

Diocese of Amarillo

Diaconate Office



Dear Deacon Inquirer

Most Reverend Patrick J. Zurek is pleased to offer his blessing for the initiation of the Deacon Formation Class of 2020. This class will tentatively begin January 2016. The below is the *Inquirer's Guide to the Diaconal Ministry* offering information how to familiarize oneself with what constitutes the Diaconal Ministry, the qualifications and things that one should consider prior to committing to the Deacon Formation Process and the impact upon yourself, wife and family. The Diaconate is a major commitment and lifestyle change for your family, but it is most often a true blessing from the Lord!

1. WHAT IS THE DIACONAL MINISTRY?

A Permanent Deacon is described in the "Dogmatic Constitution – Lumen Gentium" as follows:

{29. At a lower level of the hierarchy are deacons, upon whom hands are imposed "not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service." For strengthened by sacramental grace, in communion with the bishop and his group of priests they serve in the diaconate of the liturgy, of the word, and of charity to the people of God. It is the duty of the deacon..., to administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, to officiate at funeral and burial services. Dedicated to duties of charity and of administration, let deacons be mindful of the admonition of Blessed Polycarp: "Be merciful, diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord, who became the servant of all."}

2. DIACONAL MINISTRY SUMMARIZED AS:

WORD: Deacons proclaim the gospel of Christ by lifestyle in words & deeds – with family, on the job, in the parish, and in the community.

LITURGY: Deacons assist at the altar by serving in various liturgical/sacramental functions. *Note: A deacon who functions only at the Altar – is not a deacon but an altar server with a speaking part.*

CHARITY: Deacons exercise the Corporal Works of Mercy.

Service: Deacons serve and support their Bishop, Pastor, Parish Body of Christ, and the Community as needs require. They do so from the heart with no expectation of financial remuneration or social-status elevation.

Bridge: Deacons are often the bridge between the secular and the sacred especially in areas such as marriage, social justice, language, cultural diversity, integration, and evangelization.

Partnership: A deacon should be in partnership with the Bishop and his pastor as helper, assistant, collaborator, and friend.

Commitment: A deacon's personal commitment should be: God, Family, Job, & Church. He must be able to maintain a reasonable balance remembering the Sacrament of Matrimony was received prior to Holy Orders. However he should not use Family & Job as an excuse to negate or lessen his commitment to Church and vice versa.

Two-for-one: While the wives will not be ordained, often they are very involved in the ministry, be it their own or sharing with their deacon husband. In order to ensure that they have an understanding of what constitutes diaconal ministry and the commitment being considered, their full participation in the formation process is essential.

Blessing: The diaconal ministry can be a wonderful – spiritual blessing for the Deacon, Wife and Family.

3. BISHOP and DEACONS:

Deacons are ordained by and thus serve the Bishop in those ministries and parishes where the need is most critical. While much of your ministry is at the parish level, many deacons also function at other ministries outside the parish as designated by the Bishop.

4. PARISH DIACONAL MINISTRY:

The pastor, along with the parish staff and parish council, should consider the needs of the parish as they relate to Diaconal Ministry both currently and for the future of the parish.

Deacons function in a variety of ministries of Worship & Liturgy, Pastoral & Spiritual, and Religious Education & Sacramental Preparation usually associated with the parish of assignment.

Worship & Liturgy:

- Sunday & Weekdays Services
- Baptisms,
- Marriage
- Funerals, Vigils, Graveside
- Quinceañera
- Stations of the Cross
- Other Devotion & Prayer Services

Pastoral & Spiritual Life of the Parish:

- Evangelization, Hispanic Ministry,
- Social Justice, Prison/Jail, Charity,
- Sanctity of Life, Hospice, Welcoming,
- Sick Visitation, Ecumenical relations

Religious Education/Sacramental Preparation:

- Baptism, Holy Communion,
- First Penance, Confirmation,
- Marriage, RCIA,
- Adult Education, Youth,
- Children, Safe Environment

5. ADMISSION THOUGHTS TO PONDER

Do I have a relationship with Jesus Christ?

Do I have a visible and viable prayer and spiritual life?

Am I committed to live out Gospel values of justice, charity and service?

Have I been in full communion with the Church and have been so for no less than three (3) years?

Do I fully accept Church teachings?

If married: Is my marriage and family life stable and happy?

Does my wife have a visible and viable prayer life?

Have I prayed with my wife and discussed with her the impact the diaconal ministry will have upon her and our family?

Will my wife and I be able to attend monthly Deacon Formation Weekends (Friday evening - Sunday afternoon); plus time for homework, study groups (2 hours per month), social justice ministry (10 hours per) and parish internship (6 hours per) while maintaining a proper balance with family and job?

Will my wife and I be open to being assigned to another parish or diocesan ministry?

If I am single or if my wife should die, do I understand my commitment to celibacy?

Do I have an agreeable disposition and a pleasant/ friendly personality?

Would I be open to interacting with people of another race, language and/or culture?

Have I discussed with my pastor the diaconal ministry?

Will I be able to reasonably subject myself to the direction of the pastor and bishop?

Am I currently involved in parish and community ministry?

What skills I you believe that I possess that can be utilized in the life of the parish and to the benefit of the Catholic Diocese of Amarillo?

Do I believe that I have a calling to the vocation of Deacon?

Has anyone from my parish community suggested that I have such a calling?

