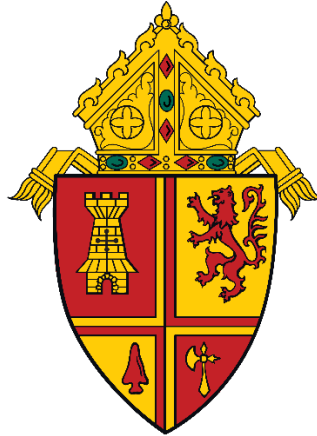


Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Office of the Diaconate



**ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
SAINT PETERSBURG**

COURAGEOUSLY
Living the Gospel

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Office of the Diaconate
Post Office Box 40200
St. Petersburg, Florida 33743
Email: diaconate@dosp.org
Phone: (727) 341-6826

Revised: July 2025

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS HANDBOOK.....	3
I. OVERVIEW OF THE DIACONATE	4
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RESTORATION OF THE DIACONATE	4
ORDAINED MINISTRIES IN THE CHURCH	6
THE MINISTRY OF DEACON	6
II. THE PATHS AND DIMENSIONS IN THE FORMATION OF DEACONS	8
PATHS IN THE FORMATION OF DEACONS	
III. ADMISSION AND SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES	13
THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR AND PARISH COMMUNITY	13
THE ROLE OF THE DIOCESE	13
DIOCESAN NORMS FOR ALL APPLICANTS	13
SCREENING PROCESS.....	15
IV. FORMATION PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS	16
MENTORING AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION	16
DAYS OF REFLECTION AND RETREATS	17
PASTORAL MINISTRY WORKSHOPS	17
PASTORAL INTERNSHIPS	17
ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS AND FEES.....	18
PARTICIPATION OF THE WIFE.....	18
FORMATION EVALUATIONS	19
ADMISSIONS & FORMATION BOARD	19
IV. THE YEAR OF INQUIRY	20
INTRODUCTION	20
V. ASPIRANT PATH IN DIACONAL FORMATION	21
INTRODUCTION	21
FORMATION IN THE ASPIRANT PATH	21
VI. CANDIDATE PATH IN DIACONAL FORMATION	23
INTRODUCTION	23
ORDINATION	23
VII. POST-ORDINATION PATH IN DIACONAL FORMATION	24
INTRODUCTION	24
MINISTRY AGREEMENT	24
POST ORDINATION REQUIREMENTS	24

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is intended for the needs of several constituencies. Primarily, it is designed to provide information about the diaconate formation program for potential applicants, to aspirants and candidates.

For the potential applicant, the handbook provides information about the application process, as well as the diocesan norms for applicants.

For the aspirant, the handbook details the major components of the aspirant phase of the formation program. It identifies the assessments of the aspirant, and it delineates the expectations and responsibilities of the aspirant and his wife, if the aspirant is married.

For the candidate, the handbook details the major components of the candidate phase of the formation program. It identifies the assessments of the candidate, especially regarding readiness for institution into the ministries of lector and acolyte, as well as ordination into the diaconate. In addition, this handbook delineates the expectations and responsibilities of the candidate and his wife, if he is married.

Finally, the handbook provides an introduction to the diaconate and the formation program that is suitable for anyone who would like to become familiar with the key elements of both.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

I. OVERVIEW OF THE DIACONATE

A Brief History of the Restoration of the Diaconate

In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the Second Vatican Council restored the diaconate as an order in the Church. *In Lumen Gentium*, #29, the Council briefly described the nature and functions of the diaconate and the need of the Church it hoped this ministry would meet, and left it to local episcopal conferences to decide, with papal approval, whether or not to restore the diaconate in their own countries.

During the next several years, Pope Paul VI implemented the Council's decision in three important steps. The Apostolic Letter *Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* (June 18, 1967) established canonical norms for the diaconate. On June 17, 1968, new rites for the conferral of all three of the ordained ministries were authorized in the Apostolic Constitution *Pontificalis Romani Recognito*.

Finally, on August 15, 1972, Pope Paul VI published new norms for the diaconate in the Apostolic Letter *Ad Pascendum*.

