

Archdiocese of Omaha Permanent Diaconate Formation Handbook

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MISSION
 MERCY
MARGINS

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Final Logo

A blazing torch represents the light that "shines in the darkness that will not be overcome" (John 1). It signifies that deacons are to be witnesses to the light of Christ in dark places.

Sandals reference Isaiah 52:7-9, a prophecy relevant to the diaconate mission of evangelization:

*"How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger
who announces peace"*



The diagonal deacon's stole represents the role of deacons in the liturgy. It is draped over a shield, which suggests that deacons are warriors for Christ.

Broken chains represent Pope Francis' call to Catholics to bring the Gospel to those places where "prisoners in thrall to many evil masters."

At the center of the shield, **MISSIO**, Latin for "Mission" is inscribed in Roman capitals. The lettering is set on the pages of a book, representing that the mission of the deacon is to spread the Gospel.

The color of the coat of arms is blood red, symbolizing the self-sacrificing service that is central to the deacon's vocation.

I. Introduction to the Permanent Diaconate Program

A. The Theology of the Diaconate

The diaconate, in so far as it is a grade of sacred orders, confers a character and communicates specific sacramental grace. The deacon as an ordained minister participates in the ministry of Christ. He is the sacramental sign in the Church of Christ the Servant. The deacon, because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, signified by the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration, exercises a service of the people of God, in the three fundamental areas of the action of the Church (word, Eucharist and charity). While the diaconate is essentially one and the same in every case, and the outlines of ministerial service inherent in the diaconate are very well defined, “the concrete ways of carrying it out are diverse; these must be suggested in each case by the different pastoral situations of the single Churches” (*Basic Norms*, 9).

Thus, the deacon is called to proclaim the Gospel and to preach the word, to instruct the people of God through the homily and through catechesis.

In the liturgical and sacramental context, by virtue of his ordination, the deacon participates in the sanctifying action of God. He presides at some of the sacraments, e.g., Baptism, Marriage and at the Rite of Christian Burial. He presides at the Liturgy of the Hours; he blesses persons and things, and above all assists the diocesan bishop and the priest in the celebration of the Eucharist. At the celebration of the Eucharist, the deacon proclaims the Gospel and has the faculty to preach the homily. As an ordinary minister of Holy Communion, he distributes the Eucharist to the faithful during Mass, and administers Viaticum to the sick. It is in the Eucharistic Sacrament that the reality of the Church and its ordained ministry is most particularly expressed.

In the third place, and in a preeminent manner, the deacon is called to be a witness of the charity of Christ, reproducing in his ministry the merciful action of the Lord, who came not to be served but to serve. An essential dimension of the vision of the Second Vatican Council was that the Church would engage in a new way with ‘the modern world’. This vision is clearly expressed in the opening words of *Gaudium et spes*: “The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.” The deacon serves in the midst of the poor as a prolongation of his ministry at the Eucharistic table. In his love of preference for the poor and the sick the deacon exercises a leadership role in the community, which finds its expression in his particular care for those who suffer from infirmities and limitations whether physical or spiritual in nature.

The deacon is ordained not to priesthood, but to a ministry of service (*Lumen Gentium*, 29). In consequence of this the deacon is called by the diocesan bishop, not to preside at the Eucharist, but to exercise the ministry that is entrusted to him. This ministry is linked into the local Church in such a way that the pastoral ministry of the deacon can be organized on a parochial, deanery or diocesan level. The different pastoral needs which present themselves will dictate the concrete form of the ministry according to the gifts of each deacon.

It falls to the diocesan bishop as pastor of the diocesan Church to determine the pastoral tasks of the deacons, and to supervise in a special way the pastoral cooperation between deacons and priests. The deacons must collaborate with the priests, and together they must collaborate

with the diocesan bishop. The deacons will exercise their ministry in hierarchical communion with the diocesan bishop and with his priests.

B. What does Christ want of Me?

The Diaconate is a call from Christ into the sacrament of Holy Orders. This call is mutually discerned by a man who perceives the call and the church, as present in the archbishop, who ratifies the call. A deacon allows Christ to extend His mystery of sacred service into every age by his willing Yes. To become a deacon is to configure one's life to Christ and to the pastoral vision of one's own Diocesan bishop. The church needs affectively and spiritually mature men who are no longer looking to find themselves but give themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit. The church needs creative men, men who have the capacity to see those ministerial needs that have yet to be met in the Archdiocese, and in light of the Diocesan bishop's call, stepping up to meet them. The church needs prayerful men, men willing to suffer the deepening of their own prayer lives so that they have something to offer the people of the Archdiocese beyond common sense or cultural values. The church needs knowledgeable men, men who integrate their prayer with a love for Scripture, theology and preaching. It needs men who preach and teach out of their deepest communion with Christ and not simply from the clever wisdom of a journalistic age. A man who aspires to the diaconate is one who lets himself be healed of any fear of Christ coming too close, he desires Christ to affect him in heart, mind and action as his foundational longing. With this as his foundation a deacon can lead others to Christ by word and deed.

C. How does a man know if he has a call to the Permanent Diaconate?

Are you attracted to prayer, prayer that overflows into creative and maybe even unique service to the church as a member of the clergy? Do you desire to attend to the Scriptures as your "food" for the rest of your life? Is there an urgency you feel to gratefully return to the Lord all that He has done for you? Do you love the Catholic Church with all your heart, mind and soul? Do you love the teachings of the Church, and wish only to abide by its doctrines and moral standards? Are you willing to evangelize and publicly proclaim your love of Christ and His church as an envoy of the archbishop, not simply from the ambo, but within the fabric of your daily life, receiving no remuneration from the Church for such action, and maybe even suffering because of such commitment? Do you possess a burning desire to assist the laity in their essential role as heralds of the new evangelization, embedding yourself deep within the secular world so as to abide with the laity as sacred minister...bringing grace, counsel and teaching to their mission? Will you enter the vital work of defending the Church's religious liberty, the right for its members to speak the contents of their ecclesial-formed consciences? Do you reverence deep within your heart a deepest of loves for the Holy Eucharist at which you will assist the priest with eager availability? Will you find Christ in all mundane service asked of you by other clergy and the needs of the laity? Are you willing to baptize, witness marriage, pray at wakes, visit the sick and counsel the spiritually troubled? Is there a motivation to teach the catechism and preach at Mass and parish missions? And finally, if married, do you in conscience believe that the diaconate will make you a holier spouse and father to your children? If your spouse were to die,

would you be willing to live in perfect continence, without a spouse, until you die? If you answered yes to these questions, then “come and see” (Jn 1:38-39).

The process to receive Holy Orders in the United States endeavors to implement the specific normative elements that are present in the following documents:

Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons (Cong. For Catholic Education, Congregation for Clergy, 1998).

Directory For the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons (Congregation For the Clergy, 1998).

National Directory For the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005).

D. A Brief History of the Permanent Diaconate

A foreshadowing of the office of deacon in the Church predates the New Testament. In the Prayer of Ordination for deacons the “sons of Levi” are recalled. Moses, instructed by God, established an order of men, the Levites, who represented the people in service to the priests and to minister in the former tabernacle of the old covenant (Numbers 18:2-6).

