

**General Decree of the Irish Episcopal Conference on Admitting  
Candidates coming from other Seminaries or Institutes of  
Consecrated Life or Societies of Apostolic Life**

On 8 March 1996, the Congregation for Catholic Education issued an Instruction: *On admitting Candidates coming from other Seminaries or Religious Communities*. This congregation requested Episcopal Conferences to draw up particular legislation addressing the concerns of the Instruction in accordance with c. 455. The following General Decree of the Irish Episcopal Conference is a response to this request of the Congregation for Catholic Education. This Decree is intended to promote mutual collaboration among bishops and those responsible for priestly formation in the interests of a greater common good.

“It is the task of the Bishop or the competent superior not only to examine the suitability and the vocation of the candidate but also to recognize it. This ecclesiastical element is inherent in a vocation to the priestly ministry as such. The candidate to the priesthood should receive his vocation not by imposing his own personal conditions, but accepting also the norms and conditions which the Church herself lays down, in the fulfilment of her responsibility”

(John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 35).

1. The Diocesan Bishop

- 1.1 In exercising his pastoral office, the Diocesan Bishop is to be solicitous for the well-being of all Christ’s faithful committed to his care (c. 383, §1). Pastoral charity demands that a Diocesan Bishop promote to the ordained ministry only those men endowed to an appropriate degree with the human, moral, spiritual and intellectual qualities necessary to sustain them in their ministry and nourish that portion of God’s people committed to their care (c. 1029). To do otherwise would be to abdicate one’s responsibility and do a serious injustice to the individual in question and to the whole ecclesial community. In addition it would risk bringing the reputation of the institution of priesthood into disrepute.
- 1.2 Of particular interest and concern in this regard is the possible re-admission into formation for the diocesan priesthood of those candidates who have already left or been dismissed from another seminary and / or house of formation of an Institute of Consecrated Life or Society of Apostolic Life. As in the case of any other candidate presenting himself for admission to seminary, the Diocesan Bishop shall endeavour to identify in him the qualities that will allow the candidate to enter fully into priestly formation and possibly be ordained as a priest. He shall not admit to seminary candidates where those qualities, or at least their clear potential to flourish, are manifestly absent.
- 1.3 As diocesan priestly ministry is primarily intended for the service of God’s people, the Diocesan Bishop shall enquire into the candidate’s affiliation to, and apostolic involvement in, the faith community to which he belongs. In his own faith and the practice of it, the candidate must embody and express the faith and the traditions of the Church as enunciated in her teachings.
- 1.4 With a view to establishing that the candidate has a “right intention” (c. 241, §1) the Diocesan Bishop shall enquire into the candidate’s motivation for seeking admission to the seminary. In the initial interview or application form a candidate must be explicitly asked if he has been already in another seminary or house of formation of an Institute of Consecrated Life or Society of Apostolic Life, or requested admission to same and been turned down. In those cases where the answer is affirmative the candidate will be asked to sign the “consent Form” (n.4 below).
- 1.5 A candidate should not be admitted to a new seminary until a recommended period of two years has elapsed since his departure from the previous seminary or house of formation - except in the case where, following a period of discernment and with the recommendation and support of those concerned with his previous formation, a mature decision is taken that the candidate transfer to another diocese, seminary or religious institute.

1.6 In the final analysis the Diocesan Bishop shall make his decision to admit or not admit a candidate to seminary by weighing up all the evidence before him.

1.7 A written report by the Diocesan Bishop (or Superior of the Institute of Consecrated Life or Society of Apostolic Life) for which the candidate was previously a student (*a quo*) is mandatory. The report will normally include the following:

- (a) Personal impressions gleaned from his own meetings and interviews with the candidate;
- (b) The exit-evaluation (n.2.1 below) from the Rector/Delegated Director of the house of formation at the time of the candidate's formation;
- (c) A confidential report from the Diocesan Vocations Director and / or Vocations Team;
- (d) Confidential references and reports (written or oral) from the parish priest of the candidate and other priests who may have known him;
- (e) Confidential reports from former teachers and school principals who have known the candidate;
- (f) Medical and psychological reports (cf. n. 3 below);
- (g) Confidential reports from such members of Christ's faithful noted for their uprightness and astuteness in evaluating people;
- (h) The report (cf. n. 5 below) of the committee established by the Episcopal Conference for the purpose of advising Diocesan Bishops on such matters;
- (i) A candidate's curriculum vitae and academic records.

