The Permanent Deacon

In an effort to enhance the administration of the Church’s missionary mandate, the proclamation of God’s work through the ministry of word, sacrament, and charitable service, the renewal of the permanent diaconate was an outcome of the Second Vatican Council. The deacon, ordained in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is a helper to the Bishop in this threefold ministry.

As a minister of the word, the deacon is called to proclaim the Scriptures and to instruct and exhort the people. This finds expression in the presentation of the Book of the Gospels, foreseen in the ordination rite itself. A deacon reads the Gospel during the sacred Liturgy and preach the good news in homilies and by the example of his life.

As minister of the sacraments, his life will find expression in prayer, in the solemn administration of baptism, in the custody and distribution of the Eucharist, in assisting at and blessing marriages, in presiding at the rites of funeral and burial, and in the administration of sacramentals. Diaconal ministry has its point of departure and arrival in the Eucharist, and cannot be reduced to simple social service.

Finally, his ministry is exercised in dedication to works of charity and assistance to the most needy. It involves the Works of Mercy, both Corporal and Spiritual. This is the ministry most characteristic of the deacon.
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I. Introduction

This booklet offers brief information and guidance to those men and their spouses who have answered an initial call of the Holy Spirit and wish to investigate, to seek, and God willing, to pursue a vocation to the permanent diaconate.

The Inquiry Period is designed as an introduction to diaconate formation and by way of thoughtful reflection to help inquirers discern the possibility of requesting entrance to the Aspirant Path that leads to diaconal formation.

Hopefully, it will answer many questions and be an aid in the preliminary discernment of a call to serve the Church of Christ as a permanent deacon.

II. The Deacon’s Vocation and Its Dimensions

There are four dimensions of the life of a deacon that require a certain level of maturity before ordination, and a constant ongoing growth which will make his ministry more effective. Deacon formation will always seek to foster and measure growth in the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral or apostolic dimensions of a man.

The aim and objectives of the Human Dimension focuses on developing self-knowledge and personal maturity. The content will help a candidate develop confidence for diaconal ministry that is at once deeply personal and private and, on the other hand public and demanding.

The Spiritual Dimension cultivates an environment where the candidate is encouraged to grow in his personal relationship with Christ and to carry on Christ’s mission in the world through a realistic commitment of service to the Church and her people.
The **Intellectual Dimension** is designed to communicate a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith and Church Tradition and Magisterial teachings. The strong academic courses prepare deacons to meet the challenges of the well educated and, as well, the constantly changing needs of today’s parishes.

The **Pastoral Dimension** of formation introduces the candidate to the practical ministerial life of the Church. Pastoral formation addresses the ministry of charity and justice aspect of the deacon’s role in the Church and explores practical ways to live it out in parish life.

### III. Inquiry: Discerning the Call

You have experienced the first stirrings of a call to diaconal ministry and are now exploring it. You are seeking information about the permanent diaconate and the formation process. This Inquiry period and the following year of Aspirancy are opportunities to pursue many of those answers. More importantly it will provide for you (and your wife, if you are married) a period of reflection, discernment, and preparation. Discerning a call from the Lord requires patience and personal reflection. As deeply involved as you become in the discernment process, you must remember that an inquiry and eventual application for entrance into diaconal formation is not just a personal and family journey. The Church must accompany it. Your parish community and the diocese will help you in this process. The two primary areas for your personal discernment are capability and readiness.

**Capability: Can I Do This?**

Deacon Formation is rigorous and demanding in regard to both time and talents. During this Inquiry period you are both encouraged to assess honestly your abilities in several key areas:

**Health:** As a candidate for the permanent diaconate, I must be in a state of good health, both mentally and physically. I must be able to carry out my duties without having to worry about serious personal problems, either physical or psychological. Will my physical health impair my ability to minister? Are there psychological or emotional issues that will impede my ability to enter into healthy ministerial relationships? Will I have the strength and energy to serve others?
Human: Do I have good relational skills? Am I willing to work at and to grow in my life of virtue? What do people who know me think of me? (A spouse can be a particular help here.)

Spiritual: Am I motivated by love? Do I know Jesus and spend time with Him in prayer regularly? What do the sacraments mean to me? How much do I cling to the things of the world? Am I willing to learn to let go?

Intellectual: Do I have the intellectual capability and desire to study Scripture and theology? How do I feel about “going back to school”? What is my educational background?

Pastoral: How do I currently serve? Do I want to do more and be more effective? Can I?

Readiness
You may discern that you have the capabilities to enter deacon formation. That is not enough. Your state in life is very important in the discerning process. This state involves marriage, family, and career or work status. During this Inquiry period you will need to look very closely at these areas and consider the following questions:

Marriage: What does my wife think? Is she willing and able to enter into formation? What effect do the two of us think it will have on our marriage?