Do I understand that I must be gainfully employed in that diaconal ministry does not offer any financial compensation for my services?

Will I be able to grasp freshman level college work in diaconal/academic studies?

Will I be open to new ideas, spiritual direction, and pastoral formation?

The formation classes will be conducted primarily in English. Do I have a working knowledge of English? {Some allowances will be made to assist those whose English skills are limited.}

In that the two predominate languages in the Amarillo Diocese are English and Spanish, you will be encouraged to learn to converse in both. If you are of another language background then that will be coupled with English.

Are you anticipating relocating outside of the Diocese of Amarillo within the next 10 years?

Are there any impediments (see below) that might preclude me from Diaconal Ministry?

6. IRREGULARITIES AND OTHER IMPEDIMENTS:

Can. 1040: Those bound by an impediment are to be barred from the reception of orders. An impediment may be simple; or it may be perpetual, in which case it is called an irregularity.

Can. 1041: The following persons are irregular for the reception of orders:

- 1* one who suffers from any form of insanity, or from any other psychological infirmity... that you interfere with the ministry;
- 2* one who has committed the offence of apostasy, heresy or schism;
- 3* one who has attempted marriage, even a civil marriage, either while himself prevented from entering marriage whether by an existing marriage bond or by a sacred order or by a public and perpetual vow of chastity, or with a woman who is validly married or is obliged by the same vow;
- 4* one who has committed willful homicide, or one who has actually procured an abortion, and all who have positively cooperated;
- 5* one who has gravely and maliciously mutilated himself or another, or who has attempted suicide;
- 6* one who has carried out an act of order which is reserved to those in the order of the episcopate or priesthood, while himself either not possessing that order or being barred from its exercise by some canonical penalty, declared or imposed.

7. REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION:

You must be at least 31 years of age and not more than 60 years of age at the time of acceptance into the Deacon Formation Program.

You may be single or married.

You must have working knowledge of English.

If married, you must demonstrate evidence of a stable marriage and sound family life. Your wife must fully support your entry into the formation program and must be willing herself to attend all weekend sessions.

At least three (3) years must have elapsed since annulment of a previous marriage and/or marriage to present spouse prior to acceptance into the formation program. If applicable, any and all child support payments must be current and/or paid in full.

If divorced and not remarried, you must obtain an annulment prior to acceptance into formation program. In addition you must fully understand your lifelong commitment to celibacy.

You must be economically stable and self-sufficient.

At least three (3) years must have elapsed since you were received into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church prior to acceptance into the formation program.

You must have a mature spiritual and prayer life and able to articulate your spiritual journey.

No impediments (Code of Canon Law 1040-1042) to ordination and/or the possibility of prior behavior, which could prove to be scandalous or harmful to the diocese, parish, you or your family. {See "Irregularities and Other Impediments".}

You must have a high school diploma or GED in order to complete the educational requirements of the formation program and to fulfill your ministerial obligations.

You must be a documented resident and/or citizen of the United States.

You must be in good health. It is required that you have a physical examination within six months of the application date, and that a report from the examining physician be submitted to the Diaconate Office stating that you can meet the rigors of formation training and diaconal ministry.

You and your wife must pass a criminal background history check.

You will undergo an extensive psychological evaluation as conducted by a Diocesan approved psychologist (cost covered by the diocese). Your wife will undergo a lesser evaluation.

You and your wife must be able to dedicate the time necessary to fulfill the formation requirements. It is a major commitment!

You must have full support of the Parish Pastor.

You must have a valid and current Email Address.

8. SPONSORING & SUPERVISING:

As an inquirer you must make your interest in the diaconal ministry known to your pastor. He must submit a letter endorsing and sponsoring you. No applicant is accepted without the pastor's recommendation and full support.

The pastor will be your supervisor, mentor and a friend and is to provide spiritual & emotional support for you and your wife.

9. INTERNSHIP:

As an applicant you will be required to function in those ministries most visible at the altar.

You should become a Lector, a Eucharistic Minister, and serve as an altar server.

In addition you should be currently participating at your parish. You should also seek to participate in the full ministry of the parish by visiting the sick, assisting at funerals, teaching religious education, working with engaged couples, being a representative at community events, and seeking the direction of the pastor, etc.

During your formation you will also have to serve in a Charitable and/or Social Justice Ministry of 10 hours per month.

10. EVALUATING:

A formal evaluation from the pastor assessing your progress not only for entry into the program but with each of the four canonical steps: Applicant to CANDIDATE, to LECTOR, to ACOLYTE, and to PERMANENT DEACON.

Regular meetings between you and the pastor are required.

11. DEACON FORMATION:

Deacon formation is a 4 ½ year process, averaging approximately 60 hours per month; tentatively beginning in January 2016 and concluding summer of 2020.

It will cover the dimensions as listed in the "National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States" to include:

- Spiritual Enhancement
- Human Enrichment
- Theological/Academic Understanding
- Pastoral Development
- (plus) Supervised Internship

The first semester, will be Saturdays from 9:00am until 3:00pm (subject to modification).

The remaining semesters, will require overnight stay from Friday evening until late Sunday afternoon.

ACTS CHAPTER 6:

The Hellenists complained ... because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ... So they presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.

**For further information contact Deacon Blaine Westlake,
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or visit the Amarillo Diocesan Website at: www.amarillodiocese.org**

