



Diocese of Davenport

Handbook for Pastors and Parish Life Coordinators

Deacon Formation Program

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Welcome

Our thanks to you for your willingness to be a part of our Deacon Formation Program. As the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States* notes, you are crucial in helping to identify potential candidates for the diaconate as well as to form this class of deacons for our diocese (#53). This small handbook is intended to be a help to you in exercising this most important ministry. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please feel free to contact the Deacon Formation office.

Responsibilities

Identification of Potential Vocations to the Diaconate

Pastors have a variety of roles in the process of identifying and forming potential deacons. They are usually one of the first to formally discuss a vocation with a potential aspirant. As such their support as well as their honesty can assist greatly in the discernment of a vocation. As the *Directory* notes:

The first stirrings of a vocation to the diaconate are often explored at a personal level and usually begin with seeking information about the diaconate and formation. Here, an individual initially reflects upon the nature of his perceived call. Primacy must be given at this time to the spiritual dimension, and central to this is spiritual guidance. "Because every spiritual journey is personal and individual, it requires personal guidance." The pastor and others on the parish staff are particular resources at this time. (#169)

Should a pastor identify someone with a potential vocation to the diaconate, he is asked to refer that person to the Director of Deacon Formation for follow-up.

Discernment of an ecclesial vocation does not take place in a vacuum; the Christian community and its pastors play key roles in this process. In the Diocese of Davenport, when someone inquires about the diaconate they are counseled to meet with their pastor and discuss their application to the program if they have not yet done so. As part of the initial application, the pastor's recommendation and attestation that the individual meets the canonical requirements for formation is required before admission to aspirancy (see *Directory* #171, 173, 174).

Meeting with the Aspirant and Candidate

Formal formation for the diaconate is divided into two phases after inquiry: aspirancy (2 years) and candidacy (3 years). During these five years, pastors ought to be meeting with aspirants and candidates from their parish on a regular basis. Such meetings may include time for prayer, formal conversations about discernment and ministry, and informal social time. An important part of the pastor's responsibilities is assessing the aspirant's and candidate's readiness to progress in formation and, eventually, to be ordained. In addition to observing the aspirant's or candidate's practice in pastoral service (see *Directory* #195), regular meetings with the man in formation and his family are crucial in helping the pastor make these assessments.

Parish Liturgical Ministry

During each year of formation, in addition to continuing their current ministries to the degree that they are able and completing 50 hours of supervised field education, those in formation are required to focus on a particular liturgical ministry. The purpose of this component of formation is both to help them understand the various ministries at the parish but also to reflect on how each of these ministries informs and is a part of diaconal ministry. The goal is not for the aspirant or candidate to replace other lay ministers but to learn from them. Those responsible for the various ministries in the parish should help prepare and guide them as they would others in the parish.

As early as possible, aspirants should be prepared to serve and be commissioned as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (if not already serving in that capacity) and scheduled as other parishioners. This is important because many of their field experiences (such as prison, hospital, and nursing home ministries) will involve the distribution of Communion.

Prior to installation as lectors and acolytes, those in formation should be placed on the usual parish rotation of ministries, with the caveat that they should exercise the assigned ministry *at least* one weekend per month. They should also exercise these various ministries during weekdays and at other liturgies (such as weddings, funerals, and baptisms) as availability allows.

During the first year, aspirants are asked to serve in the ministries of hospitality (usher/greeter) and during the second year they are asked to serve as sacristans and as ministers of the liturgical environment. During the first year of candidacy, they are to function as altar servers (vested as is usual in the parish).

Between the first and second years of candidacy, the men will be instituted as lectors. As such, they should now be assigned to proclaim the readings at one Mass per weekend. This is important not only for the development of their skills but also for the parish to gain familiarity with them. Instituted lectors may vest in an alb and be seated in the sanctuary, according to local custom. This is the practice if they exercise this ministry at diocesan liturgies.

Between the second and final year of candidacy, the men will be instituted as acolytes. Therefore, they are to serve as acolytes in their parish at one Mass per weekend. This ministry includes both serving at the altar *and* distributing Communion. In addition, they ought to be involved in bringing Communion to the homebound if not yet doing so. When exercising this ministry, they are to vest in alb and sit with the other servers.

Preaching

Also between the second and third year of candidacy, the men will complete a homiletic intensive at St. Meinrad. In addition, they will have been preaching at the Liturgy of the Hours on formation weekends throughout candidacy. Therefore, if deemed suitable, they will be granted faculties as lay preachers at this time. This means that they will be able to preach liturgically outside of Mass (ex: Communion services, funeral vigils and funeral liturgies outside Mass, Liturgy of the Hours); they may not preach at Eucharist. Prior to being granted faculties, aspirants and candidates are not to preach liturgically. If an exception is thought to be necessary, then the Director of Formation ought to be contacted.

Other Ministries (Field Education)

As noted above, an aspirant or candidate must complete 50 hours of supervised field education each year. Field experiences are explored within the parish, in the community outside of the parish and at the diocesan level. Pastors may be asked to serve as supervisors for these experiences. If so, a Handbook for Field Education Supervisors is also available.

