

Discernment and Application Process for the Permanent Diaconate Formation

“Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”
1 Timothy 3:8-13

The call to the diaconate is a call to a lifelong pursuit to be a servant in every aspect of our life. This call is more than a desire to serve the Church in ministry, a desire to serve God, or a specific pathway to holiness. The character of a deacon is a calling to a way of life that reflects the nature of Christ - emptying ourselves as a servant to others.

If accepted into diaconal formation in the Archdiocese of San Francisco those desiring to be ordained will spend a minimum of five years in discernment, formation and study as they follow a path toward ordination. This formation journey is structured in accordance with *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*, published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop’s Committee on the Diaconate.

This document outlines (1) The general requirements for being considered for diaconate formation, (2) The overall dimensions of a deacon which are examined as part of the initial discernment of those desiring to enter into formation; and, (3) The phases of discernment and formation on the journey to ordination.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS/PREREQUISITES FOR DIACONATE CONSIDERATION

1. Candidates should be single or be in a valid Catholic marriage for at least five (5) years before submitting an application to enter the discernment and formation process.
2. Individuals desiring to enter the discernment and formation process must be at least 30 years old and not older than 60 years old when they enter the formation process.
3. Candidates must have received the Sacrament of Confirmation and have been a Roman Catholic for at least five years prior to the submission of an application to enter the discernment and formation process.
4. Candidates must be ready to commit to five years of spiritual and academic preparation prior to ordination and then continue on a lifelong journey of formation.

5. The Archdiocese of San Francisco requires at the time of the application that the applicant has obtained, at least, an undergraduate degree from an institution of higher learning (e.g., Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science).
6. A new formation and discernment class commences every other year. Information nights are conducted around the Archdiocese in the Fall.
7. Deacons are not paid or employed by the Archdiocese or parish as deacons and no benefits (i.e. medical, housing, retirement, etc.) are available to non-employed personnel.
8. The cost associated with the five years of formation is \$10,000 (for married couples) or \$5,000 (for single)
9. A prospective applicant must:
 - be emotionally mature and stable
 - possess personal integrity and understands his gifts and challenges (self-knowledge)
 - if married, be living in a stable/vibrant sacramental marriage and have the full consent and support of his wife and family. His wife must be willing to support her husband **actively** through formation and in his ministry.
 - be actively involved in parish life and have the recommendation and support of his pastor
 - be in good physical and psychological health (both applicant and wife, if married)
 - be of sound moral character
 - have the ability to articulate and explain the moral and doctrinal teaching of the Church effectively
 - demonstrate a personal commitment to growing in Christian holiness / an active prayer life / participation in the Eucharistic and Sacramental life of the Church
 - have good communication skills (both as a speaker and as a listener)
 - have secure employment history and be self-supporting
 - if divorced have a valid decree of nullity for at least five years and no previous divorces
 - If single or widowed be committed to a lifetime of celibacy
 - have a record of ministry leadership and service to the parish and the community
 - reside in the Archdiocese of San Francisco
 - should not anticipate moving for at least five years after ordination
 - be living sound Catholic teaching
 - be a citizen of the United States
 - have completed both the Archdiocesan background check and safe environment training prior to submitting an application.

OVERALL AREAS OF DISCERNMENT

Those who feel God is calling them to diaconate ordination should examine the following four dimensions of their lives which are the foundation of every deacon:

1. **Human Dimension** - The goal of a “**suitable human dimension**” is a character and personality that is a bridge and not an obstacle for others as they journey with Jesus Christ. The call of the deacon is to be a servant to all and thus the character of a deacon must be centered on humility and the needs of others.

2. **Spiritual Dimension** – The spiritual dimension of the life of a deacon calls us to “**put on the mind of Christ.**” Our spiritual formation begins at birth and continues through our entire life. Those called to diaconate formation must already exhibit a strong spiritual dimension in their life that demonstrates they have nurturing attitudes, habits, and practices that provide a foundation for the development of an authentic and ongoing spiritual life. This demonstration comes in the form of participation in, for example, various devotions, retreats, days of recollection, and adult education programming. It also includes an established prayer life both as an individual and as a family.

3. **Academic Dimension** – As ordained clergy deacon preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ primarily through the way we live and the way we speak. Those desiring to enter into diaconate formation must have a good **foundational understanding of Catholic teaching**, embrace this teaching, and be living in communion with the Catholic Church. Prospective applicants should also have a good understanding of scripture and should have participated in scripture study or sharing groups.