The bishops of the United States decided in the spring of 1968 to petition the Holy See for permission to restore the diaconate in this country. In their letter of May 2, 1968, they offered the following as the reasons for their request:

- To enrich and strengthen the many and various diaconal ministries at work in this country with the sacramental grace of the diaconate.
- To enlist a new group of devout and competent men in the active ministry of the Church.
- To aid in extending needed liturgical and charitable service to the faithful in both large urban and small rural communities.
- To provide an official and sacramental presence of the Church in many areas of secular life, as well as in communities within large cities and sparsely settled regions where few or no priests are available.
- To provide an impetus and source for creative adaptations of diaconal ministries to the rapidly changing needs of our society.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

On August 30, 1968, the Apostolic Delegate informed the United States bishops that Pope Paul VI had acceded to their request. The following November, the Bishops Committee on the Permanent Diaconate was established. Its principal functions are:

- To offer local bishops recommendations concerning concrete details of and questions about diaconal vocations.
- To establish a formation program including doctrinal, pastoral, and spiritual aspects of training.
- To review and approve plans for the ministry of deacons, developed by various dioceses.
- At the request of local ordinaries, to make formal evaluations of diaconal programs after they have been operating for three years.

In February 1978, the committee was authorized to commission a comprehensive study of the permanent diaconate in the United States. The results of that survey were published in 1981, under the title *A National Study of the Permanent Diaconate in the United States*. This volume points up the strengths and weaknesses of the diaconate as it developed in this country and made suggestions for improving formation programs and for the exercise of this ministry in the Church.

In 1984, the National Conference of Catholic bishops published revised guidelines to refine the vision expressed in the 1971 guideline, in the light of experience.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Ordained Ministries in the Church

Every Christian has his or her own gift from the Holy Spirit, yet not all receive the same gifts. In the Church, there is a unity of mission and a diversity of ministry. The Church is the healthy and living Body of Christ when all submit their gifts to the discernment of the community, acknowledge the gifts others have been given, serve as their own gifts permit, and are willing to be served by the gifts others receive.

Central among the many ministerial gifts Christ has given to his Church, are the ordained ministries of bishops, priests, and deacons. These ministries have existed in the Church since New Testament times, although the concrete roles of each and their interrelationships have varied over the course of the Church's history. These three orders belong to the essence of the Church's ministry, and they are received by the Church as special ministries willed by Jesus Christ and empowered by a special grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Ministry of Deacon

At the Second Vatican Council, the Diaconate was restored as a permanent ministry in the Church. In the discussion before, and at the council that led to this decision, three primary motives were at work. The first was a desire to restore to the Church the full complement of active apostolic ministries. A second motive was the desire to integrate and strengthen with sacramental ordination and grace those who were, in fact, already exercising diaconal functions. The third goal was to provide ministers for those regions where functions vital to the Church's life would not be carried out.

The Diaconate is an ordained ministry. It belongs to those central ministries of leadership to which Jesus Christ has entrusted the fundamental task of assuring that the Church become and remain the authentic sacrament of salvation. In ordination, a Christian blessed with the ability to minister is chosen from among the members of Christ to occupy an office and to fulfill a role representative of both Christ and the Church. In this sacrament, a bishop lays hands upon a man and, in the name of the Church, prays to God to empower him with the gifts of the Spirit, that will enable him to fulfill his particular role. The believing community then receives the man as one who, in his sacramental consecration, is permanently committed, has a specific ministry, and is an ordained minister of Jesus Christ himself. Ordination is the sacramental differentiation of a Christian within the community of faith, so

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

that he becomes for it a unique sign and instrument of what Jesus Christ is for the Church and of what the Church must be for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the Diaconate is a distinct order within the ordained ministry of the Church. The bishop, as successor to the apostles, presides over the local diocesan Church. To him, is entrusted the primary responsibility of faithfully and integrally preaching the Word of God; of ministering the mysteries of God in the sacraments; and of governing the People of God. Within a diocese, priests assist the bishop as his representatives in and to the local communities of faith. They do so through the ministry of Word and sacrament and by guiding communities in fidelity and charity.

