

Behavioral Health Guidelines for Michigan Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and District Committees on Ordained Ministry

In the process of selecting candidates for ministry District Committees on Ordained Ministry (dCOM) and Boards of Ordained Ministry (BOM) must discern each potential candidate's "gifts, evidence of God's grace, and usefulness" (§301.2, see also §605.6, 2008 Discipline). The constant pastoral concern for both the Church and candidates is to maximize effectiveness in ministry (on the positive end of the continuum) and minimize ineffectiveness and harm to all involved, both now and in the future.

These mental and behavior health guidelines seek to describe the boundaries of healthy functioning, beyond which distortions of health become serious problems for the church and its ministry as well as for the person involved. The central question is how experiences impact a person's inner being or spirit and how a person's inmost spirit transforms behavior patterns (I Cor. 13, Romans 12). Concern about a person's mental and emotional status and behavioral patterns, including mental processing, emotional states, identity, personal boundaries, and responses to stress, are part of our pastoral concern in selecting candidates.

Since our ministries are treasures of God in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7), we seek to discern how human vessels can be refined and strengthened in order to be more durable and useful in the ministry of Christ in the world. Where negatives exist, can they be sufficiently healed and transformed with the available resources to enable a candidate to incarnate love in ministry? Where positives exist, can they be used to strengthen trust, enable safety, and express grace and love in relationships without giving in to temptations and distortions?

Most candidates will meet these standards immediately, but some may evidence critical behaviors or conditions that would require further exploration. Questions and appropriate actions are provided to facilitate this exploration. If the results continue to raise concerns, the Board or Committee may take some action, such as postponement of the candidacy process (for further exploration or remediation) or, in serious cases, permanent disqualification.

Definitions:

Category: A general area of concern.

Standard: A minimum requirement necessary to address the area of concern.

Rationale: An explanation of the standard.

Critical Behavior: A specific behavior or condition that indicates the standard has not been met.

Exploratory Question: A recommended question which may assist in assessing whether a critical behavior does indeed violate the standard.

Action: Corrective measures to be taken when exploratory questions indicate that a standard is not met.

Candidate: Refers to a person seeking any change of status in Early and Advanced Candidacy.

Category: Physical Health

Standard: The candidate has no current or recurring disqualifying physical health concerns.

Rationale:

Neglect of physical health is known to impair function in pervasive ways. Responsible preventive health care maximizes the functional abilities of the individual and minimizes the health care costs to the annual conference.

The physical health concerns listed below may have a strong psychological component, and may reflect psychological disorders.

Critical behaviors: (considered in cultural context)

- Morbid obesity (Body weight 100 lbs or more above maximum ideal weight).
- Markedly underweight (body weight at least 15% or more below the candidate's healthy minimum weight).
- An un-treated, chronic, medical condition such as hypertension, diabetes, etc.
- Non-compliance with prescribed medical treatment for any condition.

Exploratory Questions:

How do you evaluate your overall physical health?

What steps do you take to care for your physical health?

When was your last medical checkup?

Do you have any current or chronic health problems?

If so, what steps are you taking to care for yourself?

How does your physical health impact your ability to be an effective minister?

Action: Prior to any change of status the candidate will:

- Articulate their plans for physical health care.
- Demonstrate medical consultation and cooperation with treatment plans when a medical problem exists.

Category: Management of Personal Finances

Standard: The candidate is not in debt so as to embarrass the Church.

Rationale:

While this may not, on the surface, seem to be a behavioral health issue, personal financial management has to do with general maturity, including the ability to set priorities, maintain discipline and delay gratification. Difficulties in this area raise concerns about judgment and impulse control.

Critical behaviors:

- The candidate has been reported to a credit bureau for nonpayment.
- The candidate has a history of a personal bankruptcy.
- The candidate has had monetary judgments filed against him/her.
- The candidate has student loans and other personal debt (excluding mortgages) greater than twice the Michigan Conference Minimum Base Compensation Schedule for their applicable category.

Exploratory Questions:

- Describe the history (sequence) of your difficulties.
- Are there extenuating circumstances? (Possible mitigating circumstances: major medical expenses, divorce. NOTE: Business failures and unemployment are not necessarily mitigating conditions but require further exploration.)

Action: Prior to any change of status:

- If the candidate has a history of having been reported to the credit bureau, then three years of a good credit history is recommended.
- If the candidate has a history of a personal bankruptcy, then five years of good credit is recommended.
- If the candidate has a history of monetary judgments, then it is recommended that the judgments be satisfied prior to continuance.
- In any of the aforementioned, a candidate will articulate their plans for managing their finances.

Category: Mental Illness

Standard: The candidate has no current or recurring disqualifying psychological impairment.