4. **Pastoral Dimension** – The model of the deacon is Christ the Servant, who lived totally at the **service of God, for the good of Men**. Those desiring to enter into diaconate formation must already recognize and have experienced the call to leadership roles in ministering to their brothers and sisters in parish life as well as works of charity in the local community.

These dimensions of diaconal life become the focal discerning points for men who desire to enter diaconal formation and they remain a focus during a process of formation that lasts for the rest of their lives.

PHASES OF DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION ON THE JOURNEY TO ORDINATION

The process of discerning God’s call for one to enter into diaconate formation should begin long before a pastor requests an application from the Archdiocesan Office of Diaconate Formation and it should involve the individual, the family, the parish, and the pastor. The following outlines the inquiry phase of discernment that takes place along this journey. Throughout this phase the overall areas of discernment (dimensions of our lives) outlined above should be the focus of discernment and growth.

INQUIRY PHASE – PATH TO ASPIRANCY

The inquiry phase begins with an individual who feels that God is calling him to a lifelong commitment as an ordained deacon.

For the Inquirer: Self-Discovery and Discernment - The first step is to prayerfully examine your call and desire to enter diaconate formation in light of the objective criteria for the selection of men outlined in the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*. The document identifies that the behavioral patterns of one interested in diaconate ordination should include such things as: a natural inclination of service to the Christian community and to all in need; psychological integrity; a capacity for dialogue, which implies a sense of docility and openness; the ability to share one’s faith yet listen respectfully to other points of view; the capacity to listen carefully and without prejudices—respecting people in the context of their religion, race, gender, ethnicity, and culture; good communication skills; a sense of responsibility that includes the fulfilling of one’s word and completing one’s work; self-directed and collaborative accountability; balanced and prudent judgment; generosity in service; and the ability to lead, motivate, facilitate, and animate others into appropriate action and service.

The *National Directory* further identifies the spiritual and evangelical qualities as including: sound faith; good Christian reputation; active involvement in the Church’s apostolate; personal integrity, maturity, and holiness; regular participation in the Church’s sacramental life; evidence of recognized, ongoing commitment to the Church’s life and service; participation in faith enrichment opportunities (e.g., retreats, days of recollection, adult education programming); a positive and stable marriage, if married, or a mature celibate state of life, if single; active membership in a Christian community; capacity for obedience and fraternal communion; and a deep spirituality and prayer life.

These behavioral and spiritual patterns of our life are foundational and, as an applicant, one should prayerfully consider these traits and discuss them with your family and friends. The wife, family and our closest friends have the ability to recognize our character which must be founded on these human and spiritual qualities.

Information Night - As part of the inquiry phase the individual and his wife, with the concurrence of his pastor, must attend an information night conducted by the Archdiocese of San Francisco. The information nights are where the characteristics of a deacon are outlined along with the foundational requirements. These information nights also provide a means for discussion and the ability to respond to specific or unique questions.

Application Preparation and Submittal - Following the information night, if the pastor, the individual, and his wife feel there is a calling to the diaconate, the pastor must complete the Pastor Recommendation Form and submitted to the diaconate formation office for evaluation and discernment. Applications must be received no later than _____ where applicants are considered.

The application itself will include the following:

- A completed application that outlines the
- The baptismal certificate (*issued within the last 6 months*) with ALL NOTATIONS on the back including First Eucharist, Confirmation, and, Marriage must be submitted.
- Marriage Certificate and license if appropriate
- Certificate of annulment if appropriate
- The inquirer will submit a detailed spiritual autobiographical essay with a chronological listing of major life events and spiritual discipline. It must include:
 1. A discussion of your spiritual journey through life
 2. Sacramental history and comments
 3. History of ministry and ministry activities
 4. Liturgical activity
 5. Social service activity
 6. Your personal history (anything you think will be helpful)
 7. Articulate what you believe is your call to the diaconate
- Letter of support from your pastor
- Application and spiritual autobiographical essay from your spouse
- Three letters of recommendation
- A picture of the applicant and his wife (if married)

Aspirancy

The aspirancy year is primarily a time of discernment. Throughout the year participants meet regularly with a spiritual director individually and in small groups. During this aspirancy period and throughout the formation program, those in formation are expected to have a spiritual

director who will be able to help them deepen their relationship with God and explore their gift for diaconal ministry.

