

THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

APPLICATION AND SELECTION:
AN OVERVIEW



Diocese of Phoenix
Office of the Diaconate
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Vocation, Discernment and Selection

Vocation: From the experience of the restored diaconate in the United States, certain behavioral patterns have been discerned among exemplary deacons: 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 profile is completed with certain spiritual and evangelical qualities. Among these are a 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. The presence of these qualities, experienced in kindness and humility, may demonstrate a call to the Order of Deacons.

Additional considerations that need to be stressed are the element of readiness and the timeliness of one’s response to a vocation. Since inquirers to the diaconate have many

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commitments to family, career, employment, community, and church

service, it is a matter of prudential judgment to explore not only whether the call to the diaconate is from the Holy Spirit, but also whether the inquirer is ready and able to respond to that call at the present time. (From the National Director for Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States, Paragraphs 166-168.)

Discernment: The first step in discernment is in the heart of the individual and the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. When a call is felt, it must be tested within the context of the personal faith journey, the family (especially for those who are married), and the parish community. Discussion with the pastor or associate pastor, with deacons and other staff members is essential.

Once a man has discerned that the Holy Spirit may be calling him to ordained ministry, he makes contact with the Diaconate office. At that time, he may receive additional information or be asked some questions which will assist him in discernment.

Levels of Admission: It is important to understand that admission to diaconal formation involves two hierarchical levels.

- ◆ **Inquirer:** Is an individual who has met with, written to, telephoned or otherwise communicated with an official of the Office of the Diaconate indicating a serious interest in exploring admission to the diaconate; and/or an individual nominated by his pastor. Individuals are screened for such eligibility factors as age, marital status, residence, and ministry experience. If appropriate, the individual is provided with an information packet and put on the mailing list. The Office of the Diaconate maintains a record of the inquiry or nomination for two years. The general criteria for admission are described in the next section.
- ◆ **Inquirer-Applicant:** Is an individual who has completed

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and filed the forms for admission to the diaconate and has been notified in writing that the admission packet has been received. Applications are generally accepted only during the months of July through November, every other year, unless a special arrangement has been made with the Formation Office. If an application is received after the November 30 deadline it cannot be considered. Applications are screened, and the admission’s packet audited by the staff in the order in which they are received. The notification of acceptance as an official applicant comes from the Formation Office. Applicant-Inquirers must also attend mandatory formation events and join a “Discernment Circle.” Inquiry status is normally a one year period.

- ◆ **Aspirant.** Admission as an aspirant means that the petitioner has been admitted to the propaedeutic period (preparation for study or instruction) which ordinarily covers one and 1/2 years. It is marked by continued attendance at formation meetings, participation in a “discernment circle,” and completion of a battery of tests and interviews.
- ◆ **Candidate.** Admission as a candidate means that the petitioner has been invited by the Bishop to enter formal preparation for ordination that ordinarily covers 3 years.

General Criteria for Deacon Applicants

“...deacons must be respectable men whose word can be trusted, moderate in the amount of wine they drink and with no squalid greed for money. They must be conscientious believers in the mystery of faith. They are to be examined first, and only admitted to serve as deacons if there is nothing against them...”

1 Tim. 3:8-12

The applicant for the Diaconate in the Diocese of Phoenix should be a man who:

- ◆ Is committed to and lives out Gospel values of justice, charity and service.
- ◆ Has shown leadership qualities in parish/diocesan ministry for the past five years.

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- ◆ Has a prayerful disposition.
- ◆ If married, is in a stable and happy marriage (2 years minimum) and whose wife and children support him in pursuing the diaconate.
- ◆ If not married, is willing to commit to celibacy.
- ◆ Situations of divorce/annulment will require special approval, in general, no more than one divorce/annulment and no children from the first marriage.
- ◆ If a convert to the faith, baptism or profession made over 5 years prior to application.
- ◆ Is living within the geographical boundaries of the Diocese of Phoenix as a permanent resident of the United States.
- ◆ Is capable of college level work in theological studies and is open to spiritual and ministerial formation. (Has at least a high school diploma (no GED)).
- ◆ Can successfully pass a thorough criminal and financial background check.
- ◆ Is no younger than 30 and no older than 55 years to enter the process.
- ◆ Is capable of giving serious attention and time to theological study, spiritual formation and ministry.
- ◆ Has a stable work history (2 years).
- ◆ Has a positive attitude towards the Church and is flexible in adapting to the future needs of the Church.
- ◆ Is formally presented for the diaconate by his pastor who will see that he is mentored during the 5 years of formation.
- ◆ Must be physically and psychologically healthy.
- ◆ Should demonstrate grateful fidelity to all the Church teaches.