In communion with the bishop and priests, deacons are ordained for a distinct ministry, which is indicated by their names: they are ordained, says the ancient tradition (repeated at Vatican II), for service. They function in all three areas of the Church's life: in the transmission of the word, in celebration of the sacraments, and in the community's active love.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

II. THE PATHS AND DIMENSIONS IN THE FORMATION OF DEACONS

Three separate but integral stages constitute a unified diocesan formation program for deacons: the two initial formation stages of aspirant and candidate, and the post-ordination stage of ongoing formation. Although this National Directory addresses each stage separately, they nevertheless become ‘one sole organic journey’ in diaconal formation. In each stage, the four dimensions or specific areas in formation – human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral – are always essential. One who will serve as a deacon requires a formation that promotes the development of the whole person. Therefore, the four dimensions in formation should be so interrelated as to achieve a continual integration of their objectives in the life of each participant and in his exercise of ministry” (National Directory, 2021, p.65).

Paths in the Formation of Deacons

Aspirancy

Aspirancy follows a period of initial inquiry. At the end of the inquiry period, the bishop may accept some of the inquirers into aspirancy. The path of aspirancy is a time in which the formation team discerns the capabilities and readiness of an aspirant for nomination and possible acceptance as a candidate for diaconal ordination. The path of aspirancy lasts three years.

Candidacy

Candidacy is a period of intense human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. It is a period of continued and deep discernment on the part of both the candidate and the formation team of a diaconal vocation. The path of candidacy lasts one year.

Post-Ordination

The post-ordination path provides the newly ordained deacon with opportunities to continue to develop spiritually, intellectually, and pastorally and to integrate the various dimensions of formation into his daily life and ministry. The post-ordination path is a five-year period.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Dimensions in the Formation of Deacons

Human Dimension

“Initial formation for ministry begins with human formation and development” (*National Directory, 2021, p. 65*).

Deacons work closely with people inside and outside of the Church. By virtue of their sacramental bond of service to all people, they are called to collaborate with individuals both inside and outside of the Church. The ministry of the deacon is also a prophetic one. As such, it is their responsibility to speak out for the weak and to defend their rights. Moreover, as proclaimer of God’s Word, through word and deed in the modern world, the deacon must be able to communicate with diverse groups of people and also live the Gospel.

Among the purely human attributes that the deacon must possess or be able to develop are:

- good health
- a sense of responsibility
- honesty
- dynamism
- good professional and family conduct
- a spirit of sacrifice, strength, perseverance with a view to the function of a deacon
- good human relations
- ability to dialogue with people of different religions or cultures
- grasp of one’s own culture
- ability to communicate
- willingness to work with others
- leadership qualities
- balanced judgement
- openness of mind
- a sense of realism
- a capacity to transmit consolation and hope with a view to the particular situations or roles

Should include aptitudes for working in the fields of:

- peacemaking
- development
- socio-cultural promotion
- justice
- health care

Other important qualities:

- ability to manage conflict
- collaborate
- organize
- always contributing to the unity of the parish

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Spiritual Dimension

“A man should not be admitted to diaconal formation unless it is demonstrated that he is already living a life of mature Christian spirituality” (National Directory, 2021, p. 68).

The deacon is configured sacramentally to Christ the Servant, so the deacon must be able to serve with the mind of Christ. A deacon’s spirituality must therefore be grounded in the attitudes of Christ and be marked by openness to God’s word, to the Church, and to the world.

To help the candidate develop a balanced spirituality the spiritual dimension of the formation program seeks to:

- deepen his prayer life
- cultivate and deepen a commitment of service to God’s word, the Church, and the world
- acquaint him with the richness and depth of the Catholic spiritual tradition
- increase his appreciation for the Christian witness of matrimonial and celibate spirituality
- focus his spirituality on the life of the people he encounters where he lives, works, and serves

Intellectual Dimension

“An increasingly educated society and the new roles of leadership in diaconal ministry require that a deacon be a knowledgeable and reliable witness to the faith and a spokesman for the Church’s teaching” (National Directory, 2021, p. 72).

