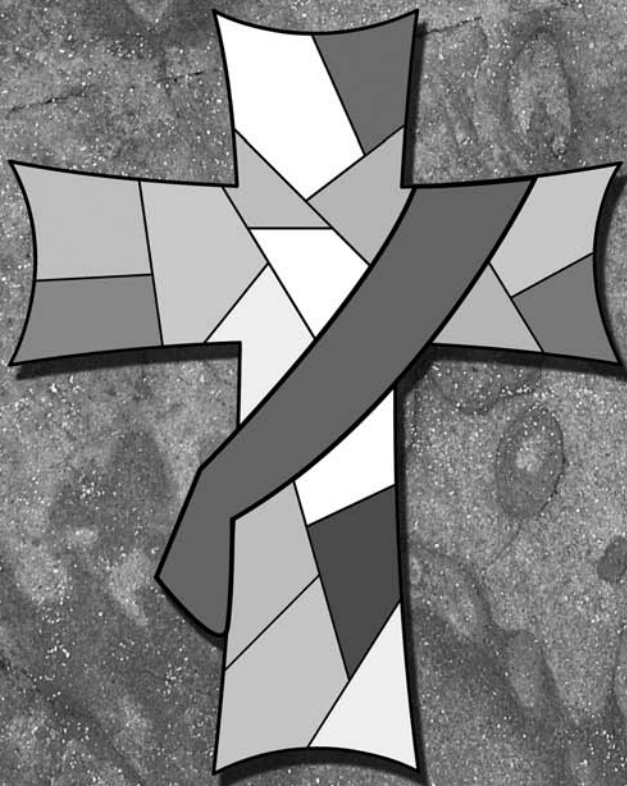


**APPLICATION AND
ADMISSION GUIDELINES
FOR THE
DEACON FORMATION
PROGRAM**



**Office for the Diaconate
DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH**

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Dear Friend:

I am pleased to present the enclosed norms for the application and admission process of the deacon formation program. Bishop Paul Bradley has called for the establishment of a formation program to identify, select and form men for ordination to the Order of Deacon. The Church in Pittsburgh continually evaluates its programs and structures as a part of our efforts to envision future ministry that will be effective in all of our parishes and institutions. The establishment of the deacon formation program relates to the diocesan efforts of providing the faithful qualified ministers to serve the pastoral needs of the Church.

Bishop Bradley reviewed in his pastoral statement the history of the diaconate and how it can benefit the Church. The Office for the Diaconate has been given the responsibility to make known these benefits as a way to catechize the faithful about the ministry of the permanent deacon. It is our hope that pastors and parishes, families and individuals, will pray for an outpouring of the Spirit and, consequently, for a generous response from men who will discern the possibility of serving the Church as a deacon.

The enclosed guidelines guarantee the integrity for the Order of Deacon first established by the Apostolic College as well as respond to the needs of the Church in the present day. The documentation that applicants will submit to the diocese is to be completed in an honest and truthful manner. Moreover, the discernment process presumes the inquirer's prayerful approach to the formation program, regular contact with the pastor and parish community, and frequent reception of the sacraments. His family will undoubtedly be a primary support system during the application period.

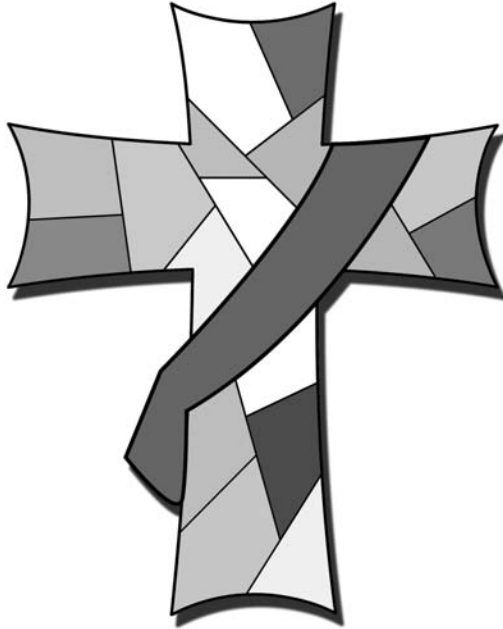
May Christ the Good Shepherd continue to bless our diocesan Church and the faithful of our parish communities. May all the People of God be inspired to serve the Church and live out its Gospel values each day and in every sector of our society.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,