Academically, you will be expected to complete, successfully, the college level courses offered through the Kino Institute of Theological Studies or equivalent program approved by the Director of Formation.

Successful completion of a course means receiving a grade of C or higher. This standard applies to all courses.

Those men whose first language is not English may have to take

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the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and receive a score that represents an acceptable fluency in English.

Ministerially, it is expected that you have been actively involved in the Church's apostolate in your parish or Catholic agency. This may include programs of social ministry, educational ministry, liturgical ministry, parish council, and so forth. Ministry in the area of social ministry has been the specific realm of the diaconate since its birth in the Apostolic Church (Acts 6:1-6). These ministries include serving the poor, the hungry, the sick, the homeless, the handicapped, the elderly, the imprisoned, life issues, and so forth.

Steps to Ordination

Inquirer: Is an individual who has been recommended for formation by his pastor, and is in the process of making application. The required materials and review processes required for inquiry:

- ◆ Reception of a letter of endorsement from his pastor; and
- ◆ Completion of a basic information form.

Aspirant: Is an individual who has been formally accepted as a deacon aspirant by the Ordinary and is formally enrolled in the propaedeutic period:

- ◆ Application has been audited and found complete.
- ◆ Staff Screening for disqualifiers and impediments.
- ◆ Letter of petition from the individual to the Bishop has been received.
- ◆ Letter of approval from his wife has been received if he is married.
- ◆ Letters of recommendation have been received.
- ◆ Transcripts from high school and college have been received
- ◆ Attendance at required formation meetings.
- ◆ An interview of the couple with either the

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Associate Director of Formation, or with the Director, or delegate, has been completed.

- ◆ Testing and Examinations completed including but not necessarily limited to the following:
 - Medical Examination
 - Dental Examination
 - Educational Examinations as appropriate.
- ◆ The Director of Diaconate Formation presents an overview of each applicant to the Committee on Admissions and Scrutinies. This body makes a recommendation to the Director of the Office of the Diaconate regarding the disposition of each applicant.
- ◆ The Director of the Office of the Diaconate reviews the recommendation and the application to determine whether to forward it to the Ordinary.
- ◆ The Ordinary reviews the applicant's file and decides whether to invite the individual to enter the discernment process as an aspirant.

Candidate: Is an individual who has completed the aspirant process, and the evaluation process required for candidacy.

The individual has been subsequently invited by the Ordinary to be admitted to candidacy for the diaconate. Enrollment among the candidates for the diaconate does not constitute any right necessarily to receive diaconal ordination. The formation process is a combination of completing the School of Ministry at Kino Institute and completing formation meetings scheduled by the Office of the Diaconate. The formation meetings are designed to allow a formal discernment process to continue while the candidate is completing the School of Ministry.

- ◆ The goal is to select men who measure well against a standard of excellence. This does not necessarily mean academic excellence, but it does

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mean that any man admitted to the formation process will display major ministerial gifts and potentialities for excellence which are inherently diaconal. In other words, admission as a candidate is not to be based on meeting some minimal qualifying threshold, but rather admission is to be based on the display of rich talents needed by the Church of Phoenix to build and become the Body of Christ. In some fashion, each applicant is to exhibit characteristics in his way of ordinary life that points to extraordinary capacity in diaconal ministry.

- ◆ The Committee on Admissions and Scutinies interviews all aspirants in person. The review board shall have the entire application file available to them prior to the review of the aspirant who has petitioned to be admitted to candidacy for formation. The members receive an executive summary of the aspirant profile in advance of the interview.
- ◆ Aspirants applying for admission to candidacy for formation should be actively and visibly committed to ministry in the parish/diocese and must be well known to the pastor or supervisor.

Documentation Required for Candidacy

In order to advance to the candidate phase from the aspirant phase, the petitioner must have completed or be in the final stages of completing the following steps:

- ◆ Propaedeutic period of discernment is completed and certificate is filed.
- ◆ Interview with Director (wife and children are included if married with children.)
- ◆ Spouse interview by the director or his delegate.

