



# BRINGING CLARITY TO YOUR CALL

*The PRO-D Assessment<sup>©</sup>*

*A Tool for Building Self-Awareness and Confidence  
in Students Preparing for Ministry Roles*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The problems associated with early termination of ministry careers, whether through congregational action, personal burnout or personal misconduct, are many.

**PIR Ministries** is a ministry that began by focusing on care for pastors who have experienced burnout, conflict and exits from ministry. Based on what we have learned through this practical experience, we then expanded our focus to provide proactive training that could allow younger pastors to avoid these common problems in ministry. We do this through the PRO D Assessment®, an effective tool for building and fortifying confidence and self-awareness in students preparing for futures in ministry.

- Fully one of out of every two pastors drops out of ministry within the first five years.
- Forward thinking educational institutions know their students need to be better equipped to cope with the rising pressures associated with contemporary ministry.
- While institutions excel at providing biblical and theological training, more limited attention has been given to helping students understand how their motivations, abilities and personalities work together, and their impact on ministry life.
- The Pro-D Assessment helps seminary students better understand the ministry roles and the contexts for which they are best suited, based on their motivations, abilities and personality.
- The PRO D Assessment is a professional development tool for leaders measuring the areas of convergence of an individual's mission, competencies and behavioral style; with the added critical dimension of anticipating *role fit*.

**Our goal** is to help institutions provide their students with better personal preparation for ministry. The results of our pilot program, conducted at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan have been overwhelmingly positive.

- 35.7% of students participating considered the PRO-D Assessment as a *vital* tool in their career decision making.
- 54.8% considered it a key reference.
- 92.9% of participating students view the Assessment as something worthwhile for others in similar situations.
- 76.6% felt that the personal consultation over the assessment was very helpful in unpacking the results.

As you work to provide your students a robust experience that helps them face the challenges of ministry, the PRO-D Assessment can contribute to increasing higher job placement and better retention in ministry.

For a deeper understanding of the principles and methods involved in the PRO-D Assessment, please contact PIR Ministries at 757-853-7889 or [info@pirministries.org](mailto:info@pirministries.org).

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## INTRODUCTION

Answering the call to ministry is the first step in a life-long immersion into a world where ministry's three p's – people, passion and the pursuit of excellence – intersect on a daily basis. Spiritual and theological implications aside, the next step in the process, preparation, is the real key to ensuring initial success in the first few years a person enjoys in his or her ministry career. Why? The reality of a career in ministry is this: The longer one serves, the more pressure one encounters.

Think about it. Today's ministerial professionals are under constant pressure both internal and external – to succeed and excel in every aspect and endeavor of church and personal life. In a complex world encumbered with complex cultures and complex congregations, the rigorous requirements of the position are daunting, as are the expectations that come from without and within. After all, while it may be possible to live with the feeling of failing people, living with the feeling of failing God brings almost unbearable frustration, anxiety and, in many cases, depression.

A column by Paul Vitello appeared in The New York Times, dated August 1, 2010, and entitled, *Taking a Break from the Lord's Work*, led with this less than rosy picture of life in ministry:

*"The findings have surfaced with ominous regularity over the last few years and with little notice: Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could."*

It's that last line that's the kicker. There was a time when the call to ministry represented a lifelong endeavor. Pastors worked seven days a week, including evenings. Even the pastor's family tended to find a home in church as much as they did at home. This lifestyle was, in many ways, a sacrificial one, where almost no personal or family price was too high a cost for increased fervor and spiritual growth among the flock. That time is no more.

## FACING THE MINISTRY FALLOUT FACTS

With the influx of social media and other cultural shifts, today's modern congregations expect a great deal more than simple spiritual mentoring. As the pressure to deliver leadership, friendship, teaching, social activism, cultural reform, theological insight and practical counsel, the position of ministry leader has grown in complexity. And those in positions of ministry – as well as their families – are paying the price. A glance at the statistics related to burnout and forced exits among the pastoral community makes a compelling case for this reality:

- 66% of pastors are experiencing a moderate level of burnout at any time.<sup>1</sup>
- Most pastors feel a high level of job stress and fatigue in their work, which contributes to burnout.<sup>1</sup>
- 47% of pastors surveyed are currently “fried to a crisp” or simply “enduring despite the heat.”<sup>2</sup>
- Over 50% of all pastors will experience a forced termination during their ministry lives.<sup>3</sup>
- 50%, fully one out of every two pastors, drop out of ministry within the first five years, and many never go back to the church again.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of pastoral burnout is real. And as this problem grows, it threatens the health and growth of the modern Christian church.

