

Aspirancy

Handbook



Office of the Permanent Diaconate

Archdiocese of Cincinnati

OFFICE OF THE DIACONATE

VISION STATEMENT

The Office of the Diaconate will be seen as providing an environment in which the permanent diaconate can thrive in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Office of the Diaconate of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati is committed to supporting diaconal ministry by being present to the deacon community and those in formation to the diaconate: to be responsive to their needs and concerns; to provide opportunities for ongoing growth and formation; to maintain the vision of the diaconate.

Some of the ways in which this can be accomplished are:

- Through being available for general information meetings at parishes to answer such questions as: *Who is a deacon? What does he do? How do pastors and parishes help in the discernment of men for the diaconate? How does the training take place?*
- By assisting men in the process of formally applying to the Formation Program.
- By aiding in the discernment throughout the four years of formation.
- By supporting the deacon community after ordination through:
 - regular regional meetings;
 - personal visits with each deacon (wife) and pastor;
 - regular communication;
 - continuing formation opportunities (retreats and education);
 - being available to respond to the needs of the deacons and pastors.
- By carrying out archdiocesan administration & management responsibilities (e.g., policy & procedure development and promulgation, staffing recommendations, assignment planning, etc.).

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INTRODUCTION

The permanent diaconate is an ordained ministry and a distinct order within the ordained ministry of the Church. Ordained by the Archbishop, not to the priesthood but to a ministry in its own right, permanent deacons are ordained for service to the bishop and priests. As sacramental signs of the servant God, fulfilled in Christ, deacons are ordained to serve the Church and the community in three areas: the ministry of the word of God, the ministry of the liturgy/worship and the ministry of charity and justice. Deacons function in all three areas: service in the transmission of the Word, service in the celebration of the sacraments and service in the community's active love.

Ministry of Charity and Justice is the foundation for diaconal ministry. It involves uncovering the needs of those in the community and motivating the laity to greater involvement in these ministries (Christian Outreach, St. Vincent de Paul, ministry to the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the orphaned, etc.). As a Minister of the Word, the deacon is called upon to proclaim the Gospel in word and action. He is to challenge others to a life modeled on that of Christ. Then, as a Minister of Worship, the deacon assists the priest at the Eucharistic Liturgy, bringing the needs of the people to the celebration. He also may witness marriages and preside at baptisms and funerals outside of Mass.

The formation program during Aspirancy and Candidacy seeks to:

- be a process for continuing discernment of the possibility of an authentic call from God to the Order of Deacon;
- provide human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral and ministerial formation;
- evaluate each student (yearly & by faculty);
- prepare one for the formal acceptance to candidacy and for installation in the ministries of Reader and Acolyte;
- provide the holistic formation necessary to prepare candidates for ordained ministry as a deacon.

The formation program is designed to touch the lives of the wives and families as well as the men, to include input, evaluation and ministerial supervision from the parish staff and community and to connect the students and their families with the community of the already ordained and their families. In addition to spiritual exercises and retreats, theological courses, pastoral ministry and liturgical practicums, the formation program is designed to involve the student in active ministry in service to the Church from the very beginning of the formation process and program.

Ordination, among other things, sacramentalizes diaconal ministry which already is witnessed in the aspirant's/candidate's pastoral, spiritual and faith commitment already made present in his life. While not measured in terms of a certain period of time, but in terms of spiritual, academic and pastoral skill development and in the discernment of an authentic call to Orders, formation prior to ordination will take at least four years (Aspirancy & Candidacy). Active ministry is expected to continue, not to be just now beginning, and is an integral part of formation. The Church will celebrate three Rites during the time of formation which mark the involvement of the student in each area of ministry: Acceptance to Candidacy, Installation as Reader and Installation as Acolyte.