As referenced above, the institution of the order of deacons by the Apostles arose from an early necessity of service in the Church that was too demanding for the Apostles to manage alone. The solution was to appoint seven men of good repute to assist them in the daily ministry. Through prayer and the laying on of hands they entrusted to those chosen men the ministry of serving at table. Saint Paul describes the particular qualifications needed for a man to be appointed to the office of deacon. We can ascertain from other texts of the New Testament that deacons in the early Church preached (St Stephen, Acts 6 and 7), baptized (St. Philip, Acts 8), and served the early Church community. With the spread of the Faith in the early Church, deacons began to have a liturgical function.

Emphasized throughout the Gospels, the Greek word that became the designation for the office of deacon, *diakonia*, was grounded in Jesus Christ himself. Jesus offered himself in total service to the Father:

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38).

“But I am among you as one who serves (*diakonia*)” (Luke 22:27).

In conformity to Jesus the Servant, an essential character of the Church is to be a servant of God and his people. The deacon is an icon of this servanthood in the midst of the Church.

In the early second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch, in many references to deacons, considered a Church without the orders of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons unthinkable. In his *Letter to the Magnesians*, chapter VI, he wrote:

“I exhort you to be careful to do all things in the harmony of God, the bishop having primacy after the model of God and the priests after the model of the council of Apostles, and the deacons, who are so dear to me, having entrusted to them the ministry of Jesus Christ.”

Among other early references to the order of deacon are those made by St. Polycarp, St. Justin Martyr and St. Irenaeus of Lyons.

As the order of deacon became more prominent throughout the early centuries of the Church, the deacon became the functional arm of the local bishop. He assisted the diocesan bishop during the sacred liturgy, exercised responsibility for the temporal affairs and goods of the Church, and distributed alms to the poor. As the diocesan bishop's advisor, legal representative and confidant, he was often the logical choice to succeed the diocesan bishop upon his death, after receiving priestly and episcopal ordination.

By 400 A.D. abuses of power and conflict with the order of priests, often over monetary compensation, are cited as factors that contributed to the decline of the diaconate as a permanent order within the Latin Church. Social changes within the Church led to the development of monasteries and religious orders that assumed responsibility for charitable institutions, further contributing to a reduction in the need for deacons who had formerly ministered to these needs. Over the centuries that followed, many factors contributed to a chain of events that, by 800 A.D., resulted in the diaconate being reduced to a transitional step toward the priesthood in the Latin Church. Since the order of deacon had apostolic roots going back to the New Testament, it could not simply be abolished in the Church. The solution at the time was to make it a step toward the fuller order of the priesthood. In the Churches of the East, the diaconate remained a permanent ministry and order.

In Germany during the 1950s, a proposal was stirring to restore the diaconate as a permanent order within the Latin Church. In the 1960s, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council proposed to the universal Church that the ministry of the deacon came from the Apostles, and as such, should be restored as a permanent order in the Church: "It will be possible in the future to restore the diaconate as a proper and permanent rank of the hierarchy" (*Lumen Gentium*, 29).

Assigned once again to the permanent diaconate were his traditional ministries of administering baptism, being an ordinary minister of Holy Communion, witnessing of marriages, bringing viaticum to the dying, proclaiming the Sacred Scriptures, exhorting and instructing the people, officiating at funeral rites, and being dedicated to charitable works.

With regard to the Church's missionary activity, it was believed that catechists and those governing remote communities of faith would be strengthened for their apostolate through the sacramental grace of diaconal ordination resulting in a more fruitful ministry (Blessed Pope John Paul II, *General Audience on Wednesday, 13 October, 1993*). This was in response to a concrete reality in the life of the Church in certain developing countries where many communities of faith were in remote areas that very seldom had the opportunity to receive the ministry of priests. The permanent diaconate was formally restored by Pope Paul VI in 1967, and it has grown steadily since. In 1975, for example, there were 898 permanent deacons in the United States and by 1985 there were 7204. As of this writing there are more than 16,000 permanent deacons in the United States. In Rome, in 1959, Caritas International requested that the "permanent" diaconate be restored and from 4-16 October 1963, the subject was discussed during the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council. On 29 September 1964, in four separate votes, the Council Fathers approved the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent order, in its own right, a full part of the three-fold hierarchy of Holy Orders: bishop, priest, and deacon. On 18 June 1967, Pope Paul VI issued "*Sacrum diaconatus ordinem*," a document that re-established the permanent diaconate for the Latin Church. In May of 1968, the Roman Catholic bishops of the United States petitioned the Holy See for permission to restore the diaconate in our country. The Apostolic

Delegate informed our bishops on 30 August 1968 that Pope Paul VI had acceded to their request. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops created a standing committee on the diaconate in November 1968. Beginning in 1971, with *Permanent Deacons in the United States: Guidelines on their Formation and Ministry*, the committee published a lengthy series of monographs as a national catechesis on the diaconate. Following the direction of the Second Vatican Council, the Archdiocese of Omaha reestablished the diaconate with the ordination of its first deacons in 1973.

E. Deacon Profile

It is essential to understand that the deacon is not defined by "what" he does, but rather "who" he is. A deacon's identity is rooted in his faith as a follower of Jesus Christ. He is a person committed to the Gospel. In discerning the invitation of Our Savior the deacon comes to examine the call to ordained ministry. With the decision of the Church and the interior acceptance of his vocation, a deacon is called to Ordination. This is not a position of power but rather the means by which a man can better serve Christ within His Church. All are called to proclaim the gospel but a deacon has made a formal, public commitment to live as a witness, sealed in his receiving the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The deacon represents the care, love, forgiveness and teaching of Holy Mother Church. Within the Church the deacon is a sign of commitment to the Gospel and the service it teaches. To society he brings public witness to the Gospel that Christ's love is not private but He wills His love to be known by all. The deacon is committed to the archbishop and his vision of pastoral ministry. As a deacon he implements the mission of the archbishop, he is characterized by openness and responsiveness to a wide variety of needs in keeping with this mission.

The secular employment of a deacon is also linked with his ministry. Although his secular work may benefit the community, some professions can become incompatible with the pastoral responsibilities of his ministry. The archbishop shall evaluate individual cases as they arise and may require a change of profession. Deacons must give priority to the spiritual life and live their *diakonia* with generosity. They should integrate their family obligations, professional life, and ministerial responsibilities so as to grow in their commitment to the person and mission of Christ the Servant. Clerics have a special obligation to seek holiness in their lives. Deacons must not become directly involved in political activities that lead to the seeking of official leadership positions in partisan groups, nor ought they seek public office in that such would constitute a danger to his freely proclaiming the Gospel in its entirety.

F. Recognition of Deacons as Clergy and the Relationship with the Archbishop and Priests

Through the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders at the hands of the archbishop, a deacon becomes a cleric and is incardinated into the Archdiocese of Omaha. He is no longer a member of the laity of the Church.

As a cleric, the deacon enjoys all the rights afforded him in the *Code of Canon Law* and is also subject to all of the obligations required of him under the same law.

Also, “through the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration [in the Rite of Ordination], [the deacon] is constituted a sacred minister and a member of the hierarchy. This condition determines his theological and juridical status in the Church.” The deacon has a special and direct bond to the archbishop under whose authority he exercises his ecclesial service and in communion with extends Christ’s own ministry of charity.

In this light it is important to recognize the deacon’s new status in the Church as a result of his ordination. The deacon’s primary identity is to be a man who, by virtue of ordination, sacramentalizes the service of the Church. The deacon participates through the grace of ordination in Christ’s own servant mysteries (“I am among you as one who serves,” Lk 22:27).