Important elements of the intellectual formation of the deacon are an understanding of Christian doctrine that is consistent with the teaching of the Church, knowledge of and appreciation for Sacred Scripture, preparation in theological and liturgical studies, and a solid foundation in preaching, its preparation, and practice. The focus of the intellectual dimension of the formation of deacons is the pastoral context of service. As such, the formation program should provide the participant with the knowledge, skills, and appreciation of the faith that he needs to effectively fulfill the ministry of word, liturgy, and charity. Also of importance, is to form the participant so that he is able to evaluate his society and culture in light of the Gospel and to understand the Gospel in the light of the society and culture in which he will be serving. In light of the multi-cultural environment of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, it is particularly important that the participant have an appreciation for the cultural and ethnic expressions of the faith, as well as what is shared in common.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Pastoral Dimension

“An integral formation must relate the human, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions to pastoral practice. ‘The whole formation imparted to [the participants] ... aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ ... Hence their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character’” (National Directory, 2021, p. 75).

The purpose of the pastoral dimension of the formation program is to relate the human, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions to pastoral practice. This dimension strengthens and enhances his ability to exercise the prophetic, priestly, and servant-leadership functions that derive from his baptismal consecration. Pastoral competence is such an important element in the formation of a man for ordination to the Diaconate that the demonstration of pastoral skills is a crucial element in the assessment of fitness for ordination.

The basic skills that the participant will need to develop and demonstrate are:

- a spirit of pastoral responsibility and servant-leadership
- generosity and perseverance
- ability to collaborate
- creativity
- respect for ecclesial communion
- filial obedience to the diocesan bishop

Pastoral formation is a component of spiritual formation. The participant must be able to identify with the *diakonia* entrusted to the Church by Christ. To allow the participant to enter into a closer identification with the mission of the universal Church, the formation program includes:

- opportunities to introduce the participant into the pastoral life of the local Church through periodic meetings with the diocesan bishop, priest, other deacons, religious, and laity serving in official ministry.
- supervised pastoral formation adapted to the needs of the participant
- opportunities to share his pastoral experiences with deacons already in ministry

The pastoral dimension of formation also focuses on the *diakonia* of word, liturgy, and charity.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

The Church's Ministry of the Word

It includes proclamation of the word in the varied contexts of ministerial service: *kerygma, catechesis, homiletics (both in theory and practice), evangelization, and missiology.*

The Church's Ministry of Liturgy

It focuses on liturgical practice, which includes celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals, and service at the altar.

The Church's Ministry of Charity

It is focused on preaching; educating the Christian community on the social dimensions of the Gospel; fostering by facilitation, motivation, and organization the Church's social justice ministry, and the preferential option for the poor.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

III. ADMISSION AND SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

The Role of the Pastor and Parish Community

Any inquirer who seeks to be considered for ordination to the Diaconate needs to enter into dialogue with his parish community and pastor. It is the pastor who presents him for consideration into diaconal formation through a letter that states that he is a practicing Catholic of good repute and in good standing.

The Role of the Diocese

The Director of Formation coordinates the selection process and arranges interviews of the applicant with members of the Admissions and Formation Board. The interview is designed to assess the applicant's level of awareness of a diaconal vocation, to obtain information and background on his family life, to evaluate his employment stability as well as his aptitude for diaconal ministry. The interview includes his wife, if he is married, and any children living at home. Appropriate psychological testing and consultation is included as part of the applicant process.

Diocesan Norms for All Applicants

The following minimum requirements apply to all seeking entrance to the Aspirancy path of the diaconate formation program.

- at least 35 years of age and no older than 65 years of age at ordination
- in good health
- if married, in a stable marriage with no discernible serious family problems
- economically sound
- has earned at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited educational institution (exceptions, though rare, are considered for those applicants to demonstrate a capacity to engage in college- level work)
- at least three years of significant service in a parish, or satisfactory completion of two years of the Lay Pastoral Ministry Institute Program, or equivalent.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Exceptions to these requirements are at the sole discretion of the bishop with consultation of the Diaconate Office, the Director of Formation, and the Admissions and Formation Board.