DISCERNMENT

The permanent diaconate is a vocation to ordained ministry. The Church has a right to expect that her candidates for the diaconate have certain personal, social, and spiritual qualities that indicate readiness in responding to God's call. A vocation to ordained ministry comes from Christ. Among the gifts which Christ gives to the Church is the capacity to discern when such a vocation is truly present. This involves a careful judgment and a prayerful and deliberative process which the Church does not take lightly. The applicant must ensure, by a serious process of discernment, that the diaconate would be advantageous to his relationship with God, his family and the Church. There is a solid basis for this in Scripture. Paul advises Timothy to exercise his pastoral responsibility carefully in selecting deacons for the Church at Ephesus.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The applicant must be aware of other factors which have emerged since the restoration of the permanent diaconate in 1964. Experience has taught that in applying for the permanent diaconate formation program, serious attention must be given to such factors as marriage and family obligations, demands of employment, readiness and commitment to preparatory formation and study as well as future ministry. There must be a well-founded hope that the life and work of a deacon can be successfully integrated into his present vocation in life, especially in the vocation of marriage.

One of the major challenges to the renewal of the permanent diaconate in the Latin Rite is the possibility of commitment to two sacramental modes of life: the Sacrament of Marriage and the Sacrament of Orders. For the married man, the marriage/family dimension is an all-important consideration prior to application to the diaconate. He must be a man truly sensitive to the needs of his wife and children and to the ideals of Christian marriage.

Ordination in the Church draws the family into public ecclesial life. The applicant must be especially sensitive to his wife and the effect of possible diaconal ordination upon their

relationship. The Sacrament of Orders must enhance the marriage bond and deepen the couple's relationship with God and each other. The wife must understand that there will likely be less time together for her and her husband because of the expectations and demands of his formation and continued service to the Church. The discernment process should be a mutual process involving the husband and wife.

The applicant must also be especially sensitive to the needs of his minor children. He must understand the importance of his presence as a parent in their total development. The church desires this awareness to be present prior to the call to the diaconate. If a man and his wife determine that the man's added absence from home would substantially deprive their children of wholesome growth, the Church would prefer that such a man postpone his consideration to the permanent diaconate.

REQUIREMENTS

Some of the requirements for entrance as an Aspirant into the diaconate program include that a man:

- must be a Catholic in good standing in the Church and fully initiated in the faith and, if a neophyte, must have lived the faith for three years prior to application;
- must be at least 31 years of age;
- must be physically and psychologically sound;
- must, if married, be validly married in the Catholic Church, normally for at least five years, and be able to show evidence of a stable and growing marriage relationship, and his wife must be willing to support her husband actively through formation and ministry;
- normally will not have children under the age of 10; the needs of the family are a priority, and there must be evidence that these needs are being met;
- will minimally have completed the theological and ministerial requirements for obtaining a certificate in lay ministry in addition to the Archdiocesan Tribunal Training course;
- must have been registered and active in his present parish for two years prior to application and be endorsed by the present pastor, parish staff and pastoral council;

- will have demonstrated his ability to respond to needs for service himself and to lead others to do so as well;
- must be open to a position of service in charity and justice;
- must be open to the possibility of reassignment.

QUALITIES

Men discerning a call to the diaconate share some common pre-existing traits. The following list is not exhaustive, but it does provide some consideration. A man must possess:

- emotional maturity;
- personal integrity/appropriate self-knowledge;
- Christian holiness/an active prayer life;
- generosity for service already being demonstrated;
- ability to work in a team/works well with people;
- good physical & psychological health (both inquirer and wife, if married);
- good communication skills (both as a speaker and as a listener);
- ability to speak publicly and proclaim the Gospel effectively;
- a need in the community for his service and leadership;
- acceptance by the Christian community as evidenced by his current ministry in the parish.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE DIACONATE FORMATION PROCESS

This is a time, continuing throughout the formation period, for discernment by the inquirer/aspirant/candidate and the staff of the Office of the Diaconate into the possibility of a call from God through the Church to the Order of Deacon. In addition to the initiative on the part of the individual participant, various members of the Church will be involved in this process, e.g.: spouse and children of the participant, other family members, pastor, parish staff, pastoral council, selected references, staff of the ministerial program which the man has attended or the Lay Pastoral Ministry Program (LPMP) directors and staff, the Archbishop, the Directors of the Office of the Diaconate and Deacon Formation, the Archdiocesan Scrutinies Committee, diaconate instructors, members of the diaconate community, fellow employees, recipients of the individual's ministry.