The deacon has a special relationship with the diocesan bishop and the priests of the diocese. The diaconate is intended to help and serve the orders of the episcopacy and priesthood. “The principal function of the deacon, therefore, is to collaborate with the diocesan bishop and the priests in the exercise of a ministry which is not of their own wisdom, but of the word of God, calling all to conversion and holiness” (*Directory*, 23).

Particular attention must be paid to the relationship between the deacon and his pastor, especially when he is assigned to parochial ministry. The pastor and all priests serving in the parish or mission must recognize the deacon as a collaborator in ministry and as one who shares with them in the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Even though the deacon is there to help and serve the pastor, his dignity as a brother in Christ and as a sacred minister of the Church must be respected. The deacon, for his part, must remember that the pastor is the one whom he helps and serves under the authority of the diocesan bishop. Mutual respect and charity should govern this relationship.

G. Deacons Serve the Church

Diocesan Service

Deacons are not ordained for any particular parish, even their own. They are ordained for service to the archbishop and the local Church.

Even though a deacon’s usual status conveys to people that he is a cleric ministering in a parish there may be times when some deacons function more like “priests in residence” providing ministry to the wider church and society even as they serve liturgically at a parish altar and ambo. Since deacons are ordained for the diocese to serve the diocesan bishop’s pastoral plan a deacon’s ministry may be exclusively for the local church and not simply for a particular parish. Well discerned and creative ministry to bring the Gospel beyond the parish confines is welcomed.

Men are ordained to the diaconate out of a discerned need acknowledged by the archbishop. All deacons serve a particular need for which they are ordained. The deacon’s primary ministry is twofold: to serve at the altar and ambo and ***from within such service to be sent by Christ, while always abiding with Him in prayer***, to respond to the spiritual and corporeal needs of people.

The particular service rendered will be reflected in the letter of assignment once a man is ordained to the diaconate. The assignment letter may read that the deacon is assigned to a particular parish or mission *to minister in a particular area of need* (e.g., to the poor of the

community, to the sick, to the elderly, to the imprisoned, to the youth, as a catechist, etc.). The deacon could also be assigned to some broader diocesan or regional ministry with diaconal faculties in a particular parish or mission. This does not mean that the deacon could never engage in some other area of ministry as his diaconal ministry matures. It does mean that he must always have some particular focus of his diaconal ministry on specific needs in the community.

Sacramental/liturgical functions

- Assisting at Mass
- Baptism and baptismal preparation
- Weddings where no Mass is requested and marriage preparation
- Distribution of Viaticum to the Dying
- Funeral vigil service outside of Mass and funeral committal service
- Preaching and proclaiming the Word of God at Mass and other liturgical celebrations
- Liturgy of the Word with Communion/Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest
- Presiding at liturgy of Hours
- Presiding at Eucharistic Adoration
- Giving Parish Missions
- Leading novenas and other devotionals

Pastoral Ministry

Deacons serve all the faithful, especially the sick, the elderly, the bereaved, the home-bound, prisoners, homeless; they are available for pastoral counsel and spiritual encouragement at the parish and beyond in many secular environments, work, school, in hospitals, nursing homes, etc. Deacons counsel the engaged and the married. They pray with people and teach others how to pray.

Evangelization/Catechesis

Catechist training; teaching adult faith formation or child catechesis

Social Services

Parish pantry, homeless, immigrants, clothing distribution, etc.

H. The Permanent Deacon and Preaching

The *Code of Canon Law* for the Latin Church gives the deacon the faculty to preach everywhere, with at least the presumed permission of the rector of the church, unless this faculty has been restricted or removed by the competent Ordinary (c. 764).

In the case of a deacon, the competent Ordinary mentioned above is the diocesan bishop, and the local ordinaries such as the Vicar General or the Vicar for Clergy. The deacons possess the faculty to preach anywhere in the diocese with the consent of the pastor of the parish. It is to

be noted that preaching is not a canonical *right* of the deacon, but a *faculty*. Canon 767 directs that the homily at Mass is reserved only to those in Holy Orders.

The permanent deacon has the opportunity to preach in various liturgical and ecclesial contexts. These include, but are not limited to: wake services, the funeral liturgy outside of Mass, baptisms, wedding celebrations outside of Mass, liturgies of the Word outside of Mass, Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest, during the Liturgy of the Hours, and other prayer and liturgical services.

As regards the preaching of the homily at Mass the liturgical norms presume that the one who presides at a liturgical service, or who is the principal celebrant at Mass, is also to give the homily. This should be the ordinary practice. This principle is borne out by both the universal Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons (n. 31) and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (66 and 94):

“When the deacon presides at a liturgical celebration, in accordance with the relevant norms, he shall give due importance to the homily...”

The deacon may give the homily at Mass:

“The homily should ordinarily be given by the priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating priest or occasionally to the deacon...”

So, from time to time the deacon may be entrusted with the homily by the priest celebrant. When a deacon is to be entrusted with the homily at Mass is worked out under the direction of the parish pastor.

Between a candidate’s third and fourth year, he will be required to attend a week-long summer preaching intensive at Immaculata Monastery in Norfolk.

II. Discerning the Diaconate and Applying to the Permanent Diaconate Program

A. The Initial Discernment Process for Men Considering the Diaconate

- Must be a Catholic for at least five years.
- An applicant must be between the ages of 31 and 55 years of age.
- Must have conversations with his pastor leading to the approval of the pastor before inquiring about diaconate formation.
- Must have the approval of his spouse and family.
- The inquirer will be encouraged to get a spiritual director during this discernment period.
- After the aforementioned steps, the man, his wife and his pastor complete an inquirer questionnaire. Based on this information, the may or may not be invited to the interview and application phase.

B. Formation Requirements

Once invited into the program (which accepts new men every other year) a man will spend four years receiving the Love and Truth of Christ through spiritual direction, counseling, pastoral ministry, prayer, and seminars on doctrine and theology.

When a man enters formation, he accepts his own personal call from God to come and share in Christ's own eager availability to minister. Within, and by way of, the formation processes a man renders himself available to those who cry out for spiritual truth and material welfare. A vital goal of the formation process is to facilitate a candidate's radical availability to the mystery of Christ. In becoming deeply available to Christ, the deacon's ministry becomes prayer, thus allowing his service to become that of Christ's.

The deacon serves the poor through the many ways found in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (CCC 2247); he serves them first and foremost as a spiritual man bearing spiritual gifts. What characterizes the life and ministry of the deacon is his participation in the self-offering of Christ as one who comes to serve (Lk 22:27).

During four years of formation a man will be asked to die to all that is not of Christ and welcome the painful conversion that accompanies the loss of sin as a false consoling pleasure in life. It is Christ who wants to become his authentic place of consolation, healing and inspiration. Since a man has responded to the call of Christ to enter Holy Orders he no longer is to remain satisfied with the status quo of his spiritual and intellectual life. By entering the formation program, a man consents to being vulnerable to a divine love that changes him at the points where he has refused change in the past. Without this consent a man will not progress toward ordination. To want to remain untouched by the fire of Christ's love would be similar to a man who wants to get married but remain in the values of his bachelor life. Such a man has not truly entered marriage but instead used marriage to attain private and self-centered goals. Christ calls all those who choose to enter formation to a new life of courage. This life is monitored and facilitated by the structures of formation---growth in prayer, growth in self-knowledge, growth in understanding of doctrine, and growth in seeing the needs of others with the eyes of Christ. Therefore the first formation requirement is courage, a courage that leads a man to confront the truth about himself and his relationship with Christ. Without this virtue then all other aspects of formation may be an occasion for simply "jumping through hoops."

The most vital part of a man's formation will be the discipline of spiritual direction.

