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# The General Board of Examining Chaplains

"Has the mail come?" Though not exactly a theological question this was the common query on March 22, 1976 of the 262 theological students who took the 1976 General Ordination Examinations. Less urgently, perhaps, but also with a mixture of hope and anxiety that Monday morning the Bishops and Commission on Ministry chairmen in 69 Dioceses awaited the postman's arrival. This was the day when the evaluations of each Candidate's performance on the exams had been promised, and decisions about ordinations could not be made until these reports were received.

Almost all Candidates in American seminaries or studying in diocesan schools of theology did receive news from the General Board of Examining Chaplains that day when the mail came. Mail delivery was delayed in a few cases until a day or two later, and four Candidates in England and one in Germany probably got theirs sometime that week. For each of them this was the climax of the fifth annual General Ordination Examination, referred to usually as the GOE. Most of the Candidates could have read their evaluations and sung "Alleluia!" but a few would have felt the medieval solemnity of "Day of wrath, O day of mourning" more appropriate.

Each year more students and more dioceses participate in the GOE's, but a description of this year's experience may stand as the General Board of Examining Chaplains' report for the past triennium of GOE's.

The 1976 GOE process began in September 1975 when most of the 21 members of the General Board of Examining Chaplains met for three days to prepare the essay questions. The GBEC, with the assistance of other seminary professors and some testing experts, had previously prepared a multiple choice test of 300 questions titled "The History, Literature, and Vocabulary of the Christian Tradition." In December the Bishops were asked to name their diocesan Candidates who would take the GOE's and to add recommendations to those made in previous years of persons who might assist in evaluating the written exams.

At 9 a.m. on January 26, 1976 the GOE's began with two hours allotted to the multiple choice test. Then for six days (and for some Candidates parts of the nights too) the Candidates wrote their responses to the situations posed in the essay questions. Both parts of the exam were designed to allow the Candidate to demonstrate "satisfactory proficiency" in the seven subject matter areas listed in Title III Canon 5. These are: The Holy Scriptures; Church History; Christian Theology; Christian Ethics, and Moral Theology; Studies in Contemporary Society, including Racial and Minority Groups; Liturgics, Christian Worship and the contents and use of the Book of Common Prayer; and Theory and Practice of Ministry.

In the GBEC office the Administrator of the GOE and his secretary were soon deluged with 262 multiple choice tests to be scored and the percentile rankings of each Candidate calculated, and 252 full sets of essay question answers. Four Xerox copies were made by a professional company of each of these 12,461 typed pages and so they multiplied as 49,854 copies were added to the original 12,461.

The GBEC office mailed the exam papers of four Candidates to each of 128 Readers who were matched in pairs so that each pair of Readers read the same four exams. The Candidates were known to the Readers only by number, 76-159 for example, but the Readers were urged to keep St. John the Divine's phrase in mind,

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"It is a human number." Each Candidate's Readers also remain anonymous to him or to her.

After two weeks time to study these papers the pairs of Readers met in seven regional conferences (Cambridge, New York, Alexandria, Atlanta, Kansas City, Seattle, and Berkeley) with two or three members of the General Board of Examining Chaplains and prepared joint evaluations of their four sets of GOE's. These evaluations were sent posthaste (is that an out of date word?) to the GBEC office for further checking, minor editing, and some were retyped in order to get a clean copy. Exams which were severely criticized or questioned for any reason were read by a third and sometimes by even a fourth or a fifth Reader and additional evaluative comments made.

Then more Xeroxing multiplied the original certificates of proficiency, or lack of it, which the Chaplains supervising the regional meetings of Readers had signed, and the Readers' evaluations (2 to 6 typed pages for each exam). The total this time was 3,279 copies.

Finally on the week-end of the first day of spring there was the monster mail-out of the following items. Each Candidate was sent a certificate, his or her evaluation, a graph reporting his or her percentile ranking on the test on "The History, Literature, and Vocabulary of the Christian Tradition," and his or her original exam papers. For each of his Candidates the Bishop was sent the certificate, the evaluation, the percentile ranking graph, the exam questions, and a full copy of what each Candidate had written in response to the questions. The Commission on Ministry chairmen were sent copies of everything mailed to the Bishop. As the Canon requires, seminary deans were sent copies of the certificates of proficiency for their students. Postage costs for this mailing amounted to \$618.