Critical behaviors:

- The candidate has been evaluated or diagnosed by a mental health professional (as referenced in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*).
- The candidate has been hospitalized for psychiatric treatment.
- The candidate has been prescribed psychiatric medications.
- The candidate has attempted suicide.

Exploratory Questions:

- Describe the history (sequence) of your treatment for your difficulties.
- What specific potential vulnerabilities do these difficulties create for your ministry, and how do you see yourself protecting both yourself and the people you would serve?
- Would you be willing to authorize communication between those who have treated you and this committee (note: the more severe the psychiatric impairment, the more important the need for direct consultation with the treating mental health practitioners).

Action: Prior to any change of status:

- The candidate will exhibit a history of remission from any moderately-to-severely impairing conditions for at least three years without necessity for psychiatric hospitalization, though treatment may continue.
- The candidate will exhibit a history of responsible management of any mildly-to-moderately impairing conditions, and has an effective treatment program in place.

Category: Alcohol Abuse/Dependence

Standard: The candidate demonstrates no present abuse or dependence upon alcohol.

Rationale:

Alcohol abuse (short-term intoxication) and/or alcohol dependence (chronic over-involvement) are mental disorders known to impair functioning in pervasive ways. Candidates who suffer from

these disorders will have greatly limited effectiveness and are at much greater risk for professional misconduct.

Critical behaviors:

- a history of drinking to the point of intoxication.
- a history of arrest for driving while intoxicated.
- a history of an arrest for public intoxication.
- complaints by family or others regarding the candidate's use of alcohol.

Exploratory Questions:

The "CAGE" questions below may be helpful: two or more "yes" answers predicts alcoholism with about 75% accuracy.

1. Have you ever felt you should **C**ut down on your drinking?
2. Have people **A**nnoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
3. Have you ever felt bad or **G**uilty about your drinking?
4. Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover? (**E**ye-opener)

Where there is a history of alcohol use, the following questions may be helpful:

- Are you currently abstinent, and if so for how long?
- If you are abstinent, how and why were you able to become abstinent?
- What are you currently doing to maintain abstinence? (Possible answers: Alcoholics Anonymous, outpatient chemical dependency counseling, other counseling)

Action: Prior to any change of status:

- The candidate will evidence a minimum of one year's sobriety.
- If any of the critical behaviors are recent (within five years), a formal "substance abuse evaluation" by a certified chemical dependency treatment specialist may be required at the candidate's expense.
- If there is clear evidence of alcohol dependence, the individual will evidence participation in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or equivalent program and continued involvement in such a program.

Category: Chemical Abuse/Dependency

Standard: The candidate demonstrates no present abuse or dependence upon either nonprescribed pharmacologic agents or prescribed medications.

Rationale:

Chemical abuse and/or dependence are mental disorders known to impair functioning in pervasive ways. Candidates who suffer from these disorders will have greatly limited effectiveness and are at much greater risk for professional misconduct.

Critical behaviors:

- Any use of illegal or non-prescribed substances, including but not limited to marijuana, cocaine, hashish, hallucinogens, sedatives, amphetamines or other stimulants.
- Misuse of prescribed pharmacological agents of any type.
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Exploratory Questions:

- What is your history of chemical abuse or dependency?
- Are you currently abstinent, and if so for how long?
- If you are abstinent, how and why were you able to become abstinent?
- What are you currently doing to maintain abstinence? (Possible answers: Narcotics Anonymous, outpatient chemical dependency counseling, other counseling)

Action: Prior to any change of status:

- If the history reveals any use of illegal substances, or any misuse of prescribed pharmacological agent within the past five years, a formal chemical dependency assessment from a credentialed chemical dependency treatment specialist may be required at the candidate's expense.
- The candidate will exhibit a period of not less than three years of sobriety.

Category: Legal (general)

Standard: The candidate shall be respectful of the law and evidence legal responsibility in personal habits.

Rationale:

This may not, on the surface, appear to be a behavioral health issue, but similar issues around maturity, discipline, and judgment come into play. In addition, one's approach toward the law often is a barometer of one's respect for authority generally, and unresolved authority issues may significantly hamper clergy effectiveness.

Critical behaviors:

- More than three moving violations (traffic) within the preceding year.
- Conviction for any misdemeanor.
- Conviction for any felony.

Note: "Conviction" includes a "no contest" plea without admission of guilt, deferred adjudication and/or probation.

Exploratory Questions:

- What is your driving record?
- Explain to us the circumstances of any conviction.

Action: Prior to any change of status:

- Candidates may have no more than three moving violations (traffic) within the preceding year.
- A history of conviction for any felony is, under most circumstances, permanently disqualifying.

Category: Family Violence

Standard: The candidate has a history of resolving family conflict in a nonviolent manner.