During the four years of formation a man must enter the depths of prayer in such a way that he becomes more and more vulnerable to the presence of Christ. The spiritual goal for a deacon will be to become a man "who prays unceasingly" (1 Thes. 5:17); "Remain in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains on the vine, so also with you unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). One cannot race toward ministry without first suffering a new way of being with Christ. Ministry is communion with Christ and without such communion it simply becomes philanthropy. Ministry is only sustained by "a truly personal encounter with Jesus, a relationship with the Father and a profound experience of the Spirit" (Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 72) As the Congregation for Education noted, "In a spirit of prayer, ***with which he should be permeated***, the deacon, following the example of the Lord who gave himself "unto death, death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), should deepen every day his total gift of self" (*Basic Norms*, 8).

For the total gift of self to be genuine a man must discuss his prayer life, his time with Christ alone, with a competent priest spiritual director. The Permanent Diaconate Office will assist everyone in formation with finding a spiritual director. Formation is to be built upon prayer, which means it is built upon a man's honesty about his prayer life. This honest sharing about one's intimacy with Christ is first and foremost the content of spiritual direction which is always confidential (Neb. Rev. Stat. 27-506 – clergy communication is confidential "if made privately and not intended for further disclosure"). The main content of spiritual direction is not "personal problems." It is a sharing on how the affect was moved in the course of prayer, how the intellect judged and received such love, and how in noting such interior movement the man receives a deeper intimacy with Christ.

The second vital part of a man's formation is found in his capacity to be rigorously ***honest about his own identity***, sense of self, and how he relates to his wife, if married, the church and his secular activities and profession. No man can proceed in formation if there is not integrity between his faith in Christ and his public commitments. To live a split or double life is unacceptable for a cleric; there must be congruence between who one is and who one says he is. Without the desire to become congruent, honest and guileless grace cannot penetrate to the depths of a man and the aids given in formation simply remain impotent. This disposition does not mean a man must be "without sin" to gain from formation and eventually give the self to the Church. It simply means that he must be aware of his faults, repudiate them, and where sin is involved, repent regularly within the sacrament of penance.

The deacon is called to be a bridge between Christ and others. It is important that the deacon's character and personality not become a stumbling block to such a meeting. Hence formation is always about growth in self-knowledge in light of Christ's love for each man.

III. The Permanent Diaconate Program

A. Dimensions of Diaconal Formation

There are four dimensions in diaconal formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. These are assessed through the candidate's knowledge and demonstrable skills. A further essential element of formation is the discernment of a vocation explored by the candidate and spouse through self-reflection, spiritual direction, and formation evaluations.

The formation program will create an environment in which the wife of an aspirant/candidate can give her informed consent to her husband's continuance in formation. More essentially, it must ascertain her compatibility with her husband's diaconal vocation and eventual ministry.

In accord with the *Code of Canon Law*, the *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* by the Congregation for Catholic Education specifies that essential formation consists of two paths, **Aspirancy** and **Candidacy**.

The **Aspirant path** in diaconal formation is during the first year of formation. It is primarily a time to discern the capability and readiness of an aspirant to be nominated to the archbishop for acceptance as a candidate for diaconal ordination. It is also a time for a married aspirant and his wife to assess the quality of their relationship and the ramifications of his

possible ordination to the diaconate upon their married life. For the single aspirant, it is a time to discern his capacity for celibacy. The discernment of the authenticity of a person's vocation to the permanent diaconate is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop. The fact that somebody aspires to the permanent diaconate does not in itself determine that a vocation is present.

The **Candidate path** in diaconal formation is during the last 3 years of the formation process. It is the occasion for continued deepening of a diaconal vocation and preparation for ordination. Throughout this path in formation, the candidate himself assumes the primary responsibility for his formation.

B. Year-by-Year Requirements

First Year Aspirant Requirements

The **Aspirant path** in diaconal formation is during the first of the four years of the formation process. It is primarily a time to discern the capability and readiness of an aspirant to be nominated to the archbishop for acceptance as a candidate for diaconal ordination. It is also a time for a married aspirant and his wife to assess the quality of their relationship and consider the ramifications of his possible ordination to the diaconate upon their married life. For the single aspirant, it is a time to discern his capacity for celibacy.

Aspirants and their wives are required to attend weekend formation every other month from September to May. During these months, they will learn about spirituality, prayer, discernment, and the nature of the diaconate. These weekends are more similar to retreat than classroom lectures.

Aspirants are required to meet with their Pastor a minimum of four times during the year.

Aspirants are required to meet with their Spiritual Director monthly.

Upon completion of satisfactory evaluations and interviews, aspirants submit a handwritten letter to the archbishop petitioning for transition to the Candidate Path of Diaconate formation. This letter is due early in the man's second year. A recommendation from the aspirant's pastor to receive candidacy is also required. The actual transition occurs during the Rite of Candidacy at which all formation classes attend. The Mass is held in Norfolk during the month of September following the aspirancy year. Aspirants vest in alb and cincture.

Sample Letter Requesting Transition to Candidacy

(Written in own handwriting)

(Date)

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha
2222 N. 111 Street
Omaha, NE 68164

Your Excellency,

I wish to express by means of this document my intentions to be admitted as a candidate for the Holy Order of Deacon in the Archdiocese of Omaha.

My intention is made freely and without any form of coercion on the part of anyone, and with the hope that God has called me to this holy vocation.

Sincerely in Christ,

(Your Signature)

Wife's Letter of Consent for Candidacy

(Written in wife's own handwriting)

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha
2222 N. 111 Street
Omaha, NE 68164

Your Excellency,

Recently, my husband, *(Full Name)*, was selected to continue his preparation to become a Deacon and receive The Sacrament of Holy Orders. He has completed the Aspirancy Period and has been recommended by the Deacon Office and approved by you to have The Rite of Candidacy conferred upon him on *(date)* at *(location)*.

As his wife, I hereby give my written consent for *(First Name of husband)* to receive the Rite of Candidacy and continue his formation for the Order of Deacon in the Roman Catholic Church. I give this consent freely without any force or coercion. I will support my husband during this time of discernment and study.

Respectfully yours in Christ,

(Signature of Wife)

Second Year Candidate Requirements

The **Candidate path** in diaconal formation occurs during the second, third, and fourth years of the formation process. It is the occasion for continued development of a diaconal vocation and preparation for ordination. Throughout this path in formation, the candidate himself assumes the primary responsibility for his formation. In accord with the Code of Canon Law, and the *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* by the Congregation for Catholic Education the candidate path in diaconal formation must last at least three years, in addition to the aspirant period.

Candidates are required to attend weekend formation (September to May).

Candidates are required to meet with their Pastor a minimum of four times during the year.

Candidates are required to meet with their Spiritual Director monthly.

Candidates are required to perform 100 hours of supervised pastoral field experience. A training session is held and candidates have until the following May to complete the 100 hours. For more information, see below under Pastoral Formation.

Second Year Candidates submit a hand-written letter of petition to the Archbishop for conferral of the ministry of lector in March. This letter is due at the December weekend formation session. A recommendation from the candidate's pastor to receive the ministry of lector is also required. All classes attend the lector ceremony. The lector, and the acolyte Mass which follows in third year of candidacy, is held on the Deacon Day of Prayer with the Archbishop each year in March. Since diaconal formation adds a new class only every other year, this Mass institutes lectors one year and acolytes the next. Candidates vest in alb and cincture.