1.8 A written report ("exit-evaluation") from the Rector of the seminary or Delegated Director of a house of formation (*a quo*) is mandatory (see n.2 below).

1.9 On acceptance of a candidate the Diocesan Bishop must write to the Rector of the seminary *ad quem* informing him that he has followed the current norms, and that he believes the candidate to be suitable according to c. 241, §1. A copy of this letter is also to be forwarded to the previous Bishop/Superior for his information.

2. The Seminary Rector/Delegated Director of house of formation

2.1 It shall be the duty of the Rector of the seminary or Delegated Director of the house of formation to write a final evaluation ("exit-evaluation") on a candidate who leaves before ordination and insert it into his personal file. The Rector/Delegated Director *a quo* is obliged to make available copies of that exit-evaluation and all reports and records in his possession to the Diocesan Bishop *ad quem*, as well as his honest assessment concerning the suitability or otherwise for the priestly ministry of the candidate in question. He will do so at the request of the Diocesan Bishop but not before he receives from the candidate the appropriate consent form, as discussed in n. 4 below.

2.1.1 An "exit-evaluation" will contain the following information:

- (a) The reasons for the candidate's departure from that seminary or Institute of Consecrated Life or Society of Apostolic Life;
- (b) The candidate's academic transcripts;
- (c) Any professional reports (medical / psychological) in possession of the seminary authorities which might shed light on the candidate's suitability or otherwise for the ordained ministry including any evidence of human and affective immaturity or psychological anomalies that may have to come to light during the candidate's sojourn in that seminary or house of formation.

2.2 In arriving at his judgement, the Rector/Delegated Director of the house of formation is strongly urged to consult with other members of staff (excepting the Spiritual Director) who may have known the candidate better and over a longer period of time.

2.3 The Rector/Delegated Director of the house of formation is to inform any student who departs from the seminary/house of formation before ordination that whenever he asks to be admitted to another seminary, the information concerning his previous formation experience contained in his exit-evaluation will be communicated to the new Diocesan Bishop or Superior.

2.4 Should a Rector/Delegated Director of a house of formation discover that a former seminarian / member of an Institute of Consecrated Life or Society of Apostolic Life has been accepted into another seminary, he shall without delay alert the Rector of the new seminary about the candidate's prior sojourn in the other seminary or institute or society. It shall then be the duty of the Rector of the seminary *ad quem* to make a full and thorough enquiry concerning the matters outlined in this General Decree and convey his findings without delay to the Diocesan Bishop who has now accepted the candidate into the seminary. It shall be for the Diocesan Bishop in consultation with the seminary Rector to determine what further steps should be taken in assessing the candidate's suitability for remaining in the seminary.

### 3. Psychological Assessment

3.1 As part of the investigation of suitability for orders, especially in cases of doubt concerning a candidate's suitability, a Diocesan Bishop may judge it useful to invite a candidate for admission or re-admission to priestly formation to undergo a psychological assessment. The psychological report is submitted to the Diocesan Bishop only with the prior written consent of the candidate. The psychological report is to be considered in the context of other reports and references. The psychological expert should be drawn from a school of thought whose views are compatible with Christian theology and anthropology and one who has an understanding of priesthood and vocation. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood* (2008), nn. 6; 11; 16).

### 4 Right to privacy and "consent form"

4.1 To safeguard the candidate's right to privacy and good reputation (cf. c. 220) and to facilitate the transfer of such information from the seminary / house of formation *a quo* to the Diocesan Bishop, the candidate shall first sign a "consent form" making available to the Diocesan Bishop and to the seminary authorities *ad quem* full disclosure of all information, including the report of the psychological expert but exempting of course matters pertaining to the internal and sacramental *fora* (cf. n. 3). On his part the Diocesan Bishop will ensure that this information shall be used solely to assist him and the authorities of the seminary concerned. Should the candidate refuse consent in this regard, the Diocesan Bishop will take this into account in arriving at his decision.

### 5 Episcopal Conference

In problematic cases, the Diocesan Bishop can consult with the Irish Episcopal Conference Commission for Clergy, Seminaries and the Permanent Diaconate.

*This decree was promulgated through publication in 'Intercom' April 2010*