*Reverend James A. Wehner, S.T.D.
Director*

June 13, 2007
Feast of Saint Anthony



Application and Admission Guidelines for the Deacon Formation Program

The Order of Deacon: Ministry to the Church

1. A vocation to the Order of Deacon involves a journey of discernment, prayer, learning, and growth. The call to serve the Church as a deacon is confirmed by the diocesan bishop who has identified pastoral needs and specific ministries that can benefit from diaconal ministry. The inquirer considers this “ministry of service” in accord with those needs, and discerns how to embrace a spirituality of service for the good of the Church. Moreover, the theological identity of a deacon is intrinsically linked to service and cannot be separated from it.
2. The Diocese of Pittsburgh has implemented a formation program in conformity with the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), the *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* (1998), the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (1998), and the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States* (2004). The formation program is predicated on the willingness and commitment of the inquirer to dutifully observe all the *norms*, requirements, and processes of the application period.

3. Those who are interested in ministry, who have cultivated a spirituality of service, and are loyal to the Tradition, teachings, liturgy, and Magisterium of the Church, begin a journey of discernment as *inquirers*. Inquirers seek knowledge about the diaconate and discuss their sense of call with their pastors, wives and family, and the parish community. If the inquirer comes to understand a call to pursue the diaconate, he must understand the commitment, dedication, and time involved with both the application and formation periods.

The Permanent Deacon as One Who Serves

4. How does one know they are called to the diaconate? Any vocation in the Church presumes a conversation between God, the individual, and the Church. The living out of a vocation is a continual path of discernment. A vocation to ordained ministry requires a special discernment involving the individual and the Church. “Anyone who thinks he recognizes the signs of God’s call to the ordained ministry must humbly submit his desire to the authority of the Church, who has the responsibility and right to call someone to receive orders” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1578). Those who experience a call to the permanent diaconate should examine themselves spiritually and personally to discern if they should pursue the application process.
5. The identity, life and ministry of any baptized Catholic is discovered first within the life of the Church which is the Body of Christ and the Sacrament of Salvation. Since the deacon is an ordained minister and has a specific participation in the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Church takes special interest in calling forth men who truly understand ministry to service, are loyal to sacred scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church.

6. The deacon is a visible sacramental sign of Christ the Servant. Therefore, it is his role to express the needs and desires of the Christian community and to be a driving force for service which is an essential activity in the mission of the Church (cf. *Basic Norms*, 5). The candidate for the permanent diaconate will necessarily undergo a formative and evaluative process to determine suitability for ordained ministry.
7. The inquirer will discern his ability to carry out ministry assigned by the diocesan bishop in a spirit of loving service to the People of God, in humble obedience to the bishop, and in a selfless manner.
8. A candidate for ordination to the diaconate must cultivate an ecclesial spirituality involving the promise of obedience to the diocesan bishop and the promise to pray the *Liturgy of the Hours* as prescribed by the diocesan bishop. The inquirer must include at the earliest stages of discernment a formation to obedience and prayer.
9. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in their national directory on the formation of men to the permanent diaconate identifies ***behavioral attributes*** of exemplary deacons which can assist an inquirer in his discernment:
 - Natural inclination to serve the Christian community and those in need;
 - Demonstrates psychological integrity;
 - Has a capacity for dialogue;
 - Ability to share one's faith yet listen respectfully to other points of view;
 - Capacity to listen carefully and without prejudice to race, gender or ethnicity;

- Good communication skills;
- Self-directed and collaborative accountability;
- Balanced and prudent judgment;
- Generosity in service;
- Ability to lead, motivate, facilitate, and animate others into appropriate action and service.