In addition, the following application documents will be required:

1. A completed application form
2. A detailed, typed autobiography.
3. A recent photograph of the applicant, spouse, and family (if applicable).
4. Sacramental documents:
 - a copy of baptismal certificate (issued within the past 6 months)
 - a copy of confirmation certificate
 - a copy of marriage certificate
 - If divorced, a copy of divorce and annulment decrees.
5. Signed release forms and authorization for background check
 - Employment Information Release Form
 - Financial and medical background check
 - Safe Environment compliance
6. A personal, handwritten statement requesting admission to aspirant formation, indicating the applicant's motivation for seeking ordination to the diaconate, his willingness to pledge his service to the diocesan Church, and his ability to fulfill the requirements of aspirant formation (described in the application cover letter).
7. If married, a personal, handwritten statement from the wife indicating her initial consent for the application and entrance into aspirant formation.
8. Proof of residency in the diocese (valid driver's license, other current picture identification with address).
9. Must have letters of reference from: the applicant's pastor, another priest, a deacon, or vowed religious. At least two others from one of the following: a faculty member of the diocesan Lay Pastoral Ministry Institute program, a recent employer or supervisor if employed, a close friend, a relative other than one's spouse.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Screening Process

Interviews

The screening process includes a personal interview with the applicant and his wife (if married). Each of the interview teams will normally consist of two members of the Admissions and Formation Board. In addition, an interview by the Bishop, the Director of the Diaconate, and the Director of Formation may also take place.

Psychological Screening

Applicants participate in psychological testing conducted by licensed psychologists. In addition, each applicant will be interviewed by one of the psychologists. The results of the psychological screening and interview provide only part of the data collected during the screening process and are not used as the sole basis for selecting or not selecting an applicant.

Notifications

Each applicant will be notified by letter of the outcome of the screening process. Those accepted into the Aspirant Year of formation will be notified by the bishop in writing. The applicant's pastor will be notified prior to the bishop's letter of acceptance.

The main checkpoints of the application process are receipt of a completed application, interview with a member of the Admissions & Formation Board, completion of psychological testing. The application process may be terminated at any one of these checkpoints.

There are three possible outcomes of the assessment and evaluation process: invitation into aspirancy by the bishop, notification that the inquirer has not been accepted into aspirancy, a judgment that the inquirer will be placed on hold status until the next inquiry cycle (usually two years). Those who are not accepted into aspirancy may not reapply to the program at a future time. Those inquirers placed in hold status, will be notified of the specific actions they should take during the two-year hold period. At the end of the two-year period, if they have fulfilled the requirements stated in the letter notifying them of the hold status, the applicant will be invited to participate in the next cycle of inquiry sessions. The merits of their application will be evaluated with that of all other inquirers at the time.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

IV. FORMATION PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The formation program consists of one year of inquiry, three years of aspirancy and one year of candidacy, for a total of five years. For those who complete the Diaconate Formation Program and are ordained, participation in post-ordination program will be required. The aspirants and candidates undergo a rigorous formation in the spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and human dimensions. Evaluations of the aspirant and candidate are conducted throughout the program.

Mentoring and Spiritual Direction

Mentoring and spiritual direction are integral parts of the formation program in that they help shape the aspirant and candidate in their awareness of the uniqueness and charism of diaconal ministry and in their relationship with God. The individual is expected to develop an effective and mature spirituality.

A deacon mentor is assigned by the Director of Formation to the aspirant during the aspirancy year. The mentors are selected on the basis of the formation needs of the aspirant that were identified during the application and selection process. Both the aspirant and mentor are expected to meet regularly – at least once every four to six weeks. After each meeting, the mentor completes a summary report of the meeting and sends it to the Office of the Diaconate.

The Director of Formation recommends to the bishop the assignment of the spiritual director, who can be a priest, a vowed religious, or a layperson. As with the mentor, the spiritual directors are selected on the basis of the formation needs of the aspirant that were identified during the application and selection process. The expectation is that the aspirant or candidate will meet with his spiritual director every four to six weeks. Though the content of meetings with the spiritual director are part of internal forum, it is expected that they will incorporate both aspects of personal spirituality unique to the diaconate (Olmsted, 2015) as well as those of diaconal spirituality (Donovan, 2000).