Still, despite the burnout problem and its attendant difficulties, there are still many young people feeling the call to ministry. This leads us to the second problem facing the Christian church in this country: **How can we better prepare today's ministry students for the challenges and pressures of lifelong ministerial vocations?** With enrollments at seminaries and Christian colleges in decline, it is crucial that these institutions take every opportunity to better prepare those who come and those who are called.

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<sup>1</sup>“Flourishing in Ministry – Emerging Research Insights on the Well-Being of Pastors,” *The Flourishing in Ministry Project*, Mendoza College of Business, The University of Notre Dame. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Survey of 329 pastors reported in *Christianity Today*, September 2015.

<sup>3</sup> “Forced Pastoral Exits: An Exploratory Study,” Barfoot, Winston and Wickman, *School of Leadership Studies*, Regent University. 2005. A recent study reported by *Christianity Today* indicates that as many as 76% of pastors have experienced a forced termination at least once. (May 2012)

<sup>4</sup> “Maintaining Personal Resiliency: Lessons Learned from Evangelical Protestant Clergy,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 2009.

## CHANGING THE TRENDS

### *Self-Awareness through the PRO D Assessment*

If pastoral burnout and ministry attrition is the problem, what's the solution?

PIR Ministries core process focuses on ministering to those who have experienced an exit from their ministry role as a result of the very issues mentioned above. Our mission also includes helping pastors and ministry leaders identify and address the pressures that can put them "at-risk." We believe that a lack of self-awareness on the part of ministry leaders – as well as those preparing for a ministry role – is a significant contributing factor to being at risk for an exit. The costs associated with these exits cannot be over-estimated. The impact on congregational health, on the dignity and families of those exited, as well as on the resources of time and money associated with exits, is staggering. Our goal is two-fold:

- to assist those ministry leaders who have been exited recover their lives and, in many cases, recover and even redeem their sense of their calling and purpose in ministry.
- To offer resources and encouragement that can help prevent the damage of an exit.

As an organization, we hold a deep primary conviction that greater self-awareness leads to a healthier ministry. The PRO-D Assessment has proven highly successful to this end.

While this certainly applies to those who have experienced an exit from a ministry role, we also believe that those preparing for careers in ministry can gain an advantage by looking within. This led us to consider introducing the PRO-D Assessment into the seminary experience; where ministry students might be enabled to better understand themselves in relation to their individual callings.

We believe the PRO-Development (or PRO-D) Assessment<sup>®</sup>, developed by TAI, Inc., provides valuable insights into personal values, styles and tendencies. This is information any individual might find interesting. However, we believe that, for seminary students on the verge of becoming ministry professionals, insights gleaned from the assessment are not only valuable, but also transformational – creating the opportunity to better discern the shape of one's calling, as well as address any growth areas the students may have.

### **Describing PRO-D<sup>®</sup> Assessment**

TAI's website describes PRO-D as a *professional development instrument* for leaders. As such, it measures the convergence of an individual's:

- Missions: motivations and interests that excite an individual to action
- Competencies: abilities and aptitudes that enable action
- Style: personality traits and behaviors that make an individual unique

*Convergence*<sup>5</sup> is the “sweet spot” in each of our lives where the above intersect, and is the place out of which we live and work most often.

PRO-D produces an accurate perspective of how the different dimensions of mission, style and competency interact for the Person, his or her Role and the Organization they are a part of. Armed with a greater sense of self-awareness, the individual is then able to create a personal environment for growing effectiveness in life and work.

PRO-D is a proven assessment tool, one we felt was well-suited to the program we desired to build. We envisioned the program as a true, value-add service that might better assist seminaries and other Christian institutions of higher learning in preparing students for the real-world work of ministry and service. It is unique in that it measures the convergence of multiple personal dimensions, as opposed to the one or two most assessment tools measure. Our vision for this program is two-fold:

- First, to provide a means for the next generation of ministry leaders to approach their call with greater self-awareness and confidence.
- Second, to bring the experience of those providing care for established pastors and ministry leaders to bear on the preparation of seminary students through the use of the PRO-D Assessment experience.