SELECTION FOR DIACONATE FORMATION

This is a process to determine the suitability and readiness of an individual for entry into diaconal formation. The final decision concerning a possible ordination to the diaconate rests with the Archbishop. **ACCEPTANCE INTO THE DIACONATE FORMATION PROGRAM DOES NOT CONSTITUTE A DECISION THAT AN INDIVIDUAL IS, IN FACT, CALLED TO THE ORDER OF DEACON**, but that there are indications that a call may exist and should be pursued through a discernment process.

The formal application procedure includes the completion of the application form (and the wife's questionnaire if the applicant is married), submission of current church documents attesting to his sacramental initiation and marriage, inventories and interview by the staff of Mercy Professional Services, the collection of information from the applicant's pastor, parish staff and Pastoral Council, references supplied by the applicant, the review of the records and transcripts of his previous ministerial education, his doctor's statement as to his physical ability to participate in the formation program, a review of his supervised practicum and ministerial project done as part of his ministerial formation, and an interview by the Director of the Office of the Diaconate.

Also required is a Background Check (fingerprinting) and participation in the Orientation Workshop on the Archdiocesan *Decree on Child Protection*. For information go to www.catholiccincinnati.org. On the home page click on *Protecting Our Children* and then *Fingerprinting Information* and *Child Protection Orientation Sessions*. Please be sure to name both your parish and the Office of the Diaconate to receive the fingerprinting results.

DIACONAL FORMATION

ASPIRANCY

Aspirancy is the beginning of the Formation Process. It is “primarily a time to discern the capability and readiness of an aspirant to be nominated to the (Arch)bishop for acceptance as a candidate for diaconal ordination” (*National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*). It is a period of continued discernment in which a man grows in his faith (human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions as well as diaconal vocation and ministry) through study, prayer and service. One of the requirements for acceptance to Candidacy is a certain level of theological and ministerial education. In the Archdiocese of Cincinnati this education is most easily obtained through the LPMP, but may be accomplished through another equivalent program in consultation with the Director of the Office of the Diaconate.

In addition to participation in the LPMP or an equivalent program, it is required that a man successfully complete the Archdiocesan Tribunal Training course. Also, in the year prior to Candidacy, the aspirant (and his wife if he is married) is required to participate in special **Aspirancy workshops** which are offered by the Office of the Diaconate. Once an aspirant nears completion of this part of the formation process, he may request, in writing to the Archbishop, admission into Candidacy. (See attached standards.)

CANDIDACY

Candidacy is a time, corresponding in duration to the progress of the individual, for the formation of the whole person through academic preparation, personal understanding and growth, ministerial and pastoral skill development and personal spiritual growth spent in preparation for a possible recommendation for ordination. It takes place at the Athenaeum of Ohio on every other weekend throughout the academic year starting around 8:00 a.m. on Saturday and continuing through noon on Sunday. This formation builds on the work already completed in a ministerial education program or the LPMP and is not intended to duplicate or repeat that course work. Formation takes place in stages.

Completion of the various courses and exercises of the formation program **DOES NOT GUARANTEE ORDINATION**. Ordination requires proper preparation and development of the individual, but it also requires the Church’s acceptance, through the Archbishop, of the fact that a call to Orders does, in fact, exist for a particular individual. While the formation program requires hard work and study, ordination is not an event earned or accomplished by the hard work, study, fidelity and piety of the individual. It is a call from God discerned by both the individual, his family and the Church.