Prior to the institution of a candidate as a lector, instruction will be given about the significance of this ministry, the canon law statements about it, and how to implement it into the candidate's life. The *Basic Norms* (no. 87) make it clear that this ministry should be emphasized through evaluation of its implementation in the life of the candidate. The candidate will be challenged to read the Mass readings every day. The ideal would be for them to read frequently at Mass but, if this is not possible, they will be encouraged to read them at home. The goal is for them to read the texts every day as if they were reading them during the Mass.

Letters will be mailed to the candidate's pastor informing him that the candidate has been instituted as a lector and asking him to increase the frequency of the candidate's opportunities to read publicly over the next year. The rationale for this will be explained in the letter.

Along with regular conversations, the assessment of the pastor, what has been observed by the permanent diaconate leadership team, and anything else the CPF has observed will be the basis for deciding if the candidate will be invited to a third year of formation.

Sample Letter Requesting Conferral of Lector Ministry

(Written in own handwriting)

(Date)

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha
2222 N. 111 Street
Omaha, NE 68164

Your Excellency,

I, *Your Name* , hereby humbly and freely request that I be formally installed into the ministry of lector in the Archdiocese of Omaha. I recognize the responsibility toward the Word of God. I pray that with continued training in Scripture Scholarship and with God's help I will be of service to the Church of the Omaha Archdiocese.

Sincerely in Christ,

(Your Signature)

Third Year Candidate Requirements

Candidates are required to attend weekend formation.

Candidates are required to meet with their pastor a minimum of four times during the year.

Candidates are required to meet with their spiritual director monthly.

Third Year Candidates are required to perform 100 hours of supervised pastoral field experience in the year following their third year of formation. The candidate has from June until the following May to complete the 100 hours. For more information, see below under Pastoral Formation. **Between a candidate's third and fourth year, he will be required to attend a week-long summer preaching intensive at Immaculata Monastery in Norfolk.**

Third Year Candidates submit a hand-written letter of petition to the Archbishop for conferral of the ministry of Acolyte in March. This letter is due at the December weekend formation session. A recommendation from the candidate's pastor to receive the ministry of acolyte is also required. All classes attend this installation ceremony. The Lector or Acolyte Mass is on the Deacon Day of Prayer with the Archbishop held each year in March. Since diaconal formation adds a new class only every other year, this Mass institutes lectors one year and acolytes the next. Candidates vest in alb and cincture.

The candidate will be challenged to learn the prayer for the purification of the vessels, the vesting prayers, as well as the prayers said by the deacon at the altar. Along with these prayers, a list of scriptural passages on holiness and the importance of a minister being purified by the Spirit of God will be submitted to the candidate for reflection and prayer. The candidate will keep a journal of his reflections on these prayers and scriptures along with his experiences of serving as an acolyte to be shared with his spiritual director.

Letters will be mailed to the candidate's pastor informing him that the candidate has been instituted as an acolyte asking him to use the candidate as an acolyte over the next year. The letter will also include the request that the candidate be given opportunities to purify the vessels after Mass. The rationale for this will be explained in the letter.

The Coordinator of Pastoral Formation (CPF) or the Director will instruct the new acolytes using the document, "The Ministry of the Acolyte" (prepared by the Permanent Diaconate Office).

The candidate's pastor will be contacted about his progress in serving. The Director and the CPF meet monthly with candidates' human formators to discuss his progress. Since an instituted acolyte is only one step away from the diaconate, he should know all of the vesting prayers, prayer during the purification of the vessels, and the prayers a deacon prays at Mass. Supervision of this will come in the form of the candidate being asked by the CPF to recite these prayers during formation weekends.

The assessment of the pastor, what has been observed by the permanent diaconate leadership team, and anything else the CPF has observed will be the basis for deciding if the candidate will be invited to a fourth year of formation.

Sample Letter Requesting Conferral of Acolyte Ministry

(Written in own handwriting)

(Date)

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha
2222 N. 111 Street
Omaha, NE 68164

Your Excellency,

I, Your Name , hereby humbly and freely request that I be formally installed into the ministry of Acolyte in the Archdiocese of Omaha. I recognize the responsibility to assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass by carrying the missal, cross, candles, etc. or by performing other such duties. I pray that my ministering in this capacity will bring fitting service to the people of the Archdiocese and glory to God.

Sincerely in Christ,

(Your Signature)

Fourth Year Candidate Requirements

Candidates are required to attend weekend formation.

Candidates are required to meet with their Pastor a minimum of four times during the year.

Candidates are required to meet with their Spiritual Director monthly.

Candidates are required to attend a five-day directed retreat prior to ordination. The retreat director must be approved by the Director of Permanent Diaconate Formation.

Candidates submit a handwritten letter of petition for Ordination to the Archbishop. This letter is due at the February weekend formation session. A recommendation from the candidate's pastor to be ordained is also required. During the March weekend formation session, the candidates will sign the Oath of Fidelity, the Oath of Freedom, and the Profession of Faith. Spouses will sign the Spousal Consent for Ordination.

After ordination during the first weekend in May, the newly ordained are required to attend the May weekend formation session for mystagogia and the blessing of the stoles.

Statement of Spousal Consent for Ordination

(Written in wife's own handwriting)

I, _____, spouse of deacon candidate
_____, do hereby consent to his ordination to
the Diaconate.

I will support him in his ministry.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Oath of Fidelity

I, _____, on assuming the Office of Deacon, promise that both in my words and in my conduct I shall always preserve communion with the Catholic Church.

I shall carry out with the greatest care and fidelity the duties incumbent on me toward both the universal Church and the particular Church in which, according to the provisions of the law, I have been called to exercise my service.

In fulfilling the charge entrusted to me in the name of the Church, I shall hold fast to the deposit of faith in its entirety, I shall faithfully hand it on and explain it, and I shall avoid any teachings opposed to that faith.

I shall follow and foster the common discipline of the whole Church, and I shall observe all ecclesiastical laws, especially those which are contained in the Code of Canon Law.

In Christian obedience I shall unite myself with what is expressed by the Bishops as authentic doctors and teachers of the faith or established by them as those responsible for the governance of the Church. I shall also faithfully assist diocesan Bishops, in order that the apostolic activity exercised in the name and by the mandate of the Church may be carried out in the communion of the same Church.

So help me God, and God's holy Gospels, on which I place my hand.

Signature _____

This Oath of Fidelity was taken publicly at _____

in the presence of _____ on _____

Oath of Freedom

I, _____, the undersigned, having presented to the Archbishop my petition for the reception of the Diaconate, now at the approach of Sacred Ordination, having diligently weighed the matter before God, do hereby testify under oath, first that I am not compelled to the reception of this Sacred Order by any coercion or force, or by any fear, but do spontaneously desire it and of my own full and free will wish to receive it, as I am convinced and feel that I am really called by God.

I profess that I know fully all the obligations and other consequences which this Sacred Order entails, which of my own will I desire and propose to receive, and I resolve to observe them all, with the help of God, most diligently during the entire course of my life.

Finally, in all sincerity, I promise that I will most obediently observe, according to the Sacred Canons, all that my superiors command me and ecclesiastical discipline requires, and that I am prepared to set a good example both in word and deed, in order that I may be rewarded by God for the undertaking of so great an office.

So I promise, vow, and swear, so help me God and these His Holy Gospels, which I touch with my hands.

