



Archdiocese of San Francisco

Diaconate Formation

At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed "not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service." For strengthened by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishop and his group of priests they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God. (Lumen Gentium, 29).

The permanent deacon brings a unique pastoral presence to the parish community. He is an ordained minister whose ministry is "service sacramentalized" through the proclamation of the Gospel, through his participation in liturgy, and through his dedication to ministries of charity and justice.

The Wife of the Deacon

During the formation process the wives of deacon candidates have the opportunity to grow along with their husbands and then, although not ordained, as wives of deacons they offer their gifts to the parish community.

Diaconate Community

The Diaconate Community includes deacons, their wives and families, as well as others who are involved in both initial and ongoing formation. We gather regularly in order to support each other as friends and as colleagues in ministry.

General Information about Acceptance and Selection

Acceptance

The selection of diaconate candidates for the Archdiocese of San Francisco follows the guidelines presented by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. An essential principle indicated by the NCCB is that the diaconate is a ministry, a way of serving the Church, and never an honor or personal reward. The call to the diaconate is both a call from God to serve, and a call from the community of faith which is to be served. This call does not come to the individual alone, nor for his own sake. It is not a right but rather a call affirmed and recognized by his community of faith. Anyone who hears such a call must have the gift validated by the Church.

It is evident that more particular criteria will vary in accordance with the specific needs of the local diocesan Church and the general lines of its pastoral program. Hence, in assessing prospective diaconate candidates, the Archdiocese of San Francisco selection process takes into consideration a variety of realities faced by the local church: ethnic diversity, the need to revitalize parishes, the homeless situation, other concerns of the poor and marginalized, and much more.

Selection

The selection of diaconate applicants for the Archdiocese of San Francisco complies with the document of the Congregation for Catholic Education *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*, as well as the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*. The *National Directory* describes some of the qualities that a man should have to apply for the diaconate. They include: natural inclination of service to the Christian community, and to all in need; ability to share one's faith; generosity in service; sound faith; good Christian reputation; personal integrity, maturity, and holiness; regular participation in the Church's sacramental life; a positive and stable marriage, if married, or a mature celibate state of life, if single, and a deep spirituality and prayer life.

Application Process

The selection of diaconate applicants for the Archdiocese of San Francisco complies with the document of the Congregation for Catholic Education *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*, as well as the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*. The *National Directory* describes some of the qualities that a man should have to apply for the diaconate. They include: natural inclination of service to the Christian community, and to all in need; ability to share one's faith; generosity in service; sound faith; good Christian reputation; personal integrity, maturity, and holiness; regular participation in the Church's sacramental life; a positive and stable marriage, if married, or a mature celibate state of life, in single; and a deep spirituality and prayer life.

The procedure for formal application and acceptance as an aspirant in the Diaconate Formation Program includes the following:

- Man must meet the general requirements for acceptance, which are found on the green sheet.
- Attend a Diaconate Information Day where the prospective applicants, and their wives, if they are married, attend a session that explains the diaconate and the formation program.
- Applicant/wife completes the Application Form for the Diaconate Formation Program.
- Pastor completes the Pastor's Response Questionnaire – that asks for the pastor's assessment and recommendation of the applicant.
- Initial interview – the applicant-couple meets with a member of the Diaconate Formation staff.
- Second interview by a member of the Diaconate Formation staff.

- Third interview by a member of the Diaconate Formation staff.
- If there is no deacon in the applicant parish, a Deacon/couple interview – a deacon couple is assigned to make a home visit and interview with the prospective applicant/couple.
- Medical and psychological evaluation; fingerprints and a background check.
- Assessment by the Diaconate Formation staff.
- Approval by the Diaconate Advisory Board and the Diaconate Formation staff.
- Notification of the applicant concerning his acceptance into the Diaconate Formation Program as an aspirant.

Please note that the above application process for an applicant may be terminated at any step of the process by the Diaconate Formation staff.

Things to Consider in Discerning the Filing of an Application

Do you have the support of you pastor and parish community? Applications are processed only after the receipt of the Pastor’s Response Questionnaire, and if the pastor recommends the applicant for admission into the Diaconate Formation Program.

Are you between the ages of 30 and 60?

Are you in good physical and mental health?

Are you willing to undergo a background check?

Do you minister to those in need within the parish or the larger community? Types of service would include helping the poor and homeless, those in jails and prisons, those in hospitals or confined to their home due to illness, caring for the bereaved, and other hands-on areas of ministry that help those in need. Six months of such ministry is usually required before beginning the application process.

Are you open to grow in knowledge of the Church’s teachings and in the pastoral applications of these teachings?

Has your call been validated by others? Are you seen as a leader in the parish?

Are you open to serving the Church in a variety of ways? All aspects of the diaconate, (Word, Liturgy, and Charity/Justice,) are important, especially the ministry of Charity/Justice. Do you have a sufficient academic foundation to complete the reading assignments and clearly express your understanding of the material during class discussions, in presentations to the class, and in written reports?

If you are married, does your wife support your discernment of God’s call be a deacon? Is she willing to go through the application process and fully participate in the aspirancy year of the Diaconate Formation Process?

If you are a couple who have young children, do you have an extended family that is willing to care for these children as you go through the Diaconate Formation Program?

Description of the Formation Program

Formation Process

Diaconate Formation for the Archdiocese of San Francisco consists of a five-year program. Applicants for the program must have at least one year of hands-on service to those in need within their own parish, or in the larger community. Types of service would include helping the poor and homeless, ministry to those in jails and prisons, visiting those in hospitals or confined to their homes due to illness and caring for the bereaved.

The first year of formation is for aspirants. The second through the fifth years are for candidates. The program has three main interrelated components: spiritual/personal growth, academic/theological, and pastoral/ministerial. During the summer prior to the beginning of each year's class, those in formation are involved in reading assignments and special projects. They meet with designated deacons (deacon couples) who are instrumental in the formation process by serving as mentors during the summer and at various times throughout the year. In addition to mentors, there is a journey deacon couple for each formation group. The journey couples are present during most of the formation sessions and assist the formation coordinator for that group in a variety of ways.

In each of the five years, the participants develop a sense of community through shared Eucharist, shared prayer, shared ministry, shared meals and relaxation, and shared conversation. The entire program follows an adult learning model that includes presentations, assigned readings, shared reflections, and group processes. Each year has a Justice and Peace component. Theological reflection is an important part of the overall program. The program complies with the document of the Congregation for Catholic Education Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons, as well as the National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States.

Classes begin on the Last Saturday in August and end in June. Classes are, for the most part, scheduled every other Saturday and begin at 8:30 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m. The majority of classes are held at St. Patrick Seminary & University in Menlo Park.

The following is a brief summary of each year of formation:

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.

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 conducted by the committee on admission and scrutinies. 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 committee on admission and scrutinies to appraise his readiness for nomination into candidacy. The committee 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 committee 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 New Testament. They are also given sessions on Theological Foundations and discuss issues such as faith, divine revelation, and grace. Presentations and discussions concerning Catholic Social Teaching are an important part of this year's formation. There are also practicums on the art of reading, proclaiming and speaking in public. Pertaining to the pastoral aspect of the program, there are sessions on grief ministry and listening and communication skills. During this year the participants have experiences in ministry to 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 Christology. Also, there is an introduction to some of the major themes of Ecclesiology, and a discussion of Church History (with an emphasis on the Early Church and the Middle Ages.) There is also the study of Mariology (the role of Mary in Sacred Scripture and the Church). 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.

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. There is the study of Funeral Rites and there are practicum's for Vigils and Committal Services.

Relating to the pastoral dimension of the program, the participants have individual and group experiences in ministry to the homeless.

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, 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 Church History, with an emphasis on the Reformation and Modern Times. There are presentations and discussions on contemporary Church issues, including the role of women in the Church and the role of the laity.

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.

Relating to the pastoral dimension of the program, there are special sessions on pastoral care with an emphasis on pastoral counseling skills, referrals, etc.

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 Justice and Peace Ministry, Catholicism in a Multi-Cultural Society, Issues of Personal and Professional Growth, Marriage Preparation, the Canon Law of the Church, and Small Faith Communities. There is also a continuation of the study of pastoral care and pastoral counseling.

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 facilitator. 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.

The Role of the Deacon

The diaconate has its origins in the apostolic times and flourished during the first four centuries of the Church's history. Later, for very complex reasons, the diaconate went into decline until it became little more than a step on the way to the priesthood in the Western Church.

When the Second Vatican Council restored the diaconate as a permanent ministry in the Church, it did so for three primary reasons: (1) A desire to restore to the Church the full complement of active apostolic ministries, (2) The desire to integrate and strengthen those who were, in fact, already exercising diaconal functions, and (3) To more fully serve the needs of the people.

Loving service is a task that falls upon every Christian as an immediate duty of life in obedience to and in imitation of Jesus. Service is obviously, also a primary and central task of priests and bishops, but the deacon especially has this role by virtue of his ordination. The deacon continually makes visible to the Church the redemptive service fulfilled by Jesus Christ. He represents and promotes in the Church what the community of faith must be, namely a community of service.

Ministry of Love and Justice

From its beginning, and particularly during the first centuries, the diaconate has been primarily a ministry of love and justice. The early metaphorical description of the deacon as *“the eyes and ears, the mouth, heart, and soul of the bishop”* referred to the duty of the deacon to identify the needy, to report their needs to the bishop and the Church, and to direct the Church’s loving service to them.

As the diaconate has developed in the United States it is hard to find a single category of needy people in Church and society who are not being served by deacons: the homeless, the ill, prisoners, refugees, the rural poor, street people, victims of racial and ethnic discrimination, the aged, the bereaved, battered women, the blind, the deaf, the divorced, drug addicts, the dying, the handicapped, abused children, etc. Deacons are ministering to these people, in the name of the church, and representing the care of Jesus Christ the Servant.

Through the grace of ordination, the deacon is to inspire, promote, and help coordinate the service that the whole Church must undertake in imitation of Christ. He has a special responsibility to identify to the Church those who are in need. Among such people the deacon is to speak about Christ and to offer them the Church’s varied assistance. But in the Church, he is also to speak about the needy, to articulate their needs, and to inspire and mobilize the whole community’s response. He thus becomes the link through which the Church reaches out to the needy and the needy challenge the church.

The Ministry of the Word of God

The deacon’s ministry of the Word is also a far-reaching one. It may include proclaiming the Gospel at the liturgy, preaching, catechetical instruction and other forms of teaching, counseling, instruction of catechumens, giving retreats, outreach to alienated Catholics, parish renewal programs, etc. Besides these more or less formal occasions, deacons may also have many opportunities to speak about Jesus Christ more informally, especially as they carry out their ministries of love and justice. Deacons who have secular occupations are also able to witness to the Gospel in the marketplace. Here they meet the demands of their work both as committed Catholics and as ordained ministers. They use the opportunities their work provides to bring the Gospel to bear on the concrete circumstances of everyday individual and social life. In turn, their secular involvement also can equip them to bring questions and insights to bear on the Gospel and can thus help lead the Church to a richer and deeper appreciation of the faith.

The Ministry of the Liturgy

The Second Vatican Council asserted that “the Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and the source from which all its power flows.” This is as true of the deacon as it is of the Church in general. To the Church gathered in worship, the deacon both

brings the gifts of the people and articulates their needs. At the Eucharistic assembly, the deacon assists the community in its worship and helps to minister the great mystery of Jesus Christ's redemptive gift of himself in Word and Sacrament. And, in such liturgical celebrations, in which all three of the deacon's ministries are uniquely concentrated and integrated, the deacon finds the source from which he draws his own Christian life and the grace to carry out his ministry.

At the Eucharist, the deacon may proclaim the Gospel, preach, voice the needs of the people in the general intercessions, assist in the presentation of the gifts, and distribute communion. The deacon can also perform other liturgical roles such as solemnly baptizing, witnessing marriages, bringing Viaticum to the dying and presiding over funerals and burials. In addition to these roles, he can also preside over liturgies of the Word, the Liturgy of the Hours, and exposition and the Blessed Sacrament. He can lead non-sacramental reconciliation services, conduct prayer services for the sick and dying, and administer certain of the Church's sacramentals.

The Integration of Diaconal Ministries

The diaconal ministries, distinguished above, are not to be separated. The deacon is ordained for them all, and no one should be ordained who is not prepared to undertake each in some way. This is not to say that a deacon may not have greater abilities in some areas than others. But, there is an intrinsic relationship among the three areas of the deacon's ministry if he is to be a sign of the Servant-Christ who redeemed us as Prophet, Priest, and King. In his person and in his roles, the deacon is also to represent to the Church the full range of services which it itself is called to carry out in the world. When the deacon preaches or teaches, it is shaped by his presence in the world, which has well acquainted him with the needs of the people. When he ministers at the altar, he brings those needs to the Church and to Jesus Christ. As he ministers to the needy in his day-to-day service, so also at the Eucharist he ministers the Body of Christ to the People of God. And when he works for the needy he does so as one who has himself both received and ministered the two-fold bread of the Word and of the Eucharist.