WIFE’S PARTICIPATION

The wives of the aspirants are required to participate in the Aspirancy workshops, August retreats, the days of reflection prior to Installations to Reader and Acolyte and the *Spirituality of Marriage* workshop in the second year of Candidacy. Wives are encouraged to participate in the weekends as well as they are able. It is up to the wives and their husbands as to what extent the wife may be able to participate throughout formation. The wife’s support may be most evident at the homefront.

ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY FOR ORDINATION

Following Aspirancy, the aspirant will request acceptance as a candidate. If accepted, the aspirant’s call to the vocation of deacon will be formally accepted by the Archbishop in a Mass and rite of acceptance called Candidacy.

INSTALLATION INTO THE MINISTRY OF READER

During the first year of Candidacy, the candidate will also be installed by the Archbishop (or his delegate) into the formal ministry of Reader for service to the Church of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. In a Mass and liturgical rite, the reader is appointed to the ministry of reading the word of God in the liturgical assembly. The candidate engages in a ministerial project appropriate to his installation as Reader.

INSTALLATION INTO THE MINISTRY OF ACOLYTE

During the second year of Candidacy, the candidate will, in a Mass and rite of the Church, be installed by the Archbishop (or his delegate) into the ministry of Acolyte. The acolyte aids the deacon and ministers to the priest. It is his duty to attend to the service of the altar and to assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of the Mass. He is also to distribute holy communion as an auxiliary minister. The candidate designs and implements a ministerial project related to his installation as Acolyte.

FINAL PREPARATION FOR ORDINATION

This is the time immediately preceding the candidate’s ordination for reflection, prayer, and the completion of the last courses, practicums and exercises. This period includes a five-day canonical retreat designed to help the candidate focus on his personal readiness and his response to a call to the Order of Deacon.

ORDINATION OF DEACONS

This is the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders in which the Archbishop affirms the call and ordains the candidate to the Order of Deacon.

POST-ORDINATION FORMATION

Formation is life-long and is a continuation of the deacon's growth and development in his spiritual, pastoral and academic skills to more effectively carry out his role as a deacon for the Church. There is a mandatory three year program of workshops following ordination. Post-ordination formation includes not only continuing education but also the obligation of an annual retreat.

RELATED READINGS

The Deacon in Church Ministry, Rev. Msgr. Joseph R. Roth, D.D., Alt Publishing Co., 1997.

The Deacon Reader, Deacon James Keating, editor, Paulist Press, 2006.

Diaconate: A Legacy of Vatican II, Rev. Msgr. Theodore W. Kraus, National Association of Deacon Directors, Rockford, IL, 1999.

National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States, Bishops' Committee on the Diaconate, USCCB, Washington, D.C., 2003.

The Sacrament of Service: Understanding Diaconal Spirituality, Rev. William T. Donovan, Alt Publishing Co., 2000.

**BASIC STANDARDS FOR READINESS FOR ADMISSION INTO THE CANDIDATE
PATH IN FORMATION**

Appreciation/Knowledge of	Demonstrated Ability/Skill
<u>Human Dimension</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His personality (strengths and limitations), appropriate boundaries, and his talents and gifts; collaboration • Models of faith and moral development through discussion and action • The necessity for ongoing spiritual and academic development • The role of respectful listening and tolerance in dialogue with others whose point of view may differ from his • The family perspective in all of its aspects • The benefit of having a support group in maintaining this perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be self-reflective; to reveal himself appropriately, sharing his experiences and attitudes with others as verified in the formation community, mentor group, pastoral ministry placement, and self-evaluation; to be both a leader and a follower • To use his knowledge to encourage others to reflect and share their experiences in dialogue and action • To demonstrate the use of appropriate resources for his physical, emotional, and spiritual development; to take initiative in self-study and in completing home assignments • To be a good listener, respect each person, and be accepted as a trusted participant who keeps confidences; to be open to change through reflective growth in understanding; to express his position candidly in sharing for study and dialogue, neither intimidating nor being intimated in doing so • To integrate and prioritize his personal boundaries relating to family, recreation, work, ministry, and time alone • To contribute to and utilize a support system