Signature _____

This Oath of Freedom was taken publicly at _____

in the presence of _____ on _____

Profession of Faith

I, _____, with firm faith believe and profess everything that is contained in the symbol of faith, namely:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

With firm faith I also believe everything contained in God's word, written or handed down in tradition and proposed by the Church, whether by way of solemn judgment or through the ordinary and universal Magisterium, as divinely revealed and calling for faith.

I also firmly accept and hold each and everything that is proposed definitively by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals.

Moreover, I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise the authentic Magisterium, even if they proclaim those teachings by an act that is not definitive.

Signature _____

This Profession of Faith was taken publicly at _____

in the presence _____ of on _____

Petition for Holy Orders

(Written in own handwriting)

(date)

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha
2222 N. 111 Street
Omaha, NE 68164

Your Excellency:

I, *(full name)*, the undersigned, in compliance with Canon 1036 of the Code of Canon Law, do hereby petition to receive the Order of Deacon.

I testify and affirm that I seek ordination freely and of my own accord. I am impelled by no sort of compulsion, force or fear to receive this sacred order.

I voluntarily desire it and of my own free will wish to be ordained to the Diaconate. I have carefully considered this matter before God and believe that I am truly called by God to receive this sacred order.

I am fully aware of all the obligations attached to this order. I freely assume them and intend, with God's grace, to fulfill them throughout my life.

I declare especially that I am clearly aware of what the law of celibacy entails. I firmly resolve with the help of God to fulfill that law willingly and to keep it in its entirety until the end of my life.

I testify and affirm that I will devote myself permanently to the ecclesiastical ministry.

Respectfully Yours in Christ,
(Signature)

C. Intellectual Formation

Materials Aspirants and Candidates will need to purchase:

- *Liturgy of the Hours*
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *The Bible*
- Required reading texts for each course of study: to be determined by Instructors

Academic Curriculum

The study of scripture and theology is essential in becoming a public minister of the Church. The Church’s mission depends upon men who can articulate clearly and competently the doctrine and spiritual heritage of Catholicism. It will be the candidates’ paramount duty to study the Catechism, Scripture and Liturgical documents and rites with an eager prayerfulness to understand their content so as to share it with others. The deacon is an evangelist and he must know the Word of God and love it, eager to read it daily and desirous to share it with others. The intellectual formation of a deacon is based upon the interpenetration of discursive study and prayerful receptivity of God’s love and truth as carried by such study. All men in formation will learn a contemplative form of study based upon the ancient tradition of *lectio divina* (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* 82, 86-87).

CURRICULUM

Aspirancy (Year 1)	
September – Discernment; vocation to the diaconate and marriage.	
November - The role of the wife; the theology of the diaconate.	
January - How to pray: interior prayer, liturgy of the hours, praying in marriage.	
March - What is Ministry?	
May - Lectio, Spiritual Direction, Reconciliation, Praying at Mass, and Counseling: ways of living for interior freedom	
Candidacy (Year 2)	
September –Gospel of Matthew	
October – Gospel of Mark	
November/December – The Trinity of God’s Love	
January/February – The Church	
March – Evangelization	
April – Sacraments (in general and Reconciliation)	

May – Pastoral Ministry and Ministerial Ethics	
Candidacy (Year 3)	
September – Gospel of Luke	
October – Acts and Pauline Epistles	
November/December– Fundamentals of Moral Theology	
January – Sacraments: Baptism and Confirmation	
February – Sacraments: Matrimony and Holy Orders	
March – Canon Law: Matrimony and Holy Orders	
April – Sacraments: Unction and Eschatology	
May – Mariology and Saints	
Candidacy (Year 4)	
September – Gospel of John	
October – Prophets of Diaconal Ministry	
November – Theology of the Body	
December – Sacraments: Eucharist and the Mass	
January/February – Catholic Social Teachings	
March – Theology/Spirituality of the Diaconate	
April – Practicum: Mass Preparation for Ordination	
May – Diaconal Mystagogy (unpacking the graces of ordination)	

D. Spiritual Formation

Spiritual Formation is the heart of clerical formation. Each Deacon is to live in intimate and unceasing union with God (USCCB, *Program for Priestly Formation*, 5th ed. n.107). This disposition of prayer, this communion with the Trinity becomes the ever flowing source of all ministry. Without a developed and guarded prayer life, a deacon simply becomes a “helper, a man of service.” To serve without remaining in intimacy with God is the path to weariness, depression, and every temptation. Therefore, there is no work in formation more vital than the “work” of receiving and suffering God’s love in prayer. To this end the most important relationship a man has in formation is the one he enters with his spiritual director. Each candidate is to meet with his spiritual director at least once a month. The content of direction is discussion about his prayer life, its images, affections, and graces received and refused. Spiritual direction aids in a man’s capacity to discern his own voice from God’s, his own will from God’s. Spiritual direction assists a man to verbalize his conversations with God. To verbalize one’s loving knowledge of God is crucial for becoming a good preacher, teacher, and spiritual counselor.

Spiritual direction is not pastoral counseling; it is not about problem solving or alleviating psychological pain. There are other forums for these. Obviously, when a man prays, he prays with his whole being so there will be some aspects of his psychological and pastoral and

marital life that will be relevant but these are not the emphasis; the emphasis is his prayerful communion with the Trinity and his capacity or lack of capacity to receive that communion more and more deeply each month. During the course of formation these spiritual themes and activities will be emphasized:

- Learning how to receive the grace of Christ sharing His own servant mysteries
- Learning how to recognize Christ living in you
- Training in Lectio Divina,
- Formation in personal and communal prayer,
- Instruction in how to prayer the Liturgy of the Hours,
- Formation in how to be with Christ in Eucharistic Adoration,
- Aspects of Discernment of Spirits,
- Instruction on how to pray with people one-on-one,
- Formation in devotions such as the rosary, novenas, etc.

Requirements

Those in formation will be asked to:

- Commit to a personal relationship of love for the Holy Trinity,
- Possesses an ease in speaking about God's work in his life and is able to express it in appropriate contexts,
- Integrates his academic study with prayer in the use of classroom journals,
- Attend Daily Mass, where possible and Regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist, commitment to praying Liturgy of the Hours, and at least monthly celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation,,
- Cultivates a devotion to Eucharistic Adoration and lectio divina,
- Commits to a spiritual direction relationship with a priest without fail,
- Make optional and required retreats with eagerness,
- Commits to communicating with God, and where appropriate, his wife and family, his feelings, fears, and hopes of spiritual life,
- When possible, he commits to praying with his wife and children each day beyond the minimum of grace before meals or night prayers,
- Commit to balance in regard to marriage and ministry commitments,
- Prayerfully explore a willingness to accept the gift of celibacy if so called; to speak truthfully about the gift and demands of a celibate life,
- Cultivate friends wherein spiritual conversation is preeminent and intentional,
- Integrate prayer with pastoral ministry, a capacity to receive grace even while giving himself in service,
- A willingness to help others with their spiritual life.

E. Pastoral Formation

A deacon is called to love the poor. The Catholic Church understands poverty to be “neediness,” so anyone in some material or spiritual need is someone who elicits the ministry of Christ the servant. The deacon is to love the poor and not be anxious about “doing ministry right.” Effectiveness is important but more important is *a desire to be with those in need* as Christ was when he saw Zacchaeus or when he sat and spoke with the woman at the well. Primarily pastoral formation is about carrying the disinterested love of God to those in need. By loving the poor the deacon grows closer and closer to God who loves all humans for their own sake. Pastoral ministry is a response to “seeing” the poor after a man has finally let God see him in love. Although certainly personally fulfilling a deacon does not have his own private emotional needs met in ministry. No, he only loves because he has deeply received and is still receiving the love of God which compels Him to share such love with others.

Several components make up the pastoral formation program for Aspirants and Candidates. These include:

- Meetings with the Director of the Permanent Diaconate Program-and the Coordinator of Pastoral Formation,
- Meetings with the man’s pastor – minimum of four times a year,
- Parish/Community service,
- Supervised field experiences,
- A public teaching practicum, and
- The development of a supervised self-initiated ministry.

Requirements

Year one (aspirancy year)

Pastoral formation in the aspirancy year will consist of ongoing ministry work in the parish without additional diaconate formation responsibilities. This year is dedicated to spiritual formation, strengthening the marriage bond, and a greater dedication to the work already being conducted in the parish. Occasional meetings with the aspirant’s pastor human formator are also required.

Year two

The new candidate will continue his work in the parish and meet with his pastor and the Coordinator of Pastoral Formation. In addition, the candidate will participate each month in a formation practicum session where he is trained in the useful diaconal activities, including homiletics, assisting at Mass, baptism, presiding at a wake service, visitation of the sick, exposition and benediction, the rite of marriage, and how to pray with people. On occasion he will be called upon to preach during the Liturgy of the Hours as well as to lead the intercessions. The candidate will also be challenged to begin to pray about and consider the autonomous ministry development project that he will do in his fourth year of formation. He will have an

opportunity to participate in the following ministries: Holy Communion to the homebound and nursing facilities, leading ALPHA, This Man is You, small group. Out-of-parish ministry may include homeless shelter, Heart Ministry Center, Catholic Charities, etc. **Training followed by 8-10 hours service per month.**

Year three

The third year of formation builds upon year two's activities. The new component in year three is a series of pastoral formation field experiences. The candidate will also be challenged to continue to pray about and consider the self-initiated ministry development project that he will do in his fourth year of formation. During year three the broad outline of this project should begin to take shape in the mind of the candidate. Possible opportunities include sacramental preparation, RCIA mentor, serving as lector or acolyte, St. Vincent de Paul Conference, Christ Renews His Parish, family life volunteer. Out-of-parish ministry opportunities include hospice care, Winnebago reservation, Latino ministry, Black Catholic ministry, jail and prison ministry, hospital ministry, crisis pregnancy centers, etc. **Training followed by 8-10 hours service per month.**

Year four

The fourth year of formation adds a component to the candidate's ongoing parish ministry, meetings with his pastor and human formation, and the formation practicum sessions that will be held every weekend of formation. In-parish ministry include assisting in sacramental preparation, bereavement ministry, serving as lector and acolyte, observe baptism, funeral rites, and holy matrimony, faith formation of adults and RCIA, lead small groups. Out-of-parish opportunities include those listed in the third year. Another component is a self-initiated ministry development project along with several sessions of public teaching. **Training followed by 8-10 hours service per month.**

F. Human Formation

The goal of formation is the integration of the humanity of the diaconal candidate with his faith in Christ so that such integration can bear fruit as self-donation. In human formation, a man is challenged to let the truth of who he is be received in his conscience. This truth, when received in trust of God's Love, begins to free the man from any blindness or illusion about himself. Formation aims at freeing the man from such illusions, attachments to sin and artificial consolations so that he is ready to give himself to others in ministry. In human formation, a man's appropriation of Christ as the foundation of his own humanity is facilitated. One's gifts, personality, strengths, talents, weaknesses and limitations affect one's ministry, as do one's emotional, physical and spiritual limitations. The discovery of the self in Christ aims to deepen a man's freedom to serve out of emotional, moral and spiritual maturity. To participate fully in human formation, a man needs to enter prayer generously and freely reveal the truth about

himself in regular meetings with the Director of the Permanent Diaconate, who represents the Archbishop.

Evaluations

General evaluation is based upon the aspirant's/candidate's presence and participation at weekend formation, his pastoral ministry, his participation in class which demonstrates careful preparation and proper research, and his one-on-one sessions with the human formation advisors. This written assessment is made by the Director and Coordinator of Pastoral Formation.

Particular written evaluations are produced by the Director, the man's pastor, his teachers, the Coordinator of Pastoral Formation, and the human formation advisors. The deacon candidate may review the evaluation and comment upon it to the Director. The evaluations are based upon demonstrated ability to:

- Articulate the truth about one's freedom to say "yes" to Christ and the demand his love makes for continual conversion
- Be a man who readily acknowledges both strengths and weaknesses
- The ability to discern one's vocation with the Church free from the expectations of others
- An ease and eagerness to seek counsel, and a willing inclusion of the wisdom of others in his own thoughts
- To demonstrate a spirit of gratitude free from all cynicism, sarcasm, self-aggrandizement
- Establish deep self-knowledge illuminated by a prayerful knowledge of God
- Appropriate professional and spiritual boundaries to maintain personal and psychological health
- Demonstrate personal and professional preparedness in ministry
- Cultivate true Christian friendships
- Demonstrate appropriate respect, responsibility, and accountability to the archbishop
- Become a hospitable person creating an environment where people feel free to come to you to share their pain, burdens and needs
- Express oneself clearly
- Maintain a healthy balance in personal life and ministry
- Be flexible and assign appropriate priorities in varied circumstances
- Demonstrate dependability and trustworthiness
- Communicate with and relate to a wide variety of people
- Discern and evaluate ever-changing pastoral needs
- Physically exercise is encouraged

Human Formation Mentor

Human formation mentors meet individually with the aspirants and candidates during formation weekends. They complete a human formation mentor form and submit it to the Coordinator of Human Formation. Following is a copy of that form:

HUMAN FORMATION MENTOR FORM

Name of Aspirant/Candidate: _____ Date: _____

Aspirant/Candidate begins session with prayer.

1. “Regarding your personality, where have you been a bridge, inviting people to Christ and where have you been an obstacle for those seeking Christ?”
2. (Follow-up): “What have you learned from your wife about your personality in relation to your strengths and weaknesses?”
3. “Where are you challenged in your spiritual and academic readings to grow into the maturity of Christ (in your capacity of self-gift)?”
4. “Describe a time in ministry when you knew your virtues were being used by Christ.” [Some virtues include courage, intelligence, chastity, prudence, etc.].
5. “Where in your pastoral ministry might you have refused to be a servant of Christ, either in behavior or interior attitude?”
6. “What kind of interaction relevant to your formation as a deacon did you have with your pastor this past month?”
7. “Describe the ways your marriage bond is being strengthened or threatened by diaconal formation.”

For Mentor Only: please complete your assessment from this conference:

ASSESSMENT OF ASPIRANT

DEMONSTRATED ABILITY	AREA OF STRENGTH	AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT & GROWTH
Self-knowledge illuminated by a prayerful knowledge of God		
Readily acknowledges his own strengths and weaknesses.		
An ease and eagerness to seek counsel, and a willing inclusion of the wisdom of others in his own thoughts.		
Maintains a healthy balance in personal life and ministry.		
Ability to communicate with and relate to a wide variety of people.		
The ability to discern his vocation with the Church free from all expectations of others.		
A hospitable man creating an environment where people feel free to come and share their pain, burdens and needs.		
Possesses a freedom from anxiety, rooted in the reception of God's on-going love for him as his receptiveness to the truth.		

OBSTACLES TO FORMATION

OBSTACLE	FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION REQUIRED	COMMENTS FROM ASPIRANT

NO OBSTACLES IDENTIFIED AT THIS TIME:

Initials

Advisor Signature

Date

Please place any additional notes on the back. Check the box if you have placed any notes there.

