

STAGES IN PERMANENT DIACONATE FORMATION & EDUCATION

1. Inquiry:

A man who meets the criteria and is considering applying for the Diaconate Formation Program should attend one or more of the initial informational sessions provided by the Director of Formation. He is also to begin taking the pre-formation workshops and courses that must be completed before the application stage. He is to attend the formal Information Session that will be scheduled once the Bishop has decided to begin a new class for formation.

2. Application / Screening / Selection:

Applications & documentation are reviewed. Applicants & their wives are interviewed by members of the Diaconate Formation Committee, and recommendations are made to the Bishop regarding those applicants who qualify for admission as aspirants. The Bishop also interviews each applicant. The Bishop makes the final determination and communicates his decision in writing to each applicant.

3. Aspirancy: (2 years)

Aspirant formation and education provides for a thorough discernment of a diaconal vocation, initiation into diaconal spirituality and spiritual direction, supervised pastoral experiences, an assessment of the aspirant's gifts and potential to be promoted to candidacy, and ultimately ordination. The aspirant's wife also is encouraged to participate in the formation and education, since their marriage and family are involved in the discernment of a diaconal vocation. This provides the environment for her to be prepared to give her consent to her husband's continuation in the program and for formation personnel to ascertain her compatibility with her husband's diaconal vocation and eventual ministry. This discernment period is a time to form an aspirant community with its own cycle of meetings and prayer. Aspirants continue their intellectual and pastoral formation and education by taking introductory courses for the first semester, followed by academic courses by distance learning from the University of St. Thomas.

4. Pre-Candidacy Assessment:

Toward the end of the aspirant stage, psychological evaluations are scheduled for each aspirant. An evaluation from the pastor of the aspirant is obtained. The Diaconate Formation Committee interviews the aspirant and his wife to appraise his readiness for the next stage of formation and her level of consent and support. The Bishop may also choose to interview each aspirant and his wife. Banns are published in the *East Texas Catholic* and in parish bulletins announcing the names of the aspirants and asking the Christian Faithful to notify the Director of Formation if they are aware of any impediment or any situation that would render a particular aspirant unfit for the ordained ministry. The Committee then reviews all pertinent data on the aspirant, including certificates and grades received thus far and recommends to the Bishop those aspirants who qualify to proceed to the Candidacy stage. The aspirant submits to the Bishop a handwritten letter requesting admission to Candidacy. The Bishop makes the final determination and communicates his decision in writing to each aspirant.

5. Candidacy: (3 years)

A public Rite of Admission to Candidacy is celebrated. Enrollment in the Body of Candidates does not constitute any right to receive diaconal ordination. This is the first official

recognition of the positive signs of the vocation to the diaconate, which must be confirmed in the subsequent years of formation/education. During the Candidate path in formation, the candidate continues to grow in his understanding of the diaconal vocation, its responsibilities, and its obligations; in his spiritual life; in his competency in required diaconal knowledge and skills; in his practical experience in pastoral ministry; and in his witness of Christian maturity. Much time is spent on the academic program of formation to prepare the candidate to serve the Church as a deacon. During aspirancy and candidacy, the formal academic program lasts 8 semesters and ordinarily includes courses, such as:

Human/Religious Development	Theology	Canon Law
Church History	Ecclesiology	Anthropology/ Eschatology
Introduction to Philosophy	Sacramental Preparation	Gospels
Scripture studies: Old/New Testament	Doctrine of God	Prophets
Living the Christian Life	Moral Theology	Preaching
Proclamation & Homiletics	Catholic Social Teaching	Christology
Liturgy & Sacraments	Pauline Letters	

Institution into the Ministries of Lector and Acolyte:

Sometime during the last year of the formal academic program, the candidate is instituted into the Ministry of Lector. About six months later, he is instituted into the Ministry of Acolyte. The elapse of time allows the candidate to exercise the particular ministry he has received.

Pastoral Internship:

After completion of the 8 semesters of academic studies, there is a six-month Pastoral Internship. During this time, pastoral and spiritual formation continue, and practical workshops presented by local diocesan staff may be arranged to orient the candidates to practices and procedures in the diocese. These workshops cover areas, such as, finances, counseling and spiritual direction, catechesis, liturgical practices, marriage and annulments.

Pre-Ordination Scrutinies:

During the pastoral internship, banns are published in the *East Texas Catholic* and in parish bulletins announcing the names of the candidates and asking the Christian Faithful to notify the Director of Formation if they are aware of any impediment or any situation that would render a particular candidate unfit for ordination. The Diaconate Formation Committee meets to review all pertinent data on each candidate, including grades received, completion of canonical requirements, assessment/recommendation from the pastor, assessment of intern supervisor, and any other information the Director has to share. The Committee then determines its recommendation to the Bishop. In a collegial session, the Bishop and the Committee meet, and the Committee shares the data and its recommendations with the Bishop. The Bishop may decide to meet with each Candidate and his wife before making his final decision regarding ordination. His decision is communicated in writing to each Candidate. Prior to ordination, the candidates make a canonical retreat of at least five days.

6. Ordination:

Ordination takes place at St. Anthony Cathedral Basilica.

Because so many persons, inside and outside the diocese, collaborate together in order to schedule and provide a quality formation & education program, FLEXIBILITY is a requirement. Unforeseen circumstances may require more time for a particular stage than anticipated.