

Archdiocese of Hartford

Office of Diaconate Formation

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ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD

DIACONATE FORMATION

2020 Edition

Insert Picture

PROGRAM COURSE OF STUDY

Year I

Prayer/ Discernment
Workshops on various offices/ministries in Archdiocese

Year II

Fall: Introduction to the Diaconate
Winter: History of the Christian tradition
Spring: Faith and Reason
Field Ed: Social Justice related

Year III

Fall: Systematic Theology
Winter: Sacraments
Spring: Moral Theology
Field Ed: Healthcare related

Year IV

Fall: Christian Spirituality
Winter: Old Testament
Spring: New Testament
Field Ed: in Catholic schools

Year V

Fall: Canon Law
Winter: Liturgical theology/ Homiletics I
Spring: Homiletics II/ Practicums in Baptism, Marriage, and
Funerals
Field Ed: in a parish

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THE DIACONATE IN GENERAL

A. A BRIEF HISTORICAL REVIEW

The origins of the Order of the Diaconate go as far back as Jesus himself. In the Gospels, the Lord spoke of the mandate to serve and modeled that mandate in his own life. In the Gospel of John, on the very night before he died, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, a task usually reserved for the lowest of servants in a household.

After he had washed the disciples' feet, Jesus said, "*Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do*" (cf. John 13:12b-15). Elsewhere, in speaking to the ambition of his disciples, Jesus says rather eloquently, "*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many*" (cf. Mark 10:42b-45).

Based on the Lord's own teaching by word and example, almost from the beginning a rank of ministers especially designated for service arose. The members of this rank were referred to as 'deacons,' and are mentioned specifically by Saint Paul himself in several of his letters, even to the point of establishing the qualification of those aspiring to the diaconate (cf. 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

M. A copy of his birth certificate, needed for proof of the applicant's age, and

N. A letter of recommendation from his employer.

Once these are received and reviewed by the Director of Formation, they will be shared with the Diaconate Advisory Board for review, and an interview with the aspirant by the board will be scheduled. After discussion, a final vote on each application will be taken for purposes of a recommendation to the Archbishop. The vote may indicate any one of three possibilities: acceptance, deferral to a later time, or rejection. The final decision on acceptance belongs to the Archbishop alone. In cases of deferral or rejection, the applicant may request a meeting with the Director of Formation to discuss the decision and reasons for it.

- D. The names and addresses of his pastor and any deacons who serve in his parish (if the pastor is new to the parish and has not known the applicant for more than three years, he should submit the name and address of his former pastor);
- E. The names and addresses of three parishioners who have known him well for at least three years.
- F. An Archdiocesan waiver form;
- G. An autobiographical essay in which the applicant describes his upbringing, his family life and career, his involvement in the Church, and his sense of why he feels called to the Diaconate. This essay should be as thorough as possible but reasonable in length (no more than ten to twelve pages at most);
- H. If the applicant is married, a handwritten statement from his wife indicating her initial consent for his application and entrance into formation;
- I. A statement from the applicant's physician indicating that the applicant has recently had a physical examination and is in good health.
- J. Report of the psychologist on the results of the psychological assessment required of all applicants;
- K. The document indicating the results of the required criminal background check;
- L. Official transcripts from secondary schools, colleges, and graduate schools attended;

In the years following upon the close of the New Testament era, the diaconate was an essential component in the life of the Christian community (Acts 6:1-6). Deacons, closely associated with the bishop, were referred to as "the eyes and the ears" of the bishop in the local community. They were charged with the special care of the poor and those on the fringes of the community. They often managed the resources of the Church. They knew the needs of the people and insured that the members of the community were aware of them, both for the purpose of responding to those needs and holding those needs before the community in prayer.

As time passed, the diaconate became little more than a step on the way to priestly ordination. Very often the practice was that a man was ordained deacon almost immediately prior to his ordination as a priest. The exercise of the diaconate as a ministry almost disappeared from the Church.

There was a renewal on the vocation to the diaconate with the Second Vatican Council, which convened in Rome between 1962 and 1965. One of the major contributions of the Fathers of the Council was their call for the diaconate to be restored as a permanent order in the Church. Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Letter, *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem*, published on June 18, 1967, officially restored the Order of the Diaconate as a permanent ministry in the Church. The following year the Bishops of the United States requested permission from the Holy See to restore this ministry in this country. In 1969, the late Archbishop John F. Whealon instituted a formation program for deacons in the Archdiocese of Hartford. This effort bore fruit, and four years later 1973, the first class of deacons was ordained for the Archdiocese. Currently, deacons serve in a wide variety of ministries in the church, inclusive of parishes, prisons, hospitals, social agencies, and more.

B. WHAT IS A DEACON?

Deacons are ordained ministers of the Church, men who “receive the imposition of hands’ not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry” (cf. *Lumen Gentium* [*The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Vatican II]. n. 41). At ordination to the diaconate, only the bishop imposes hands. Such an exclusive act by the bishop signifies liturgically that deacons have a special attachment to the bishop in the exercise of their ministry. Deacons have a special share in the mission and the grace of Jesus Christ himself. As with recipients of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, they are marked with an *imprint*, a “character” that cannot be removed, a character that configures them to Christ, the servant of all (cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1570).

Deacons exercise a three-fold ministry in the Church: the ministry of the word, the ministry of liturgy, and the ministry of charity and justice. This three-fold ministry of the deacon is integral, that is, each of the ministries is not to be separated one from another. A man is ordained as deacon for all of these ministries, and “no one should be ordained who is not prepared to undertake each of them in some way” (cf. *The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*, n. 39).

As *ministers of the word*, deacons share in the evangelizing and teaching ministry of the Church. The deacon normally proclaims the Gospel in the liturgical assembly. He delivers the homily on occasion. He is involved in catechetical formation, especially of those who are preparing to receive sacraments. With appropriate preparation, he may conduct retreats and be involved in renewal programs on the parish level and elsewhere as his competency allows. The deacon can be involved in outreach to alienated and disaffected Catholics. He may work in counseling and spiritual direction, but only if properly trained and qualified.

THE PROCESS OF APPLICATION

Upon initial inquiry to the Office of Diaconate Formation, a prospective applicant will be sent a basic autobiographical information form which must be completed and returned, along with a brief statement of purpose indicating why he senses a call to the diaconate and how he has been involved in the life of his parish. Once these are received they are carefully reviewed by the Director of Formation.

Potential applicants, with their spouses if married, are expected to attend two inquiry sessions in the spring before the aspirancy year. These sessions serve several purposes. They afford the potential applicant the opportunity to familiarize himself with the Diaconate in general, the duties and responsibilities of deacons in the Church of today, and the demands of the Diaconate Formation Program. These sessions also afford the potential applicants the opportunity to ask necessary questions, should they arise.

At the end of the final inquiry session, providing that it has been established that there are no impediments or irregularities that would prevent a man from receiving Sacred Orders, he will receive an application packet which he will be asked to complete and submit to the office by a fixed date.

Among the items required are the following:

- A. A formal application for admission to aspirancy;
- B. Current copies of the applicant’s record of Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation and, if married, a record of Marriage.
- C. Two recent photographs, (passport size) of the applicant and if married, his wife.

6. If the applicant was not raised as a Catholic, a period of five years must have elapsed since his baptism or full reception into communion with the Catholic Church.
7. A higher education institution diploma or its equivalent is preferred. All applicants must demonstrate the ability of pursuing higher levels of education (college level work).
8. The applicant must demonstrate a willingness to commit to all of the aspects of the Diaconate Formation Program. The required studies must be completed successfully every semester during the period of formation.
9. Among the many qualities and skills needed for effective and fruitful ministry as deacons, the following are minimally required for admission into the formation program:
 - a. A strong sense of a calling to serve Christ's church through the diaconal ministry
 - b. A desire to grow in the spiritual life
 - c. A demonstrated ability to work with others and to serve the needs of others
 - d. A healthy sense of self-esteem
 - e. Responsibility; a capacity for initiative; potential for pastoral leadership
 - f. Intelligence and a capacity for study
 - g. Respect for authority and a commitment to the Church
 - h. Balanced understanding of the priorities involved in marriage, one's secular occupation, and the demands of the formation program and, eventually, the diaconal ministry

Perhaps most importantly, a deacon is one who in the whole of his life seeks to transmit the Word of God both by word and especially by example. The very presence of the deacon should be influential in places where public opinion is formed and ethical norms applied (cf. *The National Directory*, n. 31). It is the special role of the deacon to lead the community of believers to reflect on their communion and shared mission in Jesus Christ, especially impelling the community to live lives of Christian service. The deacon *sacramentalizes* service and should seek to proclaim the word by witnessing, to its power in the way he lives his own life (cf. *The National Directory*, n. 32). As Saint Francis of Assisi once said, "Preach the Gospel always, but use words only when necessary."

As *ministers of liturgy*, deacons, like all members of the Church, should understand the liturgy as the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and at the same time, the fount from which all the Church's power flows (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium [The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy]*, Vatican II, n. 10). The presence and ministry of the deacon in the liturgical assembly in itself witnesses to the connection between sharing at the Lord's Eucharistic table and serving the many hungers felt so keenly by all of God's People. The deacon participates in the penitential rite of the Mass. He proclaims the Gospel and may deliver the homily. He leads the general intercessions, voicing the needs of the people, needs with which the deacon should have particular and personal familiarity flowing from his ministry of charity in the community. The deacon assists the presider in accepting the offerings of the people, symbolic of the traditional role of the deacons in the receipt and distribution of the resources of the community. He assists in the preparation of the gifts to be offered in sacrifice. The deacon extends the invitation to offer the sign of peace. He is an ordinary minister of Holy Communion and has a special responsibility in the distribution of the chalice. The deacon also dismisses the people at the end of the liturgy. Outside of Mass, deacons solemnly baptize, witness and bless marriages, bring *viaticum* to those who are

dying, and preside over funerals and burials. They also preside at liturgies of the word and communion services in the absence of a priest at the discretion and direction of the bishop. Deacons may officiate at the celebrations of the *Liturgy of the Hours* and in exposition and benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Deacons may impart blessings as designated in the *Book of Blessings* at liturgies of the word and communion services in the absence of a priest at the discretion and direction of the bishop. Deacons may officiate at the celebrations of the *Liturgy of the Hours* and in exposition and benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Deacons may impart blessings as designated in the *Book of Blessings*.

As *ministers of charity and justice*, deacons, in the words of Pope Saint John Paul II, are called to be “servants of their brothers and sisters” in need. This dimension of diaconal ministry is inseparably joined to the ministries of the word and the liturgy. All three together show the critical importance of the sacred ministry, which all deacons receive by ordination. The *Directory on the Ministry and Life of the Permanent Deacons* underscores this interrelation when it says, “...the ministry of the word leads to ministry at the altar, which in turn prompts the transformation of life by liturgy, resulting in charity” (cf. n.39). The deacon stands within the community as a special sacramental sign of Christ the Servant, expressing the needs and desires of the Christian community, and serving as a driving force for service (*diakonia*), which is an *essential* part of the mission of the Church (cf. *The Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons*, n. 5). Since the deacon is the servant at the table of the poor, he has his distinctive liturgical roles at the Table of the Lord. Likewise, there is a correspondence between the deacon’s role as herald of the Gospel and his role as one who articulates the needs of the Church, especially in the general intercessions. The deacon brings the poor to the church and the Church to the poor. He is called to be a driving force in addressing the injustices among God’s people. In a world that hungers and thirsts for convincing signs of the compassion and liberating

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

1. The applicants must be no younger than thirty-five (35) or older than sixty (60) years of age to be accepted for consideration. Exceptions to this requirement are not normally granted.
2. The applicant must be recommended in writing *by his pastor* and must have been actively involved in ministry in his parish for a period of at least five years. Particularly desired is experience in ministries involving social outreach, charitable organizations and liturgical service. Two additional letters of recommendation (from another priest, work colleague, employer) are required.
3. If the applicant is married, he must have been married for at least five years and be in a stable marriage. Furthermore, such a marriage must be canonically recognized by the Church. Since the Sacrament of Marriage and the Sacrament of Holy Orders must never compete, the wife of an applicant must be supportive of her husband's desire to enter into the formation program. She should also be willing to partake in those programs and activities where the participation of spouses is required. In addition, the presence of young children in the family may be a factor in reaching a decision about acceptance into the program.
4. The applicant should be physically and emotionally healthy and stable. He should be free from addictive behaviors. The applicant will be expected to undergo a criminal background check through the Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance of the Archdiocese of Hartford and a thorough psychological evaluation by a licensed psychologist determined by the Archdiocese.
5. The applicant must be gainfully employed and self-sufficient. It is expected that diaconal responsibilities will normally be an addition to the deacon's secular occupation.

E. EVALUATIONS

Of critical importance throughout the process of diaconal formation is the regular evaluation of each candidate. Such evaluations are not meant to be negative and confrontational, but rather, are aimed at the affirmation of progress made and strengths noted. Evaluations also include areas where the candidate needs to make additional progress. Faculty evaluations at the end of each course are reviewed. The Director of Formation meets periodically with each candidate to assess his progress. All evaluative instruments are kept in each candidate's formation file.

love of God, the deacon sacramentalizes the mission of the Church in his words and deeds. He responds to the command of the Lord to serve and not be served and, moreover, in his way of life, demonstrates in concrete ways examples of how to carry it out.