10. The USCCB emphasizes the following *spiritual attributes* of exemplary deacons:

- Sound faith;
- Good Christian reputation;
- Active involvement in the Church’s apostolate;
- Personal integrity, maturity, and holiness;
- Regular participation in the Church’s sacramental life;
- Evidence of recognized, ongoing commitment to the Church’s life and service;
- Participation in faith enrichment opportunities (e.g., retreats, days of recollection, adult education programming);
- Positive and stable marriage, if married, or a mature celibate state of life, if single;
- Active membership in a Christian community;
- Capacity for obedience and fraternal communion; and
- Deep spirituality and prayer life.

Discerning the Call

11. The call to the diaconate begins at a personal level and will eventually involve the inquirer to seek information and make eventual contact with the Diocese. The Office for the Diaconate is responsible for overseeing the recruitment, promotion, and facilitation of the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The diocesan bishop has the ultimate responsibility of accepting applicants into the

propaedeutic and candidate phases of the formation program. Therefore, it is clearly understood that discernment involves both the inquirer and the Church. “No one has a *right* to receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Indeed no one claims this office for himself” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1578).

12. While the Office for the Diaconate has responsibilities in coordinating the permanent diaconate, the promotion and recruitment of suitable candidates for the Order of Deacon is a collaborative effort between various diocesan offices, the bishop and pastors, and among the religious and laity of the diocesan Church. The diocesan curia is well aware of the pastoral needs of the local Church and will need to communicate those needs clearly in order that qualified candidates are identified for diaconal ministry.
13. Since the pastor has an integral role in the nomination and application phases, the inquirer will need to be in regular contact with the pastor, discussing with him the discernment of a possible vocation to the diaconate.
14. In addition, the inquirer is to discuss the ministry of the diaconate with his wife and children and, if he comes from a background that emphasizes the extended family, his extended family as well. For a married man, the support and consent of his wife are required, and he needs to ensure that her support and consent are present at even the earliest stages of discernment.
15. The inquiry process also involves the parish since it is here that most of the faithful experience the life of the Church. The inquirer will need to demonstrate close and strong bonds

with the parish. The application process involves the testimony of the pastor, the parish staff, and the parishioners.

16. A vocation to serve the Church is to be fostered, supported and nurtured by the Church. Hence, the inquirer should be open-minded, enthusiastic, and sharing in his discernment of the permanent diaconate. He should involve as many people as possible in his discernment since it is to the Church he might be called to serve and it is from the Church a vocation to Holy Orders is sustained.

Nomination Phase

17. Once the inquirer has discussed with his family, pastor, and colleagues the possibility of discerning a vocation to the permanent diaconate and believes the Lord is calling him to active discernment, he is to be nominated to the Office for the Diaconate as an applicant by the pastor of his parish.

18. The pastor presents to the bishop through the Office for the Diaconate on behalf of the parish community all aspirants to the diaconate. Various faith communities and agencies have a unique opportunity to identify appropriate nominees from among their constituencies encouraging them to be presented by the pastors.

19. The pastor is to complete the *Pastor's Nomination and Profile Form* and submit it to the Office for the Diaconate. It should clearly be noted that the pastor is not to determine whether the candidate is accepted, since this is an exercise by those charged with oversight of the formation program. He can determine the qualifications of the applicant as outlined in this manual in accordance with the norms of the

Church. The pastor will be consulted at various stages of the application and formation processes. His testimony is to be positively scrutinized by the formation boards and strongly considered in final deliberations.

20. A pastor should NOT nominate an applicant before first speaking with him. It is preferred that consent be given by the inquirer to the pastor prior to the completion of the *Pastor's Nomination and Profile Form*.

21. The director of the Office for the Diaconate will notify the nominee that his pastor has nominated him as a potential applicant for the permanent diaconate formation program of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The nominee is to respond in a letter to the director of the Office for the Diaconate indicating acceptance or rejection of the nomination.