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Days of Reflection and Retreats

A day of reflection is conducted in January of each year of formation. Generally, both the aspirant and candidate groups are combined for this day.

An annual retreat is conducted in June for both the aspirants and candidates. Both the aspirant and candidates' groups participate for some aspects of the retreat. Separate breakout sessions that are relevant to the level of formation are provided for the aspirants and candidates.

Formation Workshops

These workshops are designed to supplement the academic preparation with a perspective on various key pastoral and other topics. Presentations and discussion groups for topics such as pastoral leadership, liturgy, homiletics are provided. These workshops typically take place monthly on a Saturday. The workshops are conducted by the formation staff.

Pastoral Internships

Aspirants in their 2nd and 3rd year participate in an internship outside of the parish setting. In the fourth year, Candidates will be assigned to a parish in order to shadow a deacon. This will likely be the assigned deacon mentor unless circumstances warrant placement with another deacon. The internship may consist of two 20-hour or one 40-hour assignment. The internship is selected in consultation with the mentor and the Coordinator of Pastoral Internships.

Liturgy Practicums & Comprehensive

During the year of Candidacy, the men are required to participate in several liturgical practicums, designed to develop competency as a presider and liturgical minister.

Homiletics Practicums

Throughout the year of Candidacy, the candidates gain experience preparing and delivering homilies. They will be required to submit written, brief homilies, which will be evaluated and returned for corrections as necessary. The candidates will be required to deliver several homilies before a group of evaluators, who will assess the candidate's level of homiletic competence.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Academic Requirements and Fees

The academic dimension of the formation program is provided by St. Leo University. The standard program grants the candidate a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies from the University. For those candidates who do not hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, the University grants an undergraduate certificate, which may be applied toward a bachelor's degree.

The courses are conducted by the St. Leo University faculty on a trimester basis. Each course is four months in length, meets one full day on a Saturday at a designated facility and requires of the student supplemental work conducted over the University online teaching system.

Aspirants and candidates are expected to earn a passing grade in each course in order to continue in the formation program. Failure to complete a course successfully will result in the aspirant or candidate having to withdraw from the formation program or to repeat the whole year of formation.

All aspirants and candidates who hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution are expected to take the courses for graduate credit. Those who take the courses for graduate credit pay a portion of the course and all book fees. Those whose academic preparation does not allow them to take the courses for graduate credit, pay only the book fees. The diocese pays the costs of all retreats and days of reflection.

Participation of the Wife

Wives are invited to all courses and workshops to the extent practical for the family circumstances in coordination with St. Leo University. In addition, wives are required to attend retreats, days of reflection, and occasional meetings conducted specifically for spouses.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Formation Evaluations

Annually, the mentor submits a formal evaluation of the aspirant's / candidate's growth. The baseline for this assessment is established by the Personal Growth Plan, which is developed by the aspirant in consultation with the mentor.

Annually, the spiritual director is asked to notify the Diaconate Office whether or not the meetings have been taking place regularly.

Similarly, the pastors are asked for their assessment of the aspirant or candidate.

Admissions & Formation Board

The Admissions and Formation Board is established to review continuously the progress of the aspirants and candidates in their formation. Any aspirant or candidate can be dismissed at any time if the Admissions and Formation Board, considering all circumstances under the Holy Spirit, comes to the conclusion of the lack of diaconal vocation of a candidate.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

IV. THE YEAR OF INQUIRY

Introduction

Conducted by the formation staff, the purpose of the year of inquiry period is to engage the participant, the participant's family, and the local Church in a process of discernment.

Both the inquirer and his wife are expected to also seriously consider the implications for the inquirer should the wife pre-decease him after ordination. Should that occur, the ordained deacon is expected to live a celibate life, as dispensations for re-marriage are generally not granted. In addition, should the wife pre-decease the aspirant/candidate during the formation period, it is likely that he will be required to take a leave of absence from the program so that he has the appropriate time to grieve and to seriously reflect on whether he will be able to live a celibate life.

At the end of the inquiry period, the expectation is that both the participant as well as the extended community will have discerned a possible vocational path for the individual. The inquiry process is conducted every other year, on even years.

