faculty member. This was partly the faculty member's fault, but nonetheless, the seminarian did not act well in that situation. More unrelated, that particular seminarian is now in formation with a religious order.

A certain major seminary we use has an extremely lackluster formation program. Many of their priests are sub-par and are malformed themselves. There's been a few cases where we, the diocese/me the VD, discover a serious concern that the seminary/the man's formator was completely oblivious to. Some cases we've been able to alert the seminary to these issues and have successfully worked with the man. In another case, one recently, we asked the seminarian to step out of formation. The specific reason was his lack of vocational certainty/permanence (had been in seminary nearly 6 years and was fast approaching diaconate - the point of no return), as well as a lack of autonomy. He was gliding through the seminary system like on a conveyer belt. It was only doing our due diligence that we found this and were able to press abort before ordaining him and potentially running into an issue down the road. N.B.: We are no longer sending new men to this particular seminary.

### **Other Comments about the Topic**

Eight bishops and three vocation directors wrote in other comments about the topic that did not contain either of the situations described above:

#### *Bishops*

I tell seminarian I will not go against the recommendation of the seminary as a general rule.

The incidents (2) have more to do with the age of the seminarians -both were over 50-and the seminary recommended moving them to another place. We placed them in a seminary that specializes in forming second-career folks and all went very well.

The seminary, in both cases, had a prior formator working with my seminarian, and the poor performance of the formator should not be a determinant of a man's vocation. I had a candid conversation with the seminary rectors about their choice of formators and in both cases they requested that I send a priest from my diocese. I don't have a priest to spare. Everyone is doing the best they can, but I have to trust my director of seminarians and personal judgments more than the formal recommendation of the seminary in certain cases.

The Diocese of [Name] had a man ready to enter 3rd theology. While the faculty raised concerns of his growth on their evaluation they recommended his advancement. However, I asked him to do a pastoral year to work on addition to gaming which greatly affected sleep and his formation. He never responded to goals we established and after 12 months self-disclosed ongoing porn addiction. He was discontinued.

I have noticed in two candidates for ordination a deep-seated rigidity and an affinity for the traditional Latin Mass. When I brought up my objection, I was assured that this was worked through in formation. Both men who were ordained have had issues in their assignments with being rigid, tend toward the traditional Latin Mass and have tried to recruit other seminarians to their vision of Church.

Candidate turned away by one diocese may or may not proved suitable for ordination by another: cases proved both over the years.

It has happened that a seminarian had problems relating with people, i.e. awkward or timid. Parishioners in his assignment were quick to notice something was off. However, the seminary evaluation did not see it that way.

Other information came to our attention.

### *Vocation Directors*

I am not sure as I have not been in the role the past 10 years. So far, within the past 3 years, I have not seen Bishop disagree with any recommendations the Review Board or Vocation Direction has made.

We no longer send to the seminary. But, we had a seminarian who was moving onto major seminary. For his psych evaluation, we used the psychologist at the seminary. The psych evaluation, and the seminarians end of the year evaluation, which was also obviously from the same seminary, were drastically different. The psych eval proved to be true.

None in past ten years.

### **Additional Comments Written in**

As a final question on all five surveys, respondents were invited to write in: *Any additional comments you wish to communicate:* As the instructions were so open-ended, no analysis of these comments are included in the main body of this report. To read the complete transcription of the responses, see Appendices I to V.

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