Financial Support

Parishes should cover the costs associated with attending the annual Deacon's Retreat and Deacon Study Days. Parishes are asked to assist the candidate with expenses associated with attending the Homiletic Intensive at St. Meinrad's (summer after the second year of Candidacy). If a parish wishes to assist the aspirant or candidate with travel, childcare, or book expenses, they are encouraged to do so. The parish may also assist the candidate by providing or purchasing an alb.

Evaluation/Recommendation

As noted above, pastors are an important voice in the assessment of the aspirant or candidate for continuing formation and ultimately for ordination. Therefore, each year, pastors are asked to submit their recommendation, in writing, to the Director of Formation. The form will be given to the pastor by the aspirant or candidate, and should be returned directly to the Director of Formation. A copy of the form is reproduced below; it is also available on our website. The form is due back by March 15 to:

Director of Deacon Formation
Diocese of Davenport
780 West Central Park Avenue
Davenport, IA 52804

As the *Directory* states:

It is essential, therefore, that those who are responsible for selection and formation, including pastoral placement, discern whether the participant has integrated the various dimensions in formation that are needed for an effective diaconal ministry. Further, consultation with the **participant's pastor**, the faculty, other pastoral field education supervisors, mentors, those whom the participant serves, and, if married, his wife is crucial to the discernment process. The surest indicator, however, is the participant's previous and present effectiveness in Church service. (#154)

Interviews should be scheduled regularly with the candidates and their families, **their pastors** and pastoral supervisors, members of the faculty, and mentors. The director of formation and those who collaborate with him should gather at regularly scheduled times to stay informed about a candidate's progress. They should address concerns and become collectively aware of their common collaborative role in assisting, counseling, and assessing the candidate. This responsibility should be regarded as their most important task. Due care must be taken, however, to preserve the confidentiality of spiritual direction in these proceedings. (#226)

In the Diocese of Davenport, this consultation is usually done in writing. If necessary, the Director of Formation is available to meet directly with the pastor in person or by phone.

Communication from the Deacon Formation Program

At the end of each year, pastors will receive a letter from the Director of Formation detailing the Bishop's decision regarding the aspirant's or candidate's continuation in or dismissal from the program and a brief outline of the components of formation for the coming year.

At the end of each year, the Director of Formation completes a report that is presented to the Bishop, providing "a synthesis of the candidate's achievements and limitations, particularly in reference to his human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral readiness for continuation in the formation process and, ultimately, for nomination to ordination" (#227). In addition to the spiritual director, pastors will also receive this synopsis of the strengths and concerns identified through the yearly evaluation process. The content used to prepare the report is also reviewed by the Admissions and Scrutinies Committee (#228). Hopefully, the information will be of assistance in guiding the aspirant/candidate in his formation at the parish level.

Communication with the Parish

Pastors ought to be catechizing the parish regarding the ministry of the deacon, especially if the parish has not had a deacon in the past. The Office of Deacon Formation is happy to assist in this endeavor if needed; handouts and other materials are available from the Office and on the Deacon Formation website: <https://www.davenportdiocese.org/deacon-formation>.

The Assignment of Deacons and Post-Ordination Formation

During the formation process, it should not be assumed that the aspirant or candidate will necessarily be assigned to the parish should he be ordained.

Formal formation does not end with ordination; the *Directory* calls for three years of directed post-ordination formation:

In designing the content for an ongoing formation program, those responsible "should take into consideration two distinct but closely related levels of formation: the diocesan level, in reference to the bishop . . . and the community level in which the deacon exercises his own ministry, in reference to the parish priest." The deacon is ordained for service to the diocesan Church, even though the focus of that service will usually be within a particular parochial community. Keeping a balance in this dual relationship is essential to his effectiveness as a deacon. (#242)

Resources

National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States (available on-line at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/diaconate/upload/DeaconDirectory.pdf>).

The Liturgical Ministry Series from Liturgy Training Publications (Chicago). (Individual volumes are available for the ministries of usher/greeter, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, sacristan, minister of liturgical environment, server, lector, member of the liturgy committee, and deacon.)

The Deacon Formation Program has produced a handbook used to teach Theological Reflection to those in formation. A copy is available from the Director.

Ditewig, William T. *101 Questions and Answers on Deacons*. New York: Paulist Press, 2004.

Ditewig, William T. *The Emerging Diaconate: Servant Leaders in a Servant Church*. New York: Paulist Press, 2007.

Garrido, Ann M. *A Concise Guide to Supervising a Ministry Student*. The Concise Guide Series, ed. Kevin McKenna. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008.

Gula, Richard. *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*. Manwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996.

Keating, James. *The Deacon Reader*. New York: Paulist Press, 2006.

Killen, Patricia O'Connell and John deBeer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York: Crossroads, 1994.

Whitehead, James D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995.

Pastor/PLC Recommendation Form

Instructions: Please give this to your pastor (or PLC) and ask him (or her) to fill it out and return it to the Director of Formation by March 15.

Name of Aspirant/Candidate: _____

Name of Pastor/PLC: _____

During the past semester, how effectively did the aspirant minister in the parish?

How well did he work with you and other members of the parish staff?

How were his interactions with parishioners?

What are areas of needed growth?

Suggestions you might have for this applicant:

Based on my knowledge of the candidate and his wife (if applicable) my recommendation regarding admission to the first year of Candidacy is as follows:

Recommend **Recommend with Reservations** **Not Recommended**

Reasons for the above choice:

Signature

Date