22. The Office for the Diaconate will send the application packet to the inquirer once the nomination has been accepted. The pastor will also receive application materials that he will need to complete.

Applicant Requisites

Maturity and Faith Development

23. The Church will only promote to Sacred Orders men who have sound faith, are motivated by right intention, are endowed with the requisite knowledge, enjoy a good reputation, who have moral probity, proven virtue, and physical and psychological qualities appropriate for ordained ministry (*cf.* CIC 1029).

24. The applicant must be able to demonstrate human and evangelical virtues necessary for diaconal ministry. The spiritual-

ity of service implies a person's ability to offer a selfless contribution to the mission of the Church (*cf.* Basic Norms 32).

25. Candidates for the permanent diaconate must be active members of the Christian community as leaders and motivators of ministry. It is presumed that the applicant will enjoy a good reputation among the faithful and be seen as a man of faith and prayer (*cf.* Basic Norms 33).
26. The applicant must be properly motivated and give evidence of an overall personal balance and moral character. He should be a frequent participant in adult faith enrichment opportunities (*e.g.*, retreats, days of reflection, spiritual direction, study of scripture and Church teachings).
27. The Diocese of Pittsburgh requires that all applicants at the time of application have obtained, at minimum, an undergraduate degree from an institution of higher learning (*e.g.* Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science) or its equivalent (*e.g.*, professional certification).

Proper Standing and Stability

28. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has established the minimum age for ordination to the permanent diaconate at thirty-five for all candidates, married or celibate. An applicant, therefore, can only be nominated to the formation program at the minimum age of thirty-one.
29. The Diocese of Pittsburgh has established the maximum age for ordination to the permanent diaconate at age sixty-five for all candidates, married or celibate. An applicant, therefore, can only be nominated to the formation program at the maximum age of sixty.

30. An applicant must be in full communion with the Catholic Church and be free of all canonical impediments and irregularities as described in the next section.
31. Three years must elapse between a convert's initiation into the Church or a returning Catholic's reconciliation to the Church before his nomination to the diaconal formation program can be reviewed. Care must also be given to someone in whom a sudden conversion experience seems to precipitate a diaconal vocation.
32. The Church has determined that a married man cannot be considered for the permanent diaconate without the consent of his wife and consultation with his family. The application process requires signed consent by the wife and visitations to the family home.
33. An applicant to the formation program who is married must live out this vocation for at least three years prior to requesting admittance into the program.
34. An applicant who is not married must be able to demonstrate a stable and mature life of chastity and understand the gift of celibacy. His lifestyle shall not be in contradiction to the Christian faith and the moral teachings of the Church.
35. An applicant whose marriage has been annulled must be screened carefully to ascertain if and how previous obstacles to a marriage commitment might affect his viability as a candidate for the diaconate. An extended period of time should elapse before an applicant is nominated to the diaconate formation program.

36. Two years must elapse before a widower is nominated to the diaconate formation program. The applicant will need to demonstrate his understanding of celibate chastity if he is to pursue the permanent diaconate.
37. The Diocese of Pittsburgh requires that all inquirers possess citizenship to the United States of America before the application process can proceed.
38. At first inquiry and upon receiving any information of Eastern Catholic or Eastern Orthodox background of deacon candidates, the Department for Canon and Civil Law Services must be notified in order to investigate details that could involve the illicit reception of Holy Orders.
39. In addition, men considering the diaconate also need to discern whether they are ready to respond to this call at this particular point in their lives. Inquirers to the diaconate have many commitments to family, career, employment, community, and Church service, and these commitments should never be compromised.

Irregularities/Impediments to the Reception of Holy Orders

Canon 1041:

40. The nomination of an applicant to the diaconate formation program cannot be accepted and promotion for ordination to the Order of Deacon cannot proceed for one who labors under some form of insanity or other psychic defect due to which, after consultation with experts, he is judged incapable of rightly carrying out the ministry.

