



Diaconate Overview

Office of the Diaconate
Diocese of Worcester

March 2021



Agenda

- Opening Prayer
- History and Ministry of the Diaconate
- Ordained and Family Life
- Candidate Eligibility Requirements
- Diaconate Formation Process
- Formation Expenses
- Application Process
- Questions and Answers
- Closing Prayer



Opening Prayer



Prayer of Vocational Discernment

Lord, our God and our loving Father, you have made us to know you, to love you, to serve you, and thereby to find and to fulfill our deepest longings. You are in all things, and every path can lead us to you.

Since we will to do what you want of us, we pray you, send your Holy Spirit to us: into our minds, to show us what you want of us; into our hearts, to give us the determination to do it; and to do it with all our love, with all our mind, and with all of our strength right to the end. Jesus, we trust in you.

Amen





History and Ministry of the Diaconate



Called to Serve

“If I, therefore, the Master and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” *John 13:14-15*





The First Deacons Filled a Need

Acts of the Apostles 6:1-3, 5-6

As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews 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...”**

So they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them.**



Acts of the First Deacons

- Stephen preached (Acts 6:8-7:60)
 - He “worked great wonders and signs” among the people
 - He was persecuted and stoned to death for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Philip preached and baptized (Acts 8:4-13,26-40)
 - He unpacked Scripture to the Ethiopian eunuch (“proclaimed Jesus to him”) and baptized him at the side of the road



What Exactