



Archdiocese of Omaha Permanent Diaconate Formation

Who is a deacon?

A deacon is a man who God calls through the Church and after discernment, formation, and preparation is ordained by his bishop to serve the needs of God's people. If a married man is called to the diaconate, his wife must consent and support his decision to seek formation and ordination. As Catholics, we believe that each ordained deacon is conformed through the sacramental grace of Holy Orders into the image of Jesus the Servant.

Deacons are called to live a threefold Ministry of Service. This service can be summarized in the following way:

1. **Service to the Word of God:** The deacon is called to be a man of deep prayer, becoming familiar with and a living witness to the Word of God in his ministry, among his family, and in the workplace. He is to love, preach and teach the Sacred Scriptures from the pulpit and daily. A deacon is also called to teach and catechize his fellow Catholics.
2. **Service to the Eucharist:** Every deacon is called to serve the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood by his participation in the Liturgy, his love and reverence of the Blessed Sacrament, and his willingness to bring the Eucharist to those who are sick and unable to join the community of faith in Sunday worship. By his ordination, a deacon may preside at several liturgical services, including the baptism of infants, witness marriages, conduct vigils, lead the Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and assist at the Eucharist. A Eucharistic spirituality is essential in the ministries described above.
3. **Service on behalf of Justice, Charity, and Peace:** Deacons serve as Christ's heralds of hope and love to the poor, disabled, needy, lonely, forgotten, and

society's outcasts. Through their living witness and service, they promote works of mercy, justice, reconciliation, and peace. In this most important aspect of diaconal service, each deacon must strive to challenge fellow believers to address the social needs of the materially and spiritually poor and seek to meet those needs.

Am I called to be a deacon?

There is no simple answer to the question, "Am I called to be a deacon?" However, we believe that the person of faith can discern God's will through personal prayer, competent spiritual direction, and recognition that the Church much discern if such a vocation is truly present.

Certain personal, social, and spiritual qualities are required for ordained ministry. These are generally of two kinds: those that pattern the candidate in the likeness of Christ and those required to meet the special needs of the local Church at a particular time and place.

Anyone contemplating a vocation to the diaconate should be actively involved in ministry in his local community and parish. A candidate's desire to be a deacon is never sufficient. He must also wait on the prayerful, enlightened decision of the Church.

If a man thinks he may have that call, where does he begin?

He begins by making the question a matter of prayer, perhaps with a retreat, a holy hour, a fast, or some meaningful spiritual expression. He should talk to his wife, children, and trusted friends. He should participate in the life of the parish by serving as lector, EMHC, sacristan, or other parish ministries. He should make an appointment to discuss it with his pastor. If his application is successful, he will enter the *aspirancy year* devoted to the discernment of his call. If his formators and the archbishop agree he is called after the first year, he will be admitted as a candidate to the four years of formation. God willing, the ordination would take place in the spring of 2029.

What are you looking for in deacon candidates?

Men seeking application into the Diaconate Formation Program come with the understanding that the diaconate is a call to a dedicated life of service, to a specific vocation. The deacon stands amid the community as one who makes present in his person and deeds the servant character of Christ and the Church. Through the sacramental ordination, the deacon becomes a sign that the Church is an authentic servant. The deacon is the animator and promoter of the common service of the Church.

Applicants should:

- Be at least 31 years old or not older than 55 at the beginning of aspirancy.
- Be a practicing Roman Catholic and active in a parish for five consecutive years or more.

- Have demonstrated leadership abilities within the parish and/or community organizations.
- Sound moral character, in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.
- Be in good physical and mental health.
- Have sufficient financial and employment stability.
- For married applicants: have been in a marriage considered by the Church to be valid for at least five years and have the consent of his wife, acceptance of his children, and a well-adjusted family life.
- Without neglecting the needs of the family, be able and willing to make the necessary commitment of talent and time for both formation and ministry.
- Possess the desire and capacity for growth and continued education to develop skills for ministry.
- Deep spirituality and prayer life that reflects a sound, mature faith attuned to the needs and life of the Church in balance with personal and family needs.
- Frequent participation in the Church's sacramental life.
- Be faithful to the traditions/teachings of the Church.
- Possess English reading, writing and speaking skills to participate fully in the academic program.
- Have no canonical irregularities or other impediments, i.e., committed heresy; committed an act of voluntary homicide or procured a completed abortion or positively cooperated in either; ever mutilated yourself or another gravely and maliciously or attempted suicide; ever attempted to exercise an act of orders reserved to bishops or priests, while either lacking that order or prohibited from its exercise by some declared or imposed canonical penalty; ever been ordained to the priesthood or the diaconate. (Code of Canon Law c.751).

Can deacons be married?

Married men can become deacons. Single men who are ordained deacons take a promise of celibacy and may not marry once they are ordained. If married, his wife must consent to his formation aspirations. His children should also be of such an age and adjustment as not to be unduly affected by their father's pursuit of a life that involves special apostolic commitments.

What role does a spouse play in diaconal discernment, formation, and ministry?

If a married man feels called to the diaconate, he must recognize that his wife is intimately involved in the discernment process of his vocation. This is true because of the covenant of marriage, wherein two spouses became one flesh in Jesus Christ. This marital covenant is the first and primary commitment that must be honored and nurtured by every married deacon. As a result, a wife must participate in her husband's aspirancy formation to help him discern his vocation and its potential effect on their relationship, marriage, and family.

- A wife's approval is essential for a man to enter Aspirancy and Candidacy formation and for his ordination to the diaconate. This approval is expressed as a written letter addressed to the archbishop.
- Once her husband is accepted into Candidacy, each wife is invited but not required to participate in the academic formation along with her husband.

How does the rule of celibacy affect the diaconate?

Since both married and single men are called to the diaconate, it should be noted that the rule of celibacy applies to deacons differently.

- In the case of the death of their spouses, deacons are bound to a life of celibacy until death. For grave and extraordinary reasons, a deacon may petition to seek re-marriage after the death of his wife. However, only the Holy See can grant this exemption.
- All unmarried men who seek entry into diaconal formation must remain celibate for their entire lives. No exemption is granted for this rule.

What areas of life are involved in diaconal formation?

Diaconal Formation involves growth in all aspects of our human life. More specifically, formation seeks growth in four specific areas:

1. **Human formation:** Each man who seeks to answer God's call to the diaconate must strive for psychological, emotional, and relational maturity. A true self-awareness that recognizes one's strengths and weaknesses is key to this growth. It demands a true sense of humility and a willingness to be honest and open to change.
2. **Spiritual formation:** Each man must seek growth in his spiritual relationship with Jesus, manifested in his personal and communal prayer, relationship with his friends and parishioners, participation in spiritual exercises such as retreats, days and evenings of prayer, daily reflection, frequent use of the sacrament of reconciliation and participation in Sunday and daily Eucharist. Each aspirant will be assigned a spiritual director at the start of Aspirancy formation to assist him in his spiritual growth.

3. **Intellectual formation:** Growth in the knowledge and love of the Catholic faith, the Sacred Scriptures, the Church's Tradition, the teachings of the Magisterium, our Catholic heritage, and culture are essential in diaconal formation.
4. **Pastoral formation:** Since diaconal ministry is one of service, ongoing, vibrant participation in pastoral ministry is a key element in diaconal formation.

How does one become ordained as a deacon?

Each deacon must be called by God to serve His Church. This divine call (i.e., vocation) is identified and nurtured through prayer, discernment, study, open communication with one's spouse, children, pastor, friends, and fellow parishioners. A divine call is an abiding awareness that God is asking for a lifetime commitment to serving His people as an ordained deacon of the Church.

1. If a man senses such a divine calling, it is necessary that he enter formation, over several years, to discern whether this calling is authentic. Formation is a journey of self-discovery, the deepening of his faith, and ongoing learning that will help each man decide whether the calling he senses is to the diaconate and if he wishes to follow it.
2. Formation is more than the academic pursuit of knowledge in a particular field. Diaconal formation is a lifelong process by which a person is molded into the image of Jesus the Servant. It involves not only academic studies but also one's prayer life, values, daily witness, self-understanding, and ministry.
3. Diaconal Formation has two distinctive phases:
 - a. **Aspirancy Formation** is approximately one year during which a man discerns the nature of God's calling for him and decide to follow that call.
 - b. **Candidacy Formation** is an intense period of ministerial, liturgical, and theological training in preparation for ordination to the diaconate. It lasts approximately three years.

Where does deacon formation take place?

The formation year begins in September and ends in May.

Aspirants and candidates meet on the third weekend of the month.

Formation takes place at Immaculata Monastery in Norfolk, NE. Lodging and meals are free.

The weekend begins Friday at 7:00 p.m. and ends Sunday at 9:00 a.m.

A typical weekend consists of morning Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, seven hours of classroom time, silent time, and social hour.

Who are some men who have answered the call to be deacons in the Diocese of Sioux Falls?

Here are profiles of some of our permanent deacons:

- A 55-year-old president of a religious order elementary school with a background in finance and accounting. He and his wife have five children. They are involved in marriage preparation and serve on his pastor's leadership team.
- A 40-year-old IT specialist with a wife and four children under 12. He is active in his parish's St. Vincent de Paul Conference.
- A 38-year-old bilingual man who tows abandoned cars. His diaconal ministry involves general parish ministry, including baptisms, presiding at wake services, and preaching. He is married.
- A 58-year-old middle manager for a large insurance company. He witnesses marriages, presides at communion services at his parish and assisted living facilities, and leads small faith-sharing groups. He is married and has adult children.

What is the timeline for the next formation class?

- **Step 1, May to June 2024** – Pastors recommend men to the Diaconate Formation Program.
- **Step 2, July to August 2024:** The Office of Permanent Deacons finalizes the Inquirers list and contacts Inquirers about the evaluation process.
- **Step 3, September 2024:** A questionnaire is sent to the Inquirer and his pastor; the Inquirer's wife attends orientation to complete a questionnaire, and learn about the theology of the diaconate, the selection process, and the wife's role.
- **Step 4, October-November 2024:** Questionnaires are reviewed, short interviews are scheduled, and decisions are made about those most suitable for interviews in January with the Deacon Formation Team.
- **Step 5, January-February 2025:** The most suitable are interviewed. Decisions are made about which Inquirers will receive formal applications.
- **Step 6, March 2025:** Decisions are made on whether to accept or deny applicants into the formation program.
- **May 2025** – Class of 2029 Orientation
- **September 2025** – Formation year begins.

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.