

CRITERIA FOR APPLICANTS FOR THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

“Deacons share in Christ’s mission and grace in a special way. The sacrament of Holy Orders marks them with an *imprint* which cannot be removed and which configures them to Christ, who made Himself the ‘deacon’ or servant of all” (#1570, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*). In plain language, a (permanent) deacon is a man who is called to a **ministry of service**. Like priests and bishops, he receives the Sacrament of Holy Orders. At the same time he is an ordained person living in the lifestyle of the laity. The deacon’s service is threefold: service of the Word, service of the altar, and service of charity and justice. Like bishops and priests, the deacon is a member of the clergy, but he has a distinctive role. He helps the Bishop and priests in service to the People of God, proclaiming by his very life the Church’s call to serve the needs of others.

Most (permanent) deacons are married. Thus, the typical deacon attempts to balance three priorities in his life: the responsibility of husband and father, his job or profession by which he earns a living or supplements retirement income, and his ministry as an ordained deacon. A number of deacons are single men and widowers. The (permanent) diaconate is a ministry unto itself, not a stepping-stone to the priesthood. It is a lifelong commitment to a ministry of service.

What are some of the criteria a man must meet in order to be a **qualified applicant**?

AGE: an applicant must be between the ages of 32 and 58.

HEALTH: an applicant should be physically and emotionally healthy and free of any substance dependency or other addictions. He must be properly motivated and give evidence of an overall personal balance and moral character.

EDUCATION: an applicant must have at least a high school diploma, and preferably some college, and be capable of undertaking graduate studies in the English language. He must have completed the required C.E.M.I. courses.

MARITAL STATUS: an applicant may be married or single. *If married*, he must be in a stable, valid marriage in the Church for at least 3 years and have the consent of his wife and support of his family. The wife must demonstrate her support and affirmation of her husband’s decision and be willing to participate in some or all programs and activities, especially in those where the participation of the wives is required. *If single*, he must be in a mature celibate state of life. If widowed, at least two years must elapse before applying. *If previously married* he is to have received an ecclesiastical annulment, and his particular situation must be reviewed with the Directors of Deacon Formation before applying in order to determine whether he qualifies. A man with multiple marriages will not be accepted into the Program.

ECCLESIASTICAL STATUS: an applicant must be a fully initiated Catholic (baptized, confirmed, first Eucharist) and be in full communion with the Catholic Church. If a convert, at least 3 years must elapse after baptism or reception into the Church. He must also be free of canonical impediments (see below).

PARISH INVOLVEMENT: an applicant must be recommended by the pastor of his parish (confirming that the applicant is a practicing Catholic of good repute, in good standing, and is active in the parish), and he must show evidence of previous and present involvement in Church service. He must be a frequent participant in adult faith enrichment opportunities (e.g. CEMI courses, retreats, days of reflection, spiritual direction, study of Scripture and church teachings).

ECONOMIC STABILITY: an applicant must be economically stable and self-sufficient. It is expected that diaconal responsibilities will be in addition to one’s secular occupation.

AVAILABILITY: an applicant must be willing and able to make a time commitment (4-6 yrs.) to all aspects of the formation and education program.

One of the criteria is that the applicant be **free of canonical impediments**. An impediment is a circumstance (an obstacle) that bars a person from doing something.

A canonical impediment is an obstacle established by the laws of the Catholic Church (Canon Law) that disqualifies a Catholic from some action until the obstacle can be remedied. Some impediments cannot be remedied. Some impediments can be dispensed by the Bishop and others can only be dispensed by the Holy See. **A man who is discerning whether to apply for our new diaconate formation program must be aware of these impediments so that he can discuss his situation with the Directors of Diaconate Formation if he thinks a particular impediment might apply to him.** What are the impediments that prevent a man from being ordained?

The first perpetual impediment is **amentia or some other existing psychic illness**. Such an existing psychic disorder renders the person unqualified to fulfill ministry properly; thus, he cannot be ordained.

A second perpetual impediment is the public offense of **apostasy, heresy, or schism** which notoriously distances a person from Catholicism through the individual's public declaration or manifestation (e.g. a formal admission into a non-Catholic or non-Christian denomination after Catholic baptism or reception into the Catholic Church). Such a person also incurs a canonical penalty. *Apostasy* is the total repudiation of the Christian faith after reception of baptism. *Heresy* is an obstinate denial or doubt, after baptism, of some truth which is to be believed as being of divine and Catholic faith. *Schism* is a genuine refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.

A third perpetual impediment is incurred by a man who **attempted marriage**, even a civil one, while already prevented from entering marriage because of: 1) a prior valid marriage bond [unless this prior bond is declared invalid by a Tribunal]; 2) a sacred Order; or 3) a public, perpetual vow of chastity. He also incurs this impediment if he attempts marriage with a woman who was already in a valid marriage [unless her prior bond was declared invalid by a Tribunal] or who was bound by a public, perpetual vow of chastity.

A fourth perpetual impediment is intentional **homicide** or the voluntary, active, and effective cooperation in or procurement of an **abortion**. Canonical penalties also apply to these acts. The man must be complicit (voluntarily and deliberately) in the planning and execution of the death, such that, without his participation, the death would not have taken place.

Grave and **malicious mutilation** of oneself or another person, as well as **attempted suicide**, is a fifth perpetual impediment. To be an impediment, the attempted suicide must be a genuine, serious effort to end one's life.

A sixth perpetual impediment is incurred by a lay person who has **simulated** (attempted to perform) **an act of Sacred Orders** that is restricted to ordained priests and bishops (e.g. simulating a sacrament such as Eucharist or penance).

A seventh impediment (not perpetual) to ordination is that of a **neophyte**, a man who is recently baptized or received into the Catholic Church. This impediment expires with the passage of time. He is generally considered to be a neophyte for a period of 3 years after baptism or reception into the Catholic Church as he becomes sufficiently grounded in his new identity as a Catholic Christian.

Because of the ecclesial importance of ordained ministers, the Christian faithful bear a moral responsibility to encourage the ordination of only suitable and qualified candidates who are not bound by impediments. It is a very serious moral obligation on the part of the Christian faithful to make known to the Bishop or one's pastor knowledge of existing impediments of a candidate for Orders before ordination. So, as clergy and parishioners consider inviting an active member of the faith community to discern whether he might be called to the permanent diaconate, all are to keep in mind the criteria for qualification and the canonical impediments.

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