G. Formation Weekend Schedule

Friday

7:00 – Instruction
7:50 – Break
8:00 – Instruction
9:15 – Night Prayer
9:30 -- Social
10:45 – Silence (until breakfast)

Saturday

7:00 – Mass
7:45 – Breakfast
8:15 – Morning Prayer
8:30 – Preaching Workshops
9:15 – Instruction
10:00 -- Break
10:10 – Instruction
11:00 – Break
11:10 – Instruction
2:00 -- Lunch
1:00-3:30 Silence: Spiritual Direction, Confession, Human Formation, Counseling
2:00-3:30 Wives' Prayer Gathering
2:00 Practicum Class
3:30 – Instruction
4:20 – Break
4:30 – Instruction
5:20– Silence: Spiritual Direction, Confession, Human Formation, Counseling,
6:00 – Dinner
6:45 – Evening Prayer
7:00 – Instruction
7:50 – Break
8:00 – Instruction
9:15 – Night Prayer
9:30 -- Social
10:45 – Silence (until breakfast)

Sunday

7:00 – Mass
8:00– Breakfast
8:30 – Morning Prayer
8:45 – Reflection and Sharing of Graces
10:00 – Dismissal

Practicum

Each weekend during formation there is instruction on and practice of one of the rites performed by a deacon. Following is the schedule and list of those rites:

September	Contemplative Homiletics
October	Communion Service
November	Baptism
December	Presiding at a Wake Service
January	Pastoral Care of the Sick
February	Exposition and Benediction/ Incense
March	Rite of Marriage
April	Assisting at the Mass
May	Praying with People

Acolytes and Lectors

During formation weekends, instituted acolytes and lectors are utilized as follows:

Acolytes

Instituted acolytes serve in the following ways. Each month one of the acolytes is designated as the acolyte for that month. On arrival the acolyte, vested in alb and cincture, brings up from the First Floor Chapel everything required for Exposition and Benediction (monstrance, humeral veil, luna from the tabernacle, etc.) and places these in the Fourth Floor Chapel. They serve as the acolyte at Exposition and Benediction. They lead the prayers at the meals and at the beginning of each class. When possible, they also serve at the Masses. At the end of the weekend they take everything required for Exposition and Benediction back to the First Floor Chapel.

Lectors

Only instituted lectors read during the Liturgy of the Hours. Lectors do the reading at the ambo and, after the homilies and a period of silence, lead the responsory.

Non-instituted Candidates

They, like the instituted candidates, can say the intercessions at the Liturgy of the Hours and can also do homilies. They are only limited in that they cannot do anything that is part of the ministry of a lector or an acolyte.

Aspirants

Aspirants learn by observing and participating in the liturgies but they do not fulfill any leadership roles.

Homilies

There are three homilies at each Liturgy of the Hours. Since there are three liturgies each formation weekend, nine men preach. Homilies are based on the reading in the Liturgy of the Hours and are delivered without notes. They are to be brief. The homilists are chosen by the leadership team and announced at the beginning of the liturgy. Thus, all candidates are required to prepare to preach for each liturgy.

Location of Formation Weekends

Immaculata Monastery
300 North 18th Street
Norfolk, NE 68701-3687
(402) 371-3438
Contact Information

Attendance at Formation Weekends

Participation is first measured by attendance. Please note that all absences of Aspirants and Candidates must be excused by the Director. Unexcused absence is grounds for dismissal from the program. Participation also manifests itself in the engagement of shared group discussion during discussion sessions. Finally, participation includes active attention to those presenting, and seeking clarification and or asking questions when appropriate. Attendance is mandatory because the man must become competent in knowledge of scripture and doctrine, as well as learn the ways of ongoing study as a virtue after ordination.

Missing Weekend Policy

It is the responsibility of all diaconal aspirants and candidates to see to it that their formation for Holy Orders is of the highest priority. It is never acceptable to miss a formation weekend for any casual, recreational, or family reasons not involving health or death. Please make sure that your secular employment is informed about your vocation so that you can resolve any conflicts with them in favor of your freedom to be on formation weekends. Since all are in possession of the formation calendar for the next three years planning should be made easier to accomplish. Please note the following:

- All absences have to be excused and the ***only valid excuses*** include sickness, death, direct threat of unemployment from your employer, or severe weather.

- For those who miss a formation weekend other means for gaining the knowledge will be required: failure to secure these other means under the guidance of the Director will result in dismissal from the program. Such means may include viewing online lectures over the internet from a authorized teacher that specializes in diaconal formation as well as other requirements deemed necessary to make up the loss of formation content and time. If you miss two formation weekends your formation will be extended or your ordination delayed.

Weather Alert Policy

In the case of severe weather, the Director will notify all of those in formation that the weekend has been cancelled. Due to the size of the Archdiocese, there may be occasions where some men will have to absent themselves while a greater portion of men can make the travel to Norfolk in safety and the weekend will progress. If Norfolk is the center of the storm, the entire weekend will be cancelled or if the instructors are unable to attend the entire weekend will be cancelled. All of those in formation must give to the Director three ways of being reached by the Director (e.g., home phone, cell phone, email, etc).

Please note that if storms cancel a weekend during the regular calendar year a summer month will be available to make up the missed dates.

Monthly Preparation

Each aspirant or candidate is responsible for the required reading given to them by their instructor through the Deacon Office. Preparation includes reading the material and taking notes so that the aspirant or candidate is ready to receive the presentations' content as familiar to him. Notes should be kept on the material on the discursive (what is the material about) and affective (what was Jesus doing within me when I read it) levels.

Academic Assessments

Assessments

Monthly assessments on the Catechism are required. They are to be done at home, then mailed or emailed to the instructor before the deadline.

Wife of Aspirant/Candidate

The wife's role during the formation process is to assist and support her spouse in discerning his call to Ordination.

Wives of Aspirants/Candidates are encouraged to seek a Spiritual Director.

They are required to attend formation weekends during the aspirancy year.

After the aspirancy year wives are welcome to attend formation weekends but are not required to do so.

Dress Code

Aspirants, Candidates, and wives are required to adhere to the following guidelines for appropriate dress while in the formation program and for the following events:

Weekend Formation: Casual (no shorts, sweatpants)
Candidacy Mass: Business Dress (aspirants will vest with alb and cincture)
Pastoral Ministry: Check with the field coordinators
Lector and Acolyte Mass: Business Dress (candidates will vest with alb and cincture)
Ordination Rehearsal: Business Casual
Ordination Dinner and Ordination: Business Dress

Business Casual Dress Defined

Men: Jeans, pants, shirt with collar (polo acceptable) or respectable t-shirt

Women: jeans, slacks and blouse, t-shirt, sweater.

Business Dress Defined

Men: coat and tie or suit and tie.

Women: dress, suit, pant suit, skirt with matching top.

Communication

The normal means of communication between the Deacon Office and deacons and formation classes is through an assigned Archdiocesan email address. There is also important information regularly through the Vicar for Clergy's email newsletter. Aspirants and candidates should check their archomaha.org email daily for updates and latest news.

H. Ordination Activities

Ordination Rehearsal

Friday night before ordination at the Cathedral. Ordinandi and spouses are required to attend.

Ordination Dinner

Friday night before ordination at the Cathedral Culture Center. Ordinandi and their spouses are invited.

Ordination Liturgy

All formation classes attend the Ordination Mass which is held at St. Cecilia Cathedral.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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