THE FORMATION OF DEACONS

In the Archdiocese of Hartford, the formation program leading to ordination to the Diaconate is a five-year program consisting of an initial year of intense discernment and study outside of a formal academic setting, followed by four years of formation which encompasses the human, spiritual, academic and pastoral dimensions.

A. HUMAN FORMATION

A deacon is a man taken from among men and women, and as such, brings with him to formation a history of interrelationships with others. One goal of the formation program aims to recognize, affirm, foster and deepen human qualities in the candidate, not only for purposes of self-development, but also for future ministerial service in the Church. Among the qualities desirable in candidates for the diaconate, three areas occupy a special place of concern: an ability to relate well to others, affective maturity (inclusive of psycho-sexual maturity and health), and training in freedom (inclusive of a well-formed moral conscience). Diaconal formation on the human level seeks to enhance the personality of the potential deacon so that he becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their encounter with Jesus Christ (cf. *The National Directory*, n. 109).

B. SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Spiritual formation sits at the heart of preparation for official ministry in the Church. Spiritual formation seeks to

develop the new life received in Baptism (cf. *The National Directory*, n. 110). Spiritual direction is essentially the work of the Holy Spirit and, as such, those involved in formation are called to be attentive to the workings of the Spirit. Since the spiritual life is of its essence dynamic and never static, spiritual formation has as a principal goal the establishment and nourishment of an ongoing spiritual discipline. No one can be admitted to diaconal formation who cannot demonstrate that he already is living in some measure a life of mature Christian spirituality (cf. *The National Directory*, n. 111).

The spirituality of a deacon by its very essence must conform to and be grounded in the attitude of Christ the Servant. Furthermore, it is nourished and sustained by the Eucharist. Desirable spiritual qualities for those in formation for the diaconate include simplicity of heart, a willingness to give totally and disinterestedly of the self, humility, love of others, and, mindful of the deacon's special relationship with the poor and needy, a choice of lifestyle of sharing and simplicity.

In brief, the goals of spiritual formation for those in preparation for diaconal ordination include: the discernment of one's vocation; a deepening of one's prayer life personal and communitarian; a deepened commitment to the Lord and the Church; the development of the virtue of penance, including mortification, sacrifice, and generosity toward others; openness to conversion of heart; a more mature understanding of one's relationship with authority in the Church, especially centered on authentic obedience, and a deeper knowledge and appreciation for the richness of the Catholic Spiritual tradition.

In the formation program, every candidate will be assigned a priest as a spiritual director, with whom he is expected to meet a *minimum* of six times annually. Each candidate is expected to commit himself to daily prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist, and regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The candidates gather in common before class each week to pray the *Liturgy of the Hours*. An annual retreat, given over a weekend usually held during early fall, is part of the annual formation calendar. The academic study of prayer, spirituality, and the Catholic spiritual tradition is included in the program.

C. INTELLECTUAL FORMATION

The intellectual or academic dimension of diaconal formation serves to nourish in a substantial way the pastoral, human, and spiritual dimensions of a candidate's life. Deacons, as ordained ministers, must be knowledgeable of the doctrine of the Church to be able to be faithful and reliable witnesses and spokesmen for the Church and her teaching. The intellectual formation of deacons in the Archdiocese of Hartford is undertaken in a serious and thorough manner. Over the course of four years of formal study, diaconal candidates are introduced to a deepened understanding of Sacred Scripture, dogmatic theology, spiritual theology, moral theology (including sexual morality and the social teaching of the Church), and pastoral practice. Most of the actual intellectual formation takes place within the context of formal classes that meet once weekly from September to June. Workshops offered periodically serve to supplement classroom work. (Additional information on the academic portion of the formation program is available through the Archdiocesan Office for the Diaconate Formation.)

D. PASTORAL FORMATION

The entirety of the formation program aims at preparing candidates for their pastoral ministry, but in the course of the four academic years, there are two solid courses in homiletics, which aim to prepare the candidates to be effective and sound preachers. Toward the end of the program workshops are scheduled to introduce candidates to the fundamentals of canon law as well as the role of the deacon in the liturgy. In addition, over the course of the formation program, candidates participate in workshops on, among other topics, hospital ministry, prison ministry, the RCIA process, campus ministry, ecumenism and interreligious issues, and the process of theological reflection. During the third and fourth years, candidates are assigned to pastoral placements in various fields to introduce them to practical aspects of the pastoral ministry and to assess their skills and readiness to undertake the ministry.