The assessment consists of four key components:

- The *assessment*, delivered online and consisting of 600 questions and divided into two parts.
  - The first measures the individual’s convergence of *mission, competencies and styles*, and suggests the roles and functions that would allow the individual to bring the best of who they are.
  - The second looks at how the individual’s convergence *fits* with what they currently *do*, within an organizational culture.
- The *report*, which provides granular data relating to the assessment results. See a sample report [here](#).<sup>6</sup>
- The *personal consult*, a 1.5 hour walkthrough of the assessment results and report, conducted by a trained PRO-D Consultant. Students received a copy of the assessment results in advance of the consultation.

With the vision developed, it was time to find a suitable environment in which to test it.

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<sup>5</sup> Convergence is a part of Career Construction Theory developed by Mark Savickas and Robert Lent. This concept helped to shape the underlying framework of the PRO-D Assessment when it was created. For over seven years George Gallup and Win Manning (ETS) advised OBIK, a Princeton-based assessment company, to guide the creation of the PRO Development™ concept. The assessment was tested with over 5,000 individuals.

<sup>6</sup> A “faith-based” version of the assessment is typically used in this context. It retains all of the elements of the corporate version, while relating those elements to biblical principles.

## Pilot Program

Because of a two-year growing relationship, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids MI, was engaged as the pilot site. The objectives of the pilot program included:

- Assessment results would be used as a mid-point and exit assessment of student readiness for ministry.
- The results would help identify areas suggesting a different shape to the ministry call moving forward.
- The initial focus would be on student strengths and weaknesses in relationship to anticipated ministry roles.
- Other areas of concern would be addressed as they were exposed.
- Additional mentoring and other resources would be made available to participating students as required.

During the semester of Fall 2015 through Summer 2016, arrangements were made for 76 students to participate in the PRO-D pilot program. These students were enrolled in a variety of educational tracks, including Masters of Divinity (MDiv), Masters of Arts (MA) in Counseling, Masters of Arts (MA) in Leadership and Masters of Arts (MA) in Spiritual Formation. Other student characteristics included:

- A mix of students from onsite and online learning.
- A mix of racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- A mix of men and women.

The PRO-D Assessment was included as part of the class requirements for students taking the Spiritual Formation class during that semester. At the end of the program a survey was administered, with 43 of the 76 participating students responding.



## OUR RESULTS

Overall, the results of the program were not only successful from our perspective, as well as that of the seminary itself, but also beneficial to the students involved. In a post-mortem meeting with Seminary leaders, the perception of the value of the PRO-D Assessment was characterized as “very positive.” In this meeting, several observations of the program’s effectiveness were made:

- The results indicated that, prior to the assessment, some students were unclear as to the nature of their callings or the direction of their ministry careers.
- The assessment helped clarify the clear distinction between *leaders* and *managers*.
- The assessment helped some students identify the level of their *communication skills (written vs. verbal)*.
- The assessment provided suggestions for *additional areas of growth or further education*. This included areas such as negotiation, listening, team building, boundaries, and feedback
- The assessment revealed some instances of a *non-traditional expression* of their individual calls to ministry.
- The assessment results indicated that each participant would benefit from the support and direction provided by a *mentor or coach*.
- In some cases, the participants *experienced a confirmation* of their respective calls.
- No more than three students were cautioned about their respective directions or possible changes in their directions.

### PRO-D’s Impact

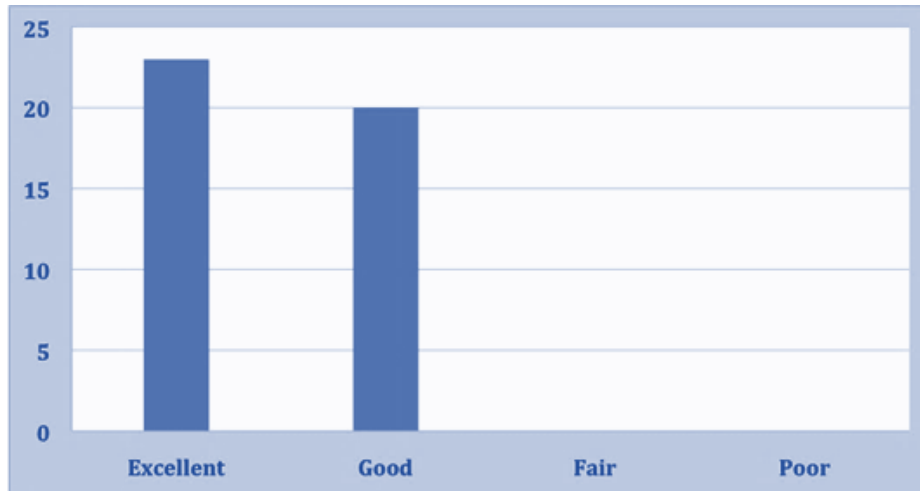
Overall, the seminary’s leadership felt the immediate impact of the pilot program on their students was three-fold:

- Participants received *a better understanding* of their individual callings.
- Participants left the program with *greater self-awareness* of both their strengths and their weaknesses.
- Participants left the assessment pilot with a *greater sense of confidence* not only in pursuing their call but also in their abilities to work effectively in their ministries.
- Participants were given an opportunity to develop an actionable plan for avoiding or dealing with the pressures, issues, concerns and problems that accompany full-time ministry endeavors. (Effectiveness)

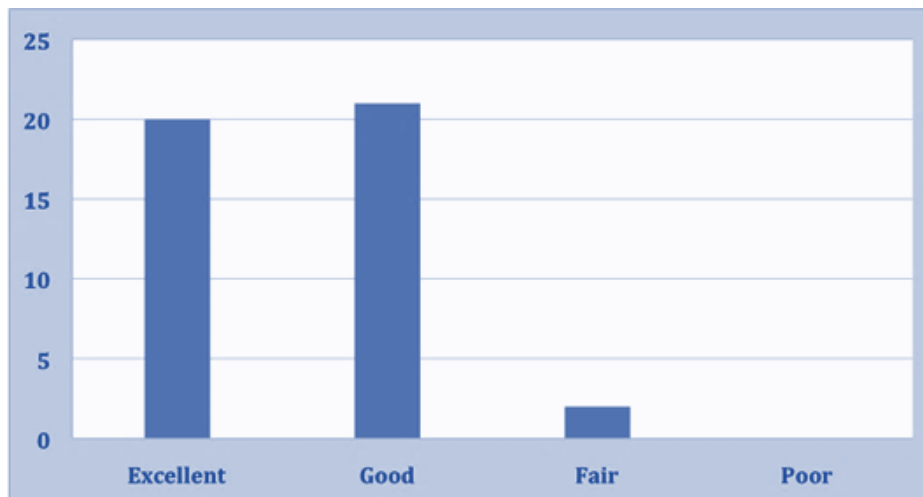
As proof of this, we present the results of a ten-question participation survey that, as mentioned in the previous section, had 43 respondents. The first four questions dealt

with the student’s ability to access, navigate and understand the assessment. Questions five through ten dealt with the student’s perception of the assessment itself.

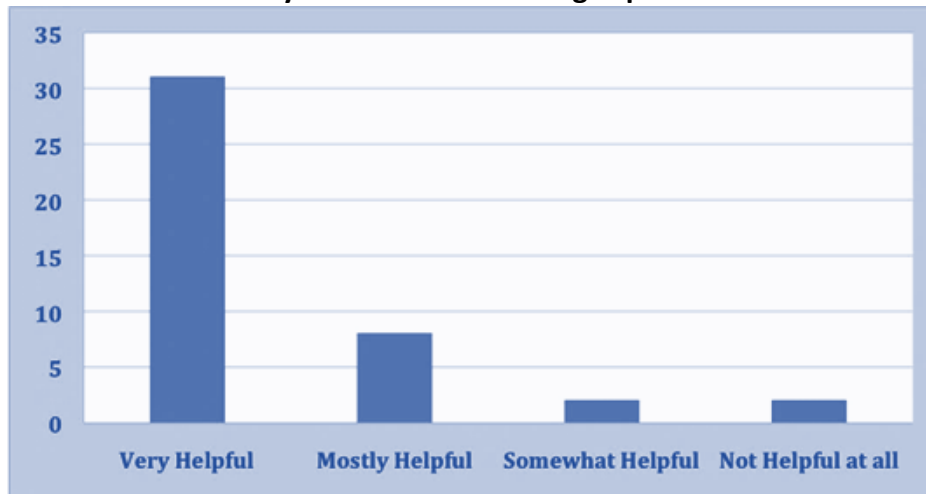
**Question Five: How would you rate your overall experience with the assessment on line?**