Most Candidates received certificates of "satisfactory proficiency" in all of the canonical subjects. For some, however, the Readers and Chaplains recommended further examination, preferably oral, on the Diocesan level in one or more of the seven subjects. A very few exams were quite unsatisfactory. In every case for every Candidate it is anticipated that his or her exam papers will be read and the strengths and weaknesses discussed with him or her by some person or persons in the Diocese. Since the original Readers are not infallible, the Candidate is protected from an inadequate evaluation made by them as two copies of his writings, plus his own copy, are available for re-reading in the Diocese so new evaluations can be made.

Who does all this work and how is it financed? The General Board of Examining Chaplains, nominated by the House of Bishops and approved by the House of Deputies, prepares the questions, supervises the writing of the Readers' evaluations, and makes the basic policy decisions. The GBEC also selects the Administrator of the GOE, and he with secretarial assistance enlists the Readers, corresponds voluminously with Candidates, Bishops, and Deans, and attends to the complicated logistics.

The General Convention in 1970 initiated the General Board of Examining Chaplains (Title III Canon 7). The membership includes three Bishops, six parish priests, six professors (and the understanding was that most would be seminary professors), and six lay persons. Several of the lay persons are also professors. Since the identity of the present membership is illustrative of the diverse experience and competence which Board members bring to this examination ministry, it seems best to add a few words about each one rather than just list their names.

The Bishops are: William Spofford of Eastern Oregon, the present Chairman, has had extensive experience and training in pastoral education and as a hospital chaplain. Frederick Wolf of Maine, former Chairman, is co-author of *Journey in Faith* and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the General Theological Seminary. George Alexander of Upper South Carolina was, before his election to the

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episcopate, Dean of the School of Theology at Sewanee.

In the past triennium several persons on the Board have changed jobs and in so doing moved from one category to another. Their present posts will be given here and the clergy will be listed first. Charles Long, Vice-Chairman of the GBEC, is the executive in charge of the American office of the World Council of Churches. Perry Williams is Dean of Trinity Cathedral, Cleveland. Bartine Sherman is Rector of St. Martin's Church, Charlotte, N.C. William Hale is Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, Syracuse. Joseph Green is Rector of Grace Church, Norfolk, Va. C. FitzSimons Allison is Rector of Grace Church, New York City. H. Boone Porter is the Director of the Roanridge Conference Center near Kansas City. Boyce Bennett is professor at the General Theological Seminary. Massey Shepherd is professor at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. Charles Eldon Davis is Rector of St. Paul's Church, Benicia, California. Jerre Feagin, a recent seminary graduate and now curate at St. John's Church, Locust Valley in the Diocese of Long Island, has been a helpful associate though not a Board member.

Lay members of the GBEC are: Marianne Micks, professor at the Virginia Theological Seminary; Charles Lawrence, professor in New York and with a wealth of experience in many areas of church life; Cecil Patterson, Dean of Undergraduate Affairs at North Carolina Central University; Lelia White, professor at Voorhees College in South Carolina; Byron Rushing, Director of the Museum of Afro-American History in Boston; George Shipman, retired professor at the University of Washington in Seattle; William Gaines, Director of the Institute of European Studies, Chicago; and Marylu Fowler, Director of the Association for Creative Change, Wilmette, Illinois.

Dr. Allison, Dr. Porter, and Dr. Fowler are former seminary faculty members.

The Rev. Emmet Gribbin has been the Administrator of the GOE for the past triennium. A University Chaplain for three decades, his main employment now is as Bishop's Deputy for Ministry in the Diocese of Alabama. Bishop Stough has released him for two months each year so that he could work full time for the GBEC. In the fall of 1975 the GBEC office was moved from New York to Alabama, primarily as an economy move.

The GBEC funds come from the General Convention's budget, and \$95,000 was appropriated this past triennium, that is for the three years \$35,000; \$35,000, and \$25,000. This proved inadequate in large part because the more Candidates there are, the more Readers there have to be. More than half of the 1976 budget was used to cover the costs of the Readers' conferences as travel, board and room, rented typewriters, some secretarial help, and a token honorarium for each Reader had to be provided. The 1976 GOE's could not have been given at all had not the General Convention's Program and Budget Committee made an additional appropriation and a number of Bishops cheerfully sent in \$100 checks for each of their Candidates. This appropriation and the \$14,200 sent in by the Bishops the GBEC took to be expressions of confidence and appreciation for the Board's work.

The GBEC welcomes criticisms and suggestions as to how to improve all aspects of the GOE. Experience has taught the GBEC much. This agency of the national Church has examined 690 Candidates during this triennium and certified most of them as academically qualified for ordination.

Respectfully submitted,  
Emmet Gribbin, *Administrator*  
William B. Spofford, *Chairman*