Spiritual Dimension

- God's redeeming activity in his lifestyle, experiences, and ministries
- The *lectio divina* in the formation of a strong Christian spirituality
- His commitment to Christian ministry as rooted in the baptismal call
- A personal and communal prayer life
- His state in life, responsibilities, and role in diaconal discernment; diaconal celibacy and other commitments
- An ecumenical perspective in formation
- To reflect theologically on his faith experience through regular spiritual direction
- To pray the Scriptures, meditating on the mystery of God as our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- To foster an appreciation of baptismal ministry among others, enabling others to reflect upon their faith journey in relationship to this call
- To fulfill a regular commitment to a pattern of personal and communal prayer through frequent praying of the liturgy of the hours, especially morning and evening prayer; to participate frequently in the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, personal prayer and reading of the Bible, and devotion to Mary and to the saints; to plan and lead communal prayer
- To ascertain, if married, the quality of his relationship with his wife and children and the need for dialogue and mutual consent to continue in formation and move forward toward ordination; to make, if unmarried, a commitment to perpetual celibacy and live a single lifestyle in an appropriate manner
- To practice in prayer and action an attitude of discipleship to Christian unity, desiring to know more about other Christian denominations and other faith experiences and finding ways for mutual action in serving human needs

Intellectual Dimension

- The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- The Sacraments of Christian Initiation and the Sacrament of Holy Orders, especially the Order of Deacon
- The Eucharist as the summit and center of Christian communal life, especially in his formation community
- The Church's spiritual tradition, including its various paths of spirituality
- Pastoral resources
- To articulate the primary teachings of the Church and discuss contemporary issues in light of this teaching
- To speak informally on Christian vocations and ordained ministry, particularly the Order of Deacon and its threefold ministries of word, liturgy, and charity; to relate this knowledge to personal and communal vocation discernment
- To actively participate in the Eucharist as a lector or extraordinary minister of the Eucharist and in ministry to the sick
- To experience and invite others into meaningful expressions of prayer and forms of Christian spirituality
- To refer others to appropriate pastoral resources as needed

Pastoral Dimension

- Theological sources that ground, interpret, and guide the activity that constitutes the pastoral life of the Church
- Effective communication skills
- A multicultural perspective in formation; cultural communication patterns and their impact on goals and programming; resources for ethnic, racial, and cultural groups
- How to approach theological study from within the context of his pastoral experience and ministry
- To name appropriate theological resources useful to ministerial study and service
- To communicate effectively in spoken and written word
- To effectively use different cultural communication patterns whenever appropriate, and to use and guide others to appropriate multicultural resources
- To discern how God is calling him into ministry and to link, in reflection, his pastoral and personal experiences to theology – apprehending God's presence through touching the needs of the poor or afflicted; to be an advocate for people in need and a facilitator of the community's resources in response to human needs

Diaconal Vocation and Ministry

- His ongoing relationship with God as the source of his ministry and discernment of a diaconal vocation
- His call and his personal commitment to live the Good News in all aspects in life
- The role and ministry of the deacon within the faith community
- The teaching that it is the Church that “calls” – affirms – the vocation to an ordained ministry
- To articulate his relationship with God and reasons for believing he has a call to the Order of Deacons within the formation community
- To articulate his call and commitment to his spiritual director and to the formation personnel and to communicate this through self/peer/formation/pastoral/family assessments
- To articulate this understanding in ways that are life-giving and empowering within his family, place of employment, parish, formation community; to identify, call forth, affirm, and support the gifts, strengths, and talents of others
- To participate collaboratively in all aspects of formation; to be cooperative, open, and respectful to all who journey with him; to be receptive of insights offered by the formation personnel, his wife and family, peers, and pastor