CPE Interviews: 10 Tips to Get Ready

1. Reread your CPE application essays, as interview questions are likely to be drawn from them.

2. Practice answering questions. Here are some examples. Look in a mirror to observe your facial expressions as you answer them, or have a friend ask you these questions and ask for feedback on your answers.
   - Why do you want to be a chaplain?
   - Why are you interested in doing CPE? What do you hope to learn from CPE? Answer could include references to two “muscles” of chaplaincy: skills and self-awareness. For instance:
     - (Skills.) “I would like to improve spiritual care skills, including needs assessment and spiritual assessment. I would like to improve my religious literacy.” Or, “I’d like to learn how to deal better with angry doctors.”
     - (Self-awareness.) “I would like to learn to be more aware of when I’m having the desire to fix someone or to remove their suffering, and how to manage that impulse.” Or, “I’d like to understand better why such-and-such is particularly hard for me.”
   - What strengths will you bring to CPE?
   - What difficulties may you have in doing CPE?
   - Give us an example of a time you did a great job of providing spiritual care.
   - Tell us about a difficult time in your life and how you dealt with it.

3. Make sure you know exactly where the interview is to take place and get there early. Wear a professional blazer or jacket, work dress shirt or blouse, and slacks. Chaplains should look mature, safe, and approachable.

4. Be sociable. Shake hands at the beginning and the end. Relax. Have fun, if possible. Interviews can be bland. It’s OK to be yourself and to express your personality and sense of humor.

5. Keep in mind that CPE supervisors assess candidates in three areas:
   - Personality and presence/people skills.
   - Readiness and openness to learning
   - Self awareness

6. Be honest and transparent about your goals, skills, and shortcomings. Don’t claim that a shortcoming is actually a good thing: “My shortcoming is that I work extremely hard!” Be honest and open and demonstrate teachability. Per one chaplain I spoke with, some interviewers may try to push our buttons. If an interviewer points out something that seems negative, don’t be defensive. Try saying something like, “Huh! Thank you for pointing that out,” or, “You’re right—I’ll bet I do that all the time without being aware of it.”

7. Keep in mind that CPE interviewers will be thinking, “Would I want this person to be my chaplain?” So be a chaplain during the interview. Notice what is going on with your interviewers. (For instance, if person rushes in late, you can say something like, “You must be dealing with a million details.”)

8. Express that you know you have things to learn. When asked how you have dealt with certain situations, you can cite examples from any applicable volunteer experience, such as at a hospital or hospice. The interviewers want to know that you can learn from what happens to you: Such-and-such happened, here’s what I learned from it, here’s how I did it differently the next time I encountered that situation.

9. Prepare some questions to ask in return, such as:
   - Who would be my supervisor?
   - What would a typical day in your CPE program look like?
   - How is your program structured? (Might be able to figure this out from their website.)
   - What is it like to supervise someone who is a Buddhist?

10. Get the full names of interviewers and administrative assistants and their mailing address. After the interview, send a brief thank-you note or card via U.S. mail (not email) to the interviewer(s) and a separate card to the administrative assistant if applicable. For instance, “Thank you for meeting with me today. I really enjoyed our conversation and appreciated your insightful questions and responses.”