41. The nomination of an applicant to the diaconate formation program cannot be accepted and promotion for ordination to the Order of Deacon cannot proceed for one who has committed the delict (offense) of apostasy, heresy, or schism.
42. The nomination of an applicant to the diaconate formation program cannot be accepted and promotion for ordination to the Order of Deacon cannot proceed for one who has attempted marriage, even a civil one only, either while he was impeded from entering marriage due to an existing matrimonial bond, sacred orders or a public perpetual vow of chastity, or with a woman bound by a valid marriage or by the same type of vow.
43. The nomination of an applicant to the diaconate formation program cannot be accepted and promotion for ordination to the Order of Deacon cannot proceed for one who has committed voluntary homicide or who has procured an effective abortion and all persons who positively cooperated in either.
44. The nomination of an applicant to the diaconate formation program cannot be accepted and promotion for ordination to the Order of Deacon cannot proceed for one who has seriously and maliciously mutilated himself or another person or a person who has attempted suicide.
45. The nomination of an applicant to the diaconate formation program cannot be accepted and promotion for ordination to the Order of Deacon cannot proceed for one who has performed an act of orders which has been reserved to those who are in the order of episcopacy or presbyterate

while the person either lacked that order or had been forbidden its exercise by some declared or inflicted canonical penalty.

Canon 1042:

46. The nomination of an applicant to the diaconate formation program cannot be accepted and promotion for ordination to the Order of Deacon cannot proceed for one who holds office or position of administration which could be a source of scandal to the faithful. The inquirer may be asked to render an account demonstrating he is free from all irregularities relating to canon law.

The Application Process

47. Once the Office for the Diaconate has received the *Pastor's Nomination and Profile Form* from the pastor, the nominee will be contacted by the director of the Office for the Diaconate. The inquirer will be asked to submit a letter either accepting or rejecting the nomination.

48. The Office for the Diaconate will send application materials directly to the inquirer along with a checklist identifying all the requirements of the application process.

49. The pastor of the inquirer will be notified that the application process has been initiated for the inquirer once the materials have been sent. The pastor will also receive materials that he needs to complete.

50. All completed application materials will become property of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. All evaluations and interviews will be collated into a final report; the original completed forms will be destroyed to protect confidentiality.

Application Forms

51. The applicant must submit application materials to the Office for the Diaconate; all materials must be thoroughly completed and submitted before any review can be undertaken.
52. *Application Form*: The applicant must complete all sections of the application form in an honest and truthful manner. The opening question on the application form requires the applicant to confirm that no information will be purposefully withheld from the Office for the Diaconate.
53. *Detailed Spiritual Autobiography*: The autobiography provides the applicant an opportunity to present himself to the diocesan bishop and those associated with the formation program. All information shared must be honest and truthful. The autobiography should not exceed twenty pages.
54. *Signed Consent Form by Wife*: A married man aspiring for ordination to the Order of Deacon must have the consent of his wife for participation in the diaconate formation program as well as for ordination itself.
55. *Wife Questionnaire Form*: If the applicant is married, his wife must complete the questionnaire form which is to be signed by both the applicant and his wife.
56. *Letters of Recommendation*: The applicant must solicit recommendations from his pastor, employer, and fellow parishioners by having the following forms completed. These forms must be completed and returned directly to the Office for the Diaconate.

- Pastor's Recommendation Form (The pastor will receive this form directly from the Office for the Diaconate.)
- Employer's Recommendation Form
- Peer Recommendation Form (The applicant chooses three non-family persons to complete the form.)

57. *Deacon Rating Form:* The pastor must complete the Deacon Rating Form as well as any other resident priest of the parish or permanent deacon. The pastor must also choose three parishioners and/or staff members to complete the Deacon Rating Form. The forms are to be sent directly to the Office for the Diaconate and not given to the applicant.

58. *Candidate Medical Form:* The medical form must be completed by a certified and licensed physician and returned to the Office for the Diaconate with the other application materials.

59. *Information Consent Form:* The applicant must sign the information form giving permission for diocesan officials to conduct independent background checks or pursue any other information that might be relevant to the application process. It is understood that the Office for the Diaconate is *not* permitted or authorized to release any information about the applicant to outside agencies, organizations, or personnel without the consent of the applicant.