**Question Six: Rate the clarity of the information provided in the PRO D Report sent to you.**



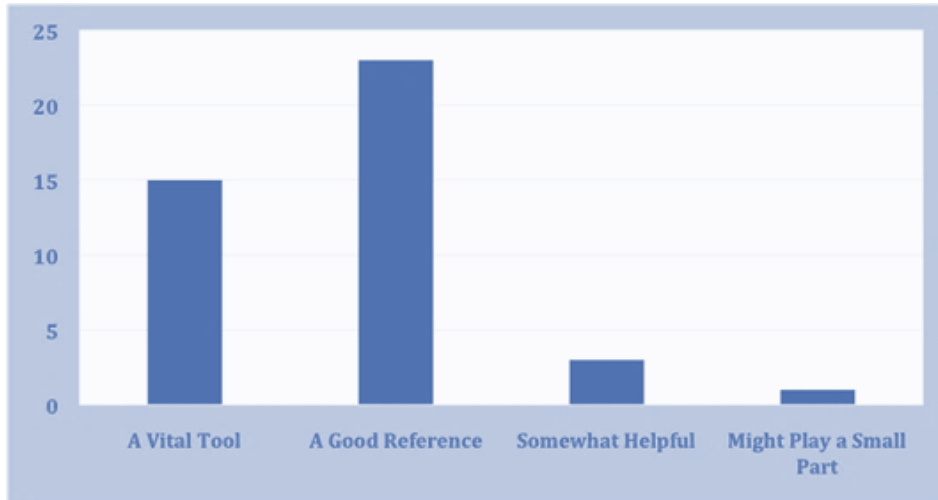
### Question Seven: How would you rate the consulting experience?



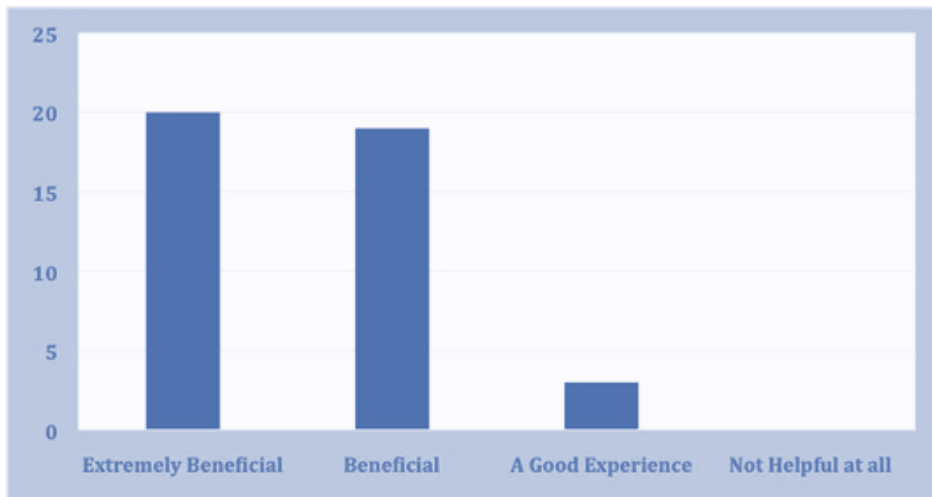
**Question Eight: What insights from the consultation were most helpful to you?** (Please note that this question asked the participants to provide comments rather than a rating. A sampling of their comments is presented here)

- *Being able to confirm/affirm the direction I have chosen for my career*
- *How my personality might fit in my role and also my organization. Also appreciated honest feedback on weaknesses and suggested solutions for these*
- *It really clarified and defined my strengths and weaknesses...Gaining more self-understanding provides me with more confidence in life. It was also reassuring to know that I am headed in the right direction given my gifts, talents, and desires.*
- *The relationships between missions, competencies, and styles across different areas*
- *Defining some aspects of my personality was extremely helpful, since it helps me frame discussions and thoughts going forward!*
- *My understanding of the "leadership L" as my highest strengths and its implications for ministry.*
- *The clarifying, categorical, and intuitive nature on how to interpret the results. The consultation allowed me to glean greater knowledge about myself and what are good routes to take while operating from that.*
- *A good understanding of how my strengths can work together rather than against each other, particularly in leadership roles.*
- *Understanding how I relate in my current job, and interpreting any successes/frustrations through the lens of my strengths & weaknesses*
- *Some of the cautionary info was very helpful. It also provided insight into why I am quite frustrated in my current role.*

**Question 9: When making decisions about current or future ministry paths, the PRO D assessment will be...**



**Question Ten: How beneficial do you think the PRO D assessment would be for others?**



## **Student and Faculty Testimonies**

Sometimes, it's best to let those with experience talk about that experience. We present a smattering of the testimonials we received from students who participated in the PRO-D Pilot Program; as well as faculty observations.