The year of inquiry consists of six, two-hour discernment workshops, conducted from September through November. Written reflections will be assigned and evaluated throughout this part of the program.

At the end of the period, the participant and spouse may be invited to attend the application workshop, conducted in January. At that time, the application forms are distributed and the assessment and evaluation process described. This important workshop is required. The office accepts applications only from those who have successfully completed the discernment workshops and who have attended the application workshop. The assessment and evaluation process continues with the submission of a completed application, usually in February, and usually ends with final notification of the inquirer's status in June.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

V. ASPIRANT PATH IN DIACONAL FORMATION

Introduction

Lasting three years, the aspirant path introduces the participant to the formation process and provides a structured process for further discernment of the individual's vocation. Upon admission to Aspirancy, the aspirant reviews a copy of the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States* (2021). The contents of this document will be useful to the aspirant in discerning his vocation to the diaconate, as well as other documents contained in the bibliography. Not all aspirants will necessarily be accepted for admission to candidacy and participation in the aspirant path does not imply a commitment to candidacy or ordination on the part of the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

Formation in the Aspirant Path

The Aspirancy path of the formation program begins with an orientation day, which typically occurs in August. Both the aspirant and wife are required to attend this event. During the first year, the aspirant is assigned a spiritual director and a deacon mentor, with whom he must meet every 4-6 weeks throughout the year. In addition, this year consists of studies offered by St. Leo University and other workshops conducted by the formation staff. Finally, the aspirant is required to complete a supervised internship in the second and third year of aspirancy.

Below identifies the academic curriculum for the years of aspirancy formation. Those aspirants who continue to demonstrate a potential vocation to ordained ministry, are called to candidacy by the bishop usually in October of the last year of formation.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Intellectual Formation: Year 1

History of the Diaconate
Philosophy
Hebrew Scriptures

Intellectual Formation: Year 2

Christian Scripture
Life and Writings of St. Paul
Ecclesiology

Intellectual Formation: Year 3

Christology
Christian Spirituality
History of Christianity

The aspirant path concludes with a formal assessment conducted by the Admission and Formation Board. At that time, the following documents must be prepared:

1. A personal, handwritten, and signed letter by the aspirant requesting admission to the candidate path of formation, as well as the reception of the Rite of Admission to Candidacy.
2. A personal, handwritten, and signed letter of consent prepared by the married aspirant's wife.

After the petition is submitted the following occurs:

1. The Director of Formation prepares a declaration outlining the profile of the aspirant's personality and a judgment of suitability.
2. Each petitioner and wife (if applicable) are interviewed by the Director of Formation to appraise his readiness for nomination into the candidate path of formation.
3. The Director of Formation ascertains the wife's level of consent and support for her husband's promotion into candidate formation.
4. The Admissions and Formation Board convenes and reviews all pertinent information on the aspirant and each member makes a recommendation on the suitability of the aspirant for the candidate path to the Director of Formation and to the Director of the Diaconate.
5. The Diaconate Office, on behalf of the Board, sends the recommendations to the bishop, who selects those to be admitted to candidacy.
6. A copy of both the declaration and the bishop's letter to the aspirant regarding his acceptance into candidacy is placed in the aspirant's personal file.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Rite of Admission to Candidacy

In the Rite of Admission to Candidacy, the one who aspires to ordination publicly manifests his will to offer himself to God and the Church to exercise a sacred order. This rite is normally celebrated in October of the fourth year of formation. After the celebration of the Rite of Admission to Candidacy, a certificate indicating the reception, date, place, and the name of the bishop is prepared and signed by the chancellor and officially sealed. This document is placed in the candidate's personal file.

VI. CANDIDATE PATH IN DIACONAL FORMATION

Introduction

Lasting one year, the candidate path of formation assesses the readiness of the candidate for ordination and continues to form him for this possibility. In addition to formal academic preparation, the program includes seminars and workshops in various topics relevant to the ministry of the deacon. These are all designed to help the candidate develop the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions of diaconal ministry. The following highlights the key elements of the intellectual formation.

Schedules and content are subject to change.