Family: What about our children? What effect will formation have on our family life?

Career: Will my work allow the flexibility needed for formation? Will diaconal formation negatively or positively impact my career? Will I have the time and energy to devote to formation?
During the Inquiry period as you discern your capability and readiness, you will have the opportunity to be guided by the Church in the person of the Bishop, the Director of the Permanent Diaconate, your pastor, your spiritual director and perhaps others.

Fundamentally, there are three questions you must personally address. They are:

- Is God calling me?
- Can I do this?
- Is this the right time?

IV. The Year of Inquiry

Description of the Diocese of Duluth Program

The Diocese of Duluth Inquiry Program consists of a number of monthly gatherings, September through April, involving prayer, a brief teaching, and time for discussion. This is a time for you to actively seek to understand the ministry of the deacon. You will be introduced to many of the pastoral ministries of the Diocese of Duluth and the permanent deacon’s role in them.

Lessons used during Inquiry will be taken from the *U.S. Catechism for Adults*. Other topics focusing on the ministry of deacon include:

- *Introduction to the Diaconate*
- *The Identity of the Deacon: Word, Sacrament, and Service*
- *Called and Gifted.....Simplicity of Life*
- *Diaconal Spirituality and Spiritual Direction*
- *Prayer*
- *The Sacraments*
- *Marriage and Orders*

These gatherings will introduce you to the study of theology, a deeper knowledge of the spirituality and ministry of the deacon, and to begin a more attentive discernment of your call. It will be a time of community building among the inquirers, allowing them to experience the communal life that is integral to diaconal ministry.
Expectations and responsibilities of the Inquirer:

- During this Inquiry period, you and your spouse will be expected to attend all scheduled gatherings and participate actively in the prayer and discussion.

- You, with your spouse, will be expected to discern personally questions of call, capability, and readiness.

- By mid-year of Inquiry, inquirers will be required to begin spiritual direction with a priest approved by the Director, and begin to participate in spiritual direction every four to six weeks.

Guidance and Assessment

Toward the middle of the year of Inquiry, those desiring to continue in the discernment process will begin to provide basic documentation. An Application for the Permanent Diaconate will be provided to the inquirer for completion and an Application for Admittance for Deacon Formation will be provided to the wife for completion. The inquirer and his wife (if married) will be required to complete diocesan Safe Environment training and authorize the diocese to complete a criminal background check. Certificates for Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage (if married) will be required.

Also toward the end of Inquiry, an interview with two deacon couples will be scheduled to assess the level of the candidate’s awareness and understanding regarding the diaconal vocation.

Finally, a perceiver interview will be scheduled with the inquirer, if continuing on to Aspirancy.

V. Acceptance and Entrance into the Path of Aspirancy

The conclusion of the period of Inquiry can be challenging. During the year some inquirers will “discern out” by discerning, “this is not for me” or “not for me at this time.” Others personally hope to be invited to continue, but discernment from the Diocese does not support their hope and they are not invited to continue on the Path of Aspirancy for continuing discernment and pre-formation.
BASIC REQUIREMENTS
for men considering the possibility of entering the formation program for the Permanent Diaconate

PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR SEEKING ADMISSION:
*A confirmed Roman Catholic, married or single and at least thirty-five years of age at the time of ordination
*Able to relate with others effectively
*A personal commitment to live a healthy and holy life style
*Has a stable job or career and is financially self-supporting and free of unreasonable debt
*If a history of addiction, must have three years of recovery with ongoing participation in a “recovery” program
*In good physical health

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
For the Married:
*A partner in a stable marriage
*Married for at least five years
*Has the expressed consent and support of his wife
*If children are at home, special consideration must be given to their ages and needs in discerning the timeliness of pursuing formation
*Clearly understand that if a man becomes a deacon and his wife should die, he is obliged to remain celibate for the rest of his life
*If prospective is a convert, he shall have practiced Catholicism for at least five years
For the Single:
*Clearly understand celibacy would be a lifelong commitment in becoming a deacon

EDUCATION:
*The quality of his intellectual training and innate ability should be such to make possible in-depth theological study with the ability to take that understanding and articulate it to the Catholic community
*At least two years of college or its equivalent
*Sufficiently free to add the time and energy demands of diaconal training and ministry to his life without jeopardizing previous commitments to family and job
*Should have training and experience in lay leadership

PARISH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:
*A resident in the parish a significant period of time.
*Appropriately involved and accepted in the life of the parish.
Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church, is the exemplary model of obedience, faith, hope, and burning love in her cooperation with the Savior’s work. By her attentive listening, simplicity of life, and faithful presence to the Lord, she remains a most appropriate companion for the life pilgrimage of the deacon.