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- ◆ Endorsement by pastor for Candidacy in writing. This typically also includes an interview with the Director of Formation and the pastor.
- ◆ Recommendations from parishioners (parish council, ministry team, etc.)
- ◆ Testing in knowledge of the faith.
- ◆ An evaluative interview of the couple by a Deacon Couple appointed by the Formation Board.
- ◆ Psychological Examination.
- ◆ *Enrich/Mate* or other measure(s) of marriage stability and spirituality.
- ◆ An affirmative staff review chaired by the Associate Director for Formation has been completed.
- ◆ An affirmative appearance of the couple before the Committee on Admissions and Scrutinies has been held.
- ◆ Employer recommendation and check of previous employment.
- ◆ Background check has been completed.
- ◆ Language proficiency and academic assessment (Informal and/or formal.)
- ◆ Videotape on proclamation and public speaking skills.

Process for Advancement to Ordination

The staff of the Office of the Diaconate conducts an audit of the petitioner’s file to determine that all necessary documents are present, that all of the mandatory evaluations have been completed, and that each required program phase has been passed. The following outline is an overview of the final steps in the process.

- ◆ Case Summary, giving a profile of the petitioner, is prepared by the Associate Director of Formation.

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- ◆ A recommendation is forwarded to the Committee on Admissions and Scrutinies and for the Diaconate Director.
- ◆ Director or his delegate conducts a candidacy interview.
- ◆ Candidate (and spouse) is interviewed by the Bishop.
- ◆ Director’s recommendation is prepared for the Bishop.
- ◆ Bishop Case Review. The Director and Associate Director of Formation meet with the Bishop and present each man’s portfolio with board and staff recommendations.
- ◆ The Bishop makes his decision on promotion to ordination.
- ◆ The Bishop notifies the petitioner of his decision in writing.

Advancement to Ordinand and Diaconate Ordination

The candidate satisfactorily completes the following during the years of direct formation and each item must be duly documented in his portfolio:

- ◆ Completion of theological studies and formation (grade of “c” or better, no incomplete grades etc.)
- ◆ Six Month Internship in assigned parish.
- ◆ Institution of Reader.
- ◆ Institution of Acolyte.
- ◆ Final file audit demonstrates candidate’s portfolio (complete and free of disqualifiers.)
- ◆ Ordinand’s interview with his pastor.
- ◆ Pastor’s endorsement of Ordination.
- ◆ Comprehensive Examination passed.
- ◆ First year *ad experimentum* assignment finalized and preliminary letter mailed to pastor and to ordinand.
- ◆ Ordinand’s Retreat.
- ◆ Placement Interview with Director of the Diaconate.

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- ◆ Letter of Petition to the Bishop.
- ◆ Certificate to the Bishop (Qualities for Reception of the Order of Deacon from the Director.)
- ◆ Interview with Bishop. (Wife to be included.)
- ◆ Interview with the Diaconate Director. (Wife to be included.)
- ◆ Certificate of readiness provided by the Diaconate Director.
- ◆ Consent of Wife if married (handwritten and signed.)
- ◆ Profession of Faith and Oath of Fidelity.
- ◆ Faculties and assignment letter mailed from the Bishop.

Request by Candidate: At the conclusion of the formation journey, the candidate who, in agreement with the director, considers himself to have the necessary prerequisites for ordination, may address to the Bishop:

- ◆ A declaration written in his own hand and signed by him, in which he attests that he is about to receive the sacred order freely and of his own accord.
- ◆ He will devote himself permanently to the ecclesiastical ministry.
- ◆ Asking at the same time that he be admitted to receive the order.

Audit: Prior to ordination, an audit of the petitioner's records is conducted by the Assistant Personnel Director to determine the following are properly filed:

- ◆ Certificate of Baptism.
- ◆ Certificate of Confirmation.
- ◆ The certificate of the ministries mentioned in can. 1035.
- ◆ The certificate of studies in accordance with can. 1032.
- ◆ Certificate of Marriage, if the ordinand to be promoted

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is married.

- ◆ The written consent of his wife if the ordinand is married.

Certificate of Readiness: Having received the request of the ordinand, the Bishop will evaluate his suitability by means of a diligent scrutiny. He will examine the certificate that the Director is obliged to present to him concerning the qualities required in the candidate for the reception of the order, namely:

- ◆ Sound doctrine.
- ◆ Genuine piety.
- ◆ Good moral behavior.
- ◆ Fitness for the exercise of ministry.
- ◆ After proper investigation, a certificate of physical and psychological health.



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