



Roman Catholic Diocese of Paterson

# THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

Journey of discernment to be ordained a Deacon

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Diocese of Paterson  
Office of the Bishop



*Dear Brothers in Christ,*

*Thank you for your interest in the Permanent Diaconate for the Diocese of Paterson. This pamphlet will give you some information to help with your discernment.*

*The deacon has a unique calling and his response to that call acknowledges God's special design in his life and, indeed, in the life of his family if he is a husband and father. The call is not away from the world but rather into it. The deacon, a symbol of service, makes a difference through his dedication and the manner and form in which he publicly responds through ministry. He is willing to take risks and to re-define his life by selfless service to others who, with him, share the enterprise of life. Yet, as a man of God, the deacon must be a man of prayer and reflection, open to pondering his experiences in the light of his faith.*

*Please contact the Office of the Permanent Diaconate for added information.*

*Yours in Christ,*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Kevin J. Sweeney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

*Most Rev. Kevin J. Sweeney*

*Bishop of Paterson*

## **PROFILE OF A DEACON**

The Church as servant carries on the mission of Christ. The deacon a witness to the serving Christ, is a man of faith called by the Church to serve God and his neighbor as an official representative of the Church in loving service to others in the community and in the marketplace.

The deacon's life is one of service. Christ states, "*I have not come to be served but to serve*". An ordained minister of the church, the deacon receives the Sacrament from his bishop. He is "*in communion with bishops and priests,*"

Although his strength comes from the altar, the deacon's service is not limited to the sanctuary but encompasses service to the world, or more directly, to a community seeking Jesus.

The leadership-service of the deacon is not performed in isolation but in union with other ordained and non-ordained ministers in the Church. His specific charism (lifetime service) is manifested in the varied works of charity to which he is called. For practical consideration, this is divided into a three-fold ministry:

### **MINISTRY OF LITURGY:**

The deacon is ordained to assist at Liturgy to proclaim the Gospel and deliver homilies; administer baptism solemnly; witness and bless marriages; officiate at wakes, funerals, burial services and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and preside over prayer services, non-sacramental penitential celebrations and the Liturgy of the Hours.

### **MINISTRY OF THE WORD:**

Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus in the Gospel periodically called to preach, catechize and evangelize.

### **MINISTRY OF SERVICE & CHARITY:**

Responding to the needs of the People of God through various works of Charity

Some specific forms of service and Charity in which the deacon may be involved are: health care ministry, youth ministry, prison ministry, campus ministry, peace and justice ministry, pastoral counseling, religious education, baptism and marriage preparation and ministry to the elderly, the homeless, the divorced and separated, the marginated as AIDS victims, drug addicts, migrant workers and refugees. Deacons also may be administrators on the diocesan or parish level

Through ordination, the deacon publicly commits himself to the responsibility of communicating God's Word and announcing His Kingdom in and through the Church. He is publicly acknowledged by the Church as one called by the Spirit for the good of the entire community of believers.

## **CRITERIA/QUALIFICATION FOR ADMISSION TO THE** **DIACONATE**

The following conditions should be evident in one who is considered a prospective candidate for the diaconate:

- Between the ages of 31 and 59
- Adequate physical and psychological health.
- Personal faith commitment over a number of years.
- A faithful, stable marriage and family life. If single, a stable, settled life
- Written consent of wife.
- A free acceptance of conditions of continued celibacy (single candidate) and no re-marriage after ordination in the event of spouse's death.
- Evidence of ministry/service in parish (minimum 2 years).
- Evidence of good relationships with others outside the home especially on the job.
- Stable employment history and financial stability
- Openness to spiritual, theological and ministerial formation.
- Bachelor's degree and learning capability to assimilate study material and fulfill academic requirements leading to a Master's degree in Theology. (Exceptions may be made for non-degree applicants who have other outstanding qualifications.)
- Ability to make time for formation without detriment to quality time with family or interference with work schedule.
- Demonstrated willingness to invest oneself in formation (commitment).