Intellectual Formation – Year 4

Ethics 1

Ethics 2

Sacraments, Liturgy, Worship

Ordination

Before a candidate can be ordained, the following additional documents must be submitted:

1. A declaration that the course of studies has been completed (CIC 1027, 1032.3, 1050.1, 1051.1)
2. A declaration that the ministries of lector and acolyte have been received and exercised for at least six months, and that a profession of faith has been made and signed (CIC 1035, 833.6)
3. A handwritten declaration by the candidate of his free and lifelong commitment to the ecclesiastical ministry, and his petition to receive the order of deacon (CIC 1035)
4. A written statement of consent from the wife of a married candidate (CIC 1050.3)
5. A signed Profession of Faith and an Oath of Fidelity.

It is the bishop's decision only to call a candidate to ordination, after having seriously considered the recommendations of the Admissions and Formation Board and the candidate's formators regarding his worthiness, effort, and choice of ministry.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

VII. POST-ORDINATION PATH IN DIACONAL FORMATION

Introduction

Post-ordination formation is five years in duration. Throughout this period, the newly ordained continue formation in the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions. Through regular meetings with his pastor or priest-supervisor, deacon mentor, and spiritual director, the deacon is able to adapt to his new and expanded role in the ministry of the Church.

Ministry Agreement

Each deacon makes a commitment to the Diocese of Saint Petersburg, and the bishop, by developing, in consultation with his pastor or priest-supervisor, a Ministry Agreement. This agreement establishes a clear and mutual understanding between the pastor or supervisor, and the deacon, with respect to the duties of his assignment. The agreement should be consistent with the needs of the Church and the work and family circumstances of the deacon. It is expected that the deacon will commit to a minimum of 10 hours of diaconal service each week. Refer to the Diaconate Office Deacon Guidelines for more information.

Post Ordination Requirements

The commitment of the deacon after ordination includes:

- 1) Approximately 25 hours annually or more of continuing, in-depth formation,
- 2) An annual evaluation of ministry prepared by their pastor or priest supervisor,
- 3) Meetings with a deacon mentor and with a spiritual director,
- 4) Attendance at an annual, canonically required, retreat; the annual retreat is sponsored by the Office of the Diaconate is the norm for an annual retreat. In limited situations, an alternate retreat may be attended with prior approval from the Diaconate Office. Wives are invited to attend the retreat.
- 5) Compliance with the guidelines for deacons published by the Office of the Diaconate on behalf of the bishop.

Diocese of Saint Petersburg

Diaconate Formation Program Handbook

Bibliography

- Bernardin, J. C. (1993). *"The Call to Service": Pastoral Statement on the Permanent Diaconate*. Archdiocese of Chicago. Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago.
- Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate. (1984). *Permanent Deacons in the United States: Guidelines on Their Formation and Ministry*. Washington, DC: National Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- Congregation for Catholic Education/Congregation for the Clergy. (1998). *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons/Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- Ditewig, W. T. (2004). *101 Questions & Answers on Deacons*. New York/Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press.
- Ditewig, W. T. (2010). *Forming Deacons: Ministers of Soul and Leaven*. (M. J. Tkacik, Ed.) New York/Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Ditewig, W. T. (2015). *The Deacon's Ministry of Charity and Justice*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Donovan, W. T. (2000). *Understanding Diaconal Spirituality*. Columbus, OH: National Association of Diaconate Directors.
- Keating, J. (2015). *The Heart of the Diaconate: Communion with the Servant Mysteries of Christ*. New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Libreria Editrice Vaticana. (2015). *Compendium on the Diaconate: A Resource for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons*. (E. Petrolino, Ed.) Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- Olmsted, T. J. (2015). *A Guide for the Spiritual Direction of Permanent Deacons*. Phoenix: The Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix.
- Rojas, R. R. (2021). *The Landscape of Pastoral Learning: A Handbook of Goals and Objectives with Bilingual References for Pastoral Learning in the Parish Setting*. Bloomington, IN: Author House.
- U.S. Bishops' Committee On The Permanent Diaconate. (1971). *Permanent Deacons In the United States: Guidelines on Their Formation and Ministry*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2021). *The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States of America*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.