Critical behaviors:

- Any report or complaint (against the candidate) of family violence.
- Any history that a law enforcement unit has been called to the candidate's residence because of his/her behavior.

- Any report or complaint (against the candidate) to protective services for inappropriate treatment of children or adults.
- Any history of protective orders against the candidate.

Exploratory Questions:

- Is there is a history of violence in your immediate or extended family?
- Is there any pending legal process?

Action: Prior to any change of status:

- The candidate will have at least three years without reports of the above mentioned critical behaviors.
- The presence of any critical behaviors requires an inquiry into the facts and circumstances.
- The candidate shall acknowledge his/her behaviors and may have entered into counseling or other appropriate treatment.

Category: Divorce or Infidelity

Standard: The candidate reflects an understanding of the significance of the quality of his or her married life on ministry.

Rationale: If the candidate has been divorced, or if there is evidence of infidelity, the candidate must have done sufficient exploratory and reparative work to demonstrate and/or articulate the impact of the health of married life on quality of ministry.

Critical behaviors:

- A divorce in the past three years.
- A history of having been married more than twice.
- A history of infidelity.

Exploratory Questions:

If a recent divorce:

- What steps have you taken to understand the nature of your own contribution to the dissolution of the marriage?
- What steps have you taken to move yourself through a healthy grief process?

If multiple marriages:

- What steps have you taken to identify and deal with any dysfunctional patterns in intimate relationships?

In either case:

- Have you maintained fidelity in marriage? If not, what steps have you taken to understand your actions and decisions so as to safeguard current or future marriage covenants?

Action: Prior to any change of status the candidate will:

- If a history of divorce is present, then at least two years shall have elapsed since the divorce.

- If the individual has been married more than twice, then at least five years either in singleness or in a stable marriage shall be required prior to certification.
- In either case, and particularly where there is evidence of an individual's infidelity, the Board requires professional counseling with a focus on relationship issues or requires evidence of previous counseling.

Category: Improper Sexual Conduct

Standard: The candidate has no history, complaints, or charges of improper sexual conduct. See addendum for definitions.

Rationale:

Candidates must model in their personal life and behavior a healthy and sacred view of sexuality so as not to misuse the clerical office.

Critical Behaviors

- A history of complaints or charges (either formal or informal) of sexual harassment.
- A history of improper sexual conduct.

Exploratory Questions

- Have you ever had a complaint or charge (either formal or informal) of sexual harassment or misconduct brought against you? (If so, describe the circumstances.)
- What steps have you taken to insure that the behavior does not occur in the future?

Action: Prior to any change of status:

- The candidate will have no evidence of sexual misconduct for at least three years.
- A candidate will articulate a plan to insure that such behavior is unlikely to recur. This plan may include intensive psychotherapy and/or ongoing supervision, or other conditions required by the Board.

Category: Legal - Sex related crimes

Standard: The candidate shall have no history that poses risk of sexual harassment, sexual assault to adults or children, nor history of any sex-related offense.

Critical behaviors:

- Treatment for any sex-related crime.
- Conviction for any sex-related crime.
- Written allegations of any sex-related crime.

Action:

- If the candidate has been convicted of a sex-related crime, he or she should be permanently disqualified.
- Certainly the candidate is entitled to be considered innocent until proven guilty, so a written accusation or arrest alone is not sufficient for disqualification, but either one would raise significant questions which the Board would need to explore in depth.

ADDENDUM
Definitions of Improper Sexual Conduct
Includes, but not limited to the following modalities:
physical contact, phone, text, or Internet

1. Sexual harassment

Includes solicitation, physical advances, or verbal or nonverbal conduct consisting of a single intense or severe act, or of multiple persistent or pervasive acts, by a candidate toward another individual, that are sexual in nature and occur whether in connection with the candidate's clerical activities or personal life, and that are unwelcome, offensive, or create a hostile environment for the affected individual.

2. Sexual impropriety

Sexual impropriety (in person, by phone, text, or internet) is deliberate or repeated comments, gestures, or physical acts of a sexual nature that include but are not limited to:

- a) behavior, gestures or expressions which may reasonably be interpreted as inappropriately seductive or sexually demeaning,
- b) making inappropriate comments about an individual's body,
- c) making sexually demeaning comments to an individual,
- d) making comments about an individual's potential sexual performance,
- e) in a counseling relationship, requesting details of a person's sexual history when not clinically indicated for the type of consultation,
- f) requesting a date,
- g) initiating conversation regarding the sexual problems, preferences, or fantasies of either party,
- h) kissing of a sexual nature,
- i) sharing or displaying pornographic material with another person.

3. Deviant sexual behaviors

Deviant sexual behaviors include, but are not limited to, behaviors such as pedophilia, exhibitionism, or other paraphilias, and preoccupation with pornographic materials for sexual stimulation and gratification.