In this year, the participants will study Catechism of the Catholic Church, Fundamental Theology, Church History, and Philosophy. Along with some academic studies. The aspirants are introduced to two tools that are used throughout the formation program –The Reverent Approach to the Word of God and Ministry Reflection and Assessment. These tools help the aspirants to understand early in their formation the importance of integrating their personal lives with Sacred Scripture and with their experience of ministry. Aspirants become familiar with the Liturgy of the Hours which is an essential part of their prayer life throughout the formation program.

The conclusion of the aspirancy period is determined through a formal assessment. This occurs when the aspirant, with the express permission of those responsible for his formation, makes a written petition to the bishop for admission to Candidacy. Each petitioner will be interviewed by the Director of Diaconate Formation and the Director of Diaconate Ministry and Life to appraise his readiness for nomination into candidacy. Both Directors will also meet with the wife of a married aspirant to ascertain her level of consent and support for her husband’s promotion into candidate formation. At various levels of the formation process, a letter of consent by the wives is necessary. The Directors will review all pertinent data on the aspirant before a recommendation is made.

Theology I

During this year of formation candidates and their wives are encouraged and helped to deepen their personal and communal prayer life and to become familiar with a variety of spiritualities and ways of praying. Also, workshops/sessions are provided to help participants become familiar with a method for personal growth, self-understanding, and reflective living.

With regard to the academic/theological dimension, those in this first year of candidacy continue their study of Sacred Scriptures—The Old Testament, The New Testament and Christology. During this year the participants have experiences in ministry in Social Justice or the sick, e.g., visiting hospitals.

Theology II

Throughout this year those in formation study and experience many forms of prayer and spirituality.

In this year participants study Ecclesiology, Sacramental Theology, Marriage and Marriage Preparation, Canon Law and Homiletics I. There are presentations and discussions on issues of Justice and Peace from a Biblical prospective. There is also the study and presentation of effective methods of evangelization, catechetics, and mission. During this year the participants have experiences in ministry in a Parish other than his own.

To prepare participants more fully for preaching the word of God there are formal presentations on the ministry of preaching (homiletics) and practicums throughout the year.

Theology III

One of the main purposes of this year is to help those in formation come to a deeper appreciation of the Church's Liturgy and the Sacraments. With regard to liturgy there are formal presentations on the liturgy documents of the Church and practicum's on presiding at Baptisms. Participants also have sessions dealing with Baptism Preparation. Concerning the sacramental life of the Church, there are presentations on various themes pertinent to the Church's teaching on the Sacraments. There is a study and discussion of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation) and the Sacraments of Vocation (Marriage and Holy Orders). Participants are also given an understanding and appreciation of the RCIA process and how it might be incorporated in the life of the local Church.

During this year those in formation continue their study of Catholic Social Teachings, Theology of the Eucharist, Theology of the Laity, Moral Theology and Practicum I. Participants are engaged in a variety of discussions on ecumenism, which include the study of Church documents as well as becoming familiar with the primary tenets of other Christian denominations and world religions. Present day issues regarding justice and peace are studied and discussed.

Theology IV (Pre-Ordination)

In this year of formation, the participants continue to grow in their appreciation of the sacramental life of the Church. They study the Sacraments of healing (Reconciliation, Sacrament of the Sick). They become conversant with the spirituality and ritual experience of Marriage and, in preparation for their own ordination, aspirants deepen their awareness of the role of the deacon in the Church through presentations, discussions, and practicums.

During this year those in formation further their understanding of Christian morality in both its personal and social dimensions. They also have various presentations and discussions on contemporary Church issues. Other subjects that are part of this year's curriculum include Trinity, Homiletics II, Pastoral Care, Restorative Justice, and Theology of the Diaconate.

In this year of formation candidates and their wives are introduced to other personal growth tools to help them further develop in their spiritual journey. There are a variety of group processes that assist the participants in their endeavors to relate more deeply with others and with God.

As in the previous year, those in formation engage themselves in Parish Field Education with specific projects determined after discussion with their pastor and diaconate formation Director. Also, there are occasions for individual and group ministry experiences in the area of family life.

(As a norm, aspirants are accepted into Candidacy at the beginning of candidacy Year I. The Rite of Reader is received at the beginning of candidacy Year II and the Rite of Acolyte is received in candidacy Year III. The Ordination to the Diaconate takes place at the end of candidacy Year IV of the formation program.