## **ADMISSION PROCESS**

The following steps comprise the admission process for the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Paterson:

1. Participate in two informative sessions with spouse.
2. Submitting the completed application along with:
  - Letter of endorsement from pastor.
  - Recent copies of certificates of baptism confirmation and matrimony.
  - Brief but complete autobiography.
  - Health evaluation from physician.
  - Recent wallet-sized photo.
3. Submitting to an assessment interview (wife included).
4. Submitting to psychological assessment.
5. Submit college transcript.
6. Proof of citizenship

## **FORMATION PROCESS**

The permanent diaconate formation program for the Diocese of Paterson seeks to provide a total environment in which a candidate can grow into that unique character intended for him by God. The program integrates the **spiritual, academic, pastoral and human** dimensions into a preparation so vital for a person seeking a life of total commitment to church service. Such preparation and integration fosters a spirit of community among the candidates and their families.

Candidates accepted into the program are required to undergo formal training for a one-year period of Inquiry and Aspirancy and then four years of academic, pastoral and spiritual development after a period. A timeline follows giving more details of this formation.

**Spiritual formation** process integrates the doctrinal, theological, biblical and ministerial development for the expression of a life lived in Christian faith. The candidates are guided in methods of prayer, meditation and self-awareness. If they do not already have a spiritual director, candidates are encouraged to find one. Candidates are indoctrinated into the practice of communal prayer-the Liturgy of the Hours. -and a shared reflection on a given theme nightly preceding classes and spiritual development activities as appropriate. Candidates also are required to make an annual retreat.

**Academic development** encompasses foundational studies in the Old Testament, New Testament, Christology, ecclesiology, moral theology early Christianity, theology of ministry, liturgy, sacraments, spirituality and canon law. The program leads to a Master's degree in Theology. The academic dimension is in conjunction with Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology, at Seton Hall University.

**Pastoral development** includes social concerns awareness, family life ministry, counseling, etc., Candidates participate in Practicums in Catholic Charities, Health Care, Homiletics and Liturgical Rites.

**Human development** includes assessment and development of personal qualities, relationships with others, ability to balanced life and personnel care as a person and minister.

## **DIACONATE FORMATION TIMELINE**

### **Nomination Phase**

- Bishop asks Pastors for potential nominees
- Nominees invited to Info sessions with wives

### **Inquiry Phase**

- Formal applications submitted
- Interviews.
- Psychological Evaluations.
- Final recommended list of candidates

### **Aspirancy Phase**

- Couples meet monthly for spiritual and pastoral topics

### **Candidacy\***

- Five years of academic training for Master's degree in Theology
- Practicums for social services, health care, homiletics and liturgy

### **Ordination**

- Pre-ordination Canonical retreat

*\* During all years of Candidacy:*

*- Spirituality Sessions once per month.*

*- Pastoral Sessions once per month*



## **ROLE OF THE FAMILY DURING FORMATION**

The formation program in the Paterson Diocese considers the collaborative role of the wife in diaconal ministry. Wives are encouraged to attend some academic classes, monthly pastoral sessions and spirituality sessions.

The thoughts and feelings of the children, especially the older ones, are given consideration. During the initial interview, their responses are discussed with the candidate and his wife. Following admission into the program the candidate and his wife are encouraged to talk about the diaconate periodically with the older children, helping them to be in touch with their responses, and allaying any fear of expectations their children may imagine is being placed upon them.

## **DIACONAL MINISTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE**

The married deacon has three priorities:

1. As husband and father is to his family
2. To his job or profession
3. To his diaconal ministry and the Church

There is much to be said on behalf of the presence of married ministers in the Church, as experience is demonstrating. While it is hoped that marriage will enrich diaconal ministry, the demands of diaconal service can impinge on married life, especially when there are young children in the family.

Although diaconal ministry can flourish within the context of marriage, it is essential that husband and wife understand the implication of this ministry. This is so important that the revised Code of Canon Law requires that the candidate's wife give her consent in writing to his ordination. In fact, in the Paterson Diocese the wife's consent must be given before an applicant will be considered for admission into the diaconate program.



Deacon Ordination August 2020 Diocese of Paterson



**For further information, please write or call:**

**Director Permanent Diaconate**

**973-377-1004 x407**

**PERMANENT DIACONATE OFFICE**

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