*"...it may have proven fruitful already in the equipping team meeting I had today. Thanks again!"*

*"Pro-D was an extremely insightful assessment that has helped me narrow my vocational vision, in a good way. It has taken away the guilt and given me the liberating freedom to pursue the careers and work environments that will suit me and those around me best."*

*"PRO-D has greatly benefited me as I determine what my calling in life is. I have taken many tests that tell me a lot about myself, but never have I taken one that was so specific to my area of need, that is where I might excel; working in my sweet spots. The test was great, but the consult to follow was the most help."*

*"Many of the assessments I have taken up to this point have primarily explored either my personality or specific ways I like to work. But the Pro-D helped me see how my personality, life purpose, and work style all converge. This convergence is an area that will most likely be a vocational 'sweet spot' for me."*

*"...Pro-D emphasizes that styles are things we CAN change. It highlighted where I lean stylistically, but also showed some practical areas that are very realistic for me to change in order to grow."*

*"It has helped me to focus my time and energies in areas I am most productive and efficient and that will bring me the greatest joy. At the same time, it has given me valuable insights where growth still needs to take place and areas I can be of the greatest assistance to a team around me."*

*"GRTS implemented the PRO-D as a requirement for all students since we value the importance of clarifying fit for ministry and vocational calling. The PRO-D provides a platform and appropriate language to have discussions about a student's future trajectory and how it fits into the way that God has created them. Students have thoroughly enjoyed their one on one consultation with a trained PRO-D consultant who invests in them spiritually and emotionally."*

- Tara Kram, Associate Dean, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary.

*"The Pro-D assessment has been very useful in helping students better understand their calling to particular ministries in the church, and the kinds of ministry environments in*

*which they will most likely thrive. The PRO-D assessment should be regarded as an essential tool in the formation of future pastors and other ministry leaders.”*

- Dr. Byard Bennett, Professor of Theology, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary.

## IN CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to convey not only the relevance of the PRO-D Assessment but also its impact on seminary students preparing for careers in ministry. What is abundantly clear is that classroom preparation alone – or preparation in conjunction with staff internships – is not sufficient to help prepare these students for the pressures facing them in the years to come. We see this in the current crisis in church leadership as more and more ministry professionals succumb to the expectations – both external and internal – that accompany this important life vocation.

A minister's primary means of receiving the support, empowerment and enablement is always rooted in that individual's personal relationship with God. However, an assessment focused on the convergence of mission, competency and style provides insight into the individual's strength and weaknesses. Such an assessment also provides:

- valuable insights into how to ensure excellence in performance over the long-term,
- A greater degree of self-awareness, creating confidence that the individual is functioning not only in areas of interest and competency but also of calling,
- ample material for personal and spiritual growth as time goes by.

Educational institutions like seminaries and colleges can use the results of the assessment to examine their own degree and course offerings, as well as mentoring experiences. This in turn allows them to help better prepare their students for success. We believe the PRO-D Assessment meets the requirements for providing these key insights. It is a program that performs an essential and valuable function in assisting those educational institutions desiring to help their students build a strong base of knowledge, character and competencies on which they can stand firm in the years to come. Institutions whose alumni have been better equipped through healthy self-awareness can point to the long-term effectiveness of those alumni in their respective ministry roles.

PIR Ministries is happy to consult with any Christian educational institution interested in administering the PRO-D assessment to its students. To find out more about the work of PIR Ministries and the PRO-D Assessment, please contact:

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## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **PIR Ministries, Inc.**

For over 20 years Pastor-in-Residence (PIR) Ministries has been providing a proven process to restore hope to “at-risk” and exited pastors by partnering with God and the church. Taking what we have learned about the conditions and circumstances that can lead to an exit from a ministry role, PIR Ministries also seeks to provide resources and relationships to assist pastors in their efforts to practice a healthy ministry lifestyle.

[www.pirministries.org](http://www.pirministries.org)

### **TAI Incorporated**

Partnering with clients around the globe, TAI works with individuals and teams at all levels, across business units, departments and functional areas. We produce values-based leaders and develop high-performing teams. The result: increased employee engagement, retention of key talent, leadership development from the top-down, and higher performance through values-based leadership. PRO-D is a leadership assessment instrument designed to help executives become more self-aware and focused on their individual strengths and ideal roles.

[www.taiinc.com](http://www.taiinc.com)