60. *Consent Form for Scrutiny:* The applicant must sign this form giving the Office for the Diaconate permission to confidentially exchange all application materials with those boards and committees associated with the application and formation processes.

61. *Psychological Testing Consent Form*: Psychological testing does not proceed until the Propaedeutic Period. However, it is imperative the applicant offers consent for the various boards and committees to scrutinize results of the psychological testing. It is understood that the Office for the Diaconate is *not* permitted or authorized to release any information about the applicant to outside agencies, organizations, or personnel without the consent of the applicant. The applicant will also be responsible for all costs associated with the testing. Financial assistance can be explored if the applicant is unable to satisfy the expenses.

Supporting Information

62. *Recent Photograph*: The applicant must submit a self color passport size photograph; if the applicant is married a second photograph that includes the wife must be submitted.

63. *Certificates of Baptism, Confirmation*, and, if applicable, *Marriage*, issued within past six months.

64. *Birth Certificate*: The applicant must supply a notarized or official copy of his birth certificate and, if applicable, proof of adoption.

65. *Proof of Legal Residency* within the diocese: The applicant must supply some proof of residency since all applicants must be residents within the six county boundary of the Diocese of Pittsburgh (*i.e.*, driver's license, tax information).

66. *Official Academic Transcripts*: The applicant is to have high school and all other academic transcripts sent directly to the Office for the Diaconate.

67. *Background Checks:* The applicant must request clearances from the Pennsylvania State Police namely the Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance and the Criminal Record Check. This information can be sent directly to the Office for the Diaconate.

68. *Previous Formation Report(s):* The applicant is to give written permission to the rector or superior of any previous house of studies, with explicit reference to evaluations of the candidate and votes rendered by the faculty, to release all pertinent reports to the Office for the Diaconate.

Administrative Screening

69. The Office for the Diaconate will conduct an initial screening of the applicant based on the application materials received to determine if the inquirer is in conformity with the norms and guidelines of the Church.

70. If it is determined that the application process cannot proceed the applicant will be contacted in writing by the director of the Office for the Diaconate.

71. If the application materials are deemed to be in conformity with the norms and guidelines of the Church, the application process may continue.

Admission Interview Evaluation

72. The Office for the Diaconate will arrange for each applicant to participate in two formal interviews with diocesan officials. The first interview will involve the director or assistant director of the Office for the Diaconate along with an approved formation director. The second interview will involve the Secretary for Ministerial Leadership or the

director of the Department for Priest Personnel along with an approved formation director. The interviewers will be using a standardized questionnaire to lead the discussions.

73. The director of the Office for the Diaconate will convene the Deacon Application Board to review all application materials, hear testimony from the interviewers of the applicant, and interview the pastor of the applicant.
74. The applicant will be notified in writing by the director of the Office for the Diaconate if the inquirer's application has been rejected. Application materials are the property of the Diocese of Pittsburgh therefore materials may or may not be returned to the applicant if the application has been rejected. Moreover, the applicant may see the collated report and final screening form.
75. The application process is to continue for the inquirer with the consent and approval of the Deacon Application Board.

Deacon Application Board and Admission Notification

76. The Deacon Application Board must nominate to the diocesan bishop only those applicants whom they have judged as possessing the necessary qualities for entrance and successful completion of the propaedeutic period.
77. The director of the Office for the Diaconate will propose to the diocesan bishop applicants being recommended to the propaedeutic phase of diaconal formation. The bishop will notify the director of the Office for the Diaconate of his decision regarding those to be admitted to the propaedeutic period.

78. The director of the Office for the Diaconate will notify the applicant in writing if he has been accepted into the propaedeutic period of the permanent diaconate formation program.
79. A meeting will be convened for all the aspirants to explain the stages of the formation program and the purpose of the propaedeutic period.
80. Applicants who are not accepted into the propaedeutic period will be notified in writing by the director of the Office for the Diaconate.

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