

INQUIRER INFORMATIONAL GUIDE

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What is a Deacon?

Deacons are best described by **who they are** rather than by what they do. Men who are ordained to the Diaconate promise to live out the charism of **service** to God's people through **the Word, Sacrament and Charity/Justice** for the rest of their lives. The role of the deacon is to be a helper of the bishops and priests and to proclaim by his life the Church's call to serve the needs of others. The deacon is the animator and promoter of what the community of faith must be: *a community of service.*

What qualities should a pastor look for in a man who he considers to be a potential deacon candidate?

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

Who can apply for admittance to The Diaconate School of Theology?

Requirements include:

- A man must be a Catholic in good standing in the Church and fully initiated in the faith.
- He must be between the ages of 32 and 60 years old.
- If married, there must be evidence of a stable and growing marriage relationship. His wife must be willing to support her husband actively through formation and in his ministry. His wife must also be an active practicing Roman Catholic
- He will have completed the requirements of the pre-requisite classes as required by the Office of the Diaconate. These classes must be completed at an accredited Roman Catholic University or College. The required classes are:
 - Introduction to Old Testament
 - Introduction to New Testament
 - Introduction to Philosophy or it's equivalency (e.g. another Philosophy course)
 - Foundations in theology
 - Theology of the Diaconate
 - Survey of the History of the Catholic Church

- Equivalent education is evaluated on an individual case basis.
- He will have demonstrated his ability to respond to needs for service and to enable others to do so.
- His present pastor endorses him.
- He must have a willingness to serve the Diocese in another parish/institution other than his home parish.

How often are new formation classes begun?

The formation classes are on a **four-year cycle** corresponding to the length of the program and the need to give adequate attention to the men in formation and their families. A class began in 2009. Therefore, another class will begin screening in 2014, 2018 and so forth. Applications for the program are accepted at least one-year preceding the beginning of a new class. The screening process is a minimum of a one year Aspirancy Period. (Keep in mind that applicants will have finished the Lay Ministry Program or its equivalent prior to starting deacon formation.) Fulfilling the pre-requisite classes or a degree in Theology does not guarantee acceptance into Aspirancy and/or Candidacy in the Diaconate School of Theology.

What are the components of the Aspirancy process?

Selection includes the receipt of all forms, certificates, transcripts, criminal background check, completing *Protecting God's Children*, etc. as required. Each man also takes a battery of psychological inventories and participates in an interview with a counseling professional. The aspirant (and his wife, if needed) must take a series of specified classes and extended interviews conducted by the Office of the Diaconate. A team of both clergy and laypersons evaluates the Aspirant. The Bishop of Columbus ultimately makes the decision on whether a man is accepted as a candidate for ordination to the Diaconate.

If, in a pastor's estimation, a parish is calling a man to the Diaconate, why can the Office of the Diaconate prevent him from participating in the Diaconate Formation Program?

A deacon is called by the Bishop, not the local parish community. Though a man can be assigned to his home parish by the Bishop, at the Bishop's discretion he may also be asked to serve somewhere else in the diocese where there is need for his ministry. Therefore, the question in the selection process is whether or not the diocese, in the person of the Bishop, is calling a man to the Order of Deacon.

The Bishop entrusts the Office of the Diaconate with the responsibility of discerning whether a man has the appropriate motives, abilities, attitude and personality traits which are called for by *The Code of Canon Law* and *The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*.

Once a man is accepted into the Diaconate School of Theology, can he be relatively sure that he will be ordained a deacon?

No. Like the Formation Program for a seminarian, the Diaconate Formation Program constitutes one more period of discernment. The candidate may find, as he learns more about himself and the Diaconate, that he is not called to Ordained Ministry. Periodic evaluation of each man by his pastor and teachers in addition to regular self-evaluation allow the formation staff to assist each individual in this discernment process. These may result in either the student or the formation faculty suggesting that the formation relationship be ended.

How long is the formation program for deacons?

The Formation process must be a minimum of four years. Once a man is accepted into Candidacy in the Diaconate School of Theology (after completion of a one-year Aspirancy period which includes prerequisites and recommendation of the Candidates Screening Board) there are three additional years of preparation for ordination. The formation for Diaconate is not only academic but also spiritual and ministerial. A man in Diaconate formation meets regularly with a spiritual director. He (and his wife) also develops a mentoring relationship with members of the Diaconate Community. Diaconal Students are installed as reader and acolyte in due time following his being accepted as a Candidate for the order of deacon by the Bishop. For each installation the students carry out ministerial projects in their parish correlating the Word, Liturgy and Charity/Justice.

Are there ways a pastor and parish staff can support a man who has been accepted into the Diaconate School of Theology?

The most important thing a pastor and parish staff can do is to keep in conversation with the Diaconal Student and his family. The man needs to have honest feedback on his work. He needs to be challenged to grow, to become accustomed to doing both self-evaluation and engaging in evaluation in the context of a ministry team or parish staff. Because he is geographically close to his parish, this is the best arena for the Diaconal Student to experience different ministries, to continue to enable other parishioners to respond to needs for service in the community and to sharpen his team ministry skills.

Do all deacons have the faculty to preach after they are ordained?

Yes. In the Diocese of Columbus a Deacon is granted faculties to preach by reason of ordination. Some deacons are called on to preach a homily when they are the principal Presiders at Baptisms, Marriages or Funerals. They also may preach when they assist at the Eucharist.

What is the ASPIRANCY PERIOD?

The National Directory on the Formation, Ministry and Life of the Permanent Deacon in the United States (ND) says that upon completion of the initial process (inquiry), the Bishop may accept some inquirers into aspirancy. This aspirancy path corresponds to the Propedeutic period required by the *Basic Norms for Formation of Permanent Deacons/Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*.

This aspirant path is primarily a time of formal application, psychological screening, further theological education, prayer and spiritual direction. Those involved in the aspirant path should begin to become thoroughly familiar with the doctrinal understanding of the Diaconate formation process in the Diocese of Columbus.

Ordinarily, the Aspirant path is one year in duration and is included in the four-year formation process. The aspirant level of formation includes an introduction and evaluation of the human dimension, spiritual dimension, intellectual dimension and pastoral dimension as described in the National Directory.

Assessment takes place by the Director of the Diaconate and a Candidate Screening Board made up of clergy and laity. The Director of the Office of the Diaconate develops the Board.

Following initial assessment and guidance by the Office of the Diaconate, a recommendation is made to the Bishop of Columbus.

The conclusion of the aspirant path of formation is determined through a formal assessment conducted by the Diocesan Office of the Diaconate. This occurs when the aspirant, with the consent of his wife (if married), and with the permission of those responsible for his formation, makes a written petition to the Bishop for admission to candidacy. The Bishop makes the final decision regarding the aspirant's acceptance into candidacy.

A review of *The National Directory* (paragraphs 182-203) gives a detailed description of the importance of this period and the procedures taken by the Bishop and The Office of the Diaconate.

**If you have any other questions about the Diaconate, whether it is about selection, formation, ministry or any other element, please do not hesitate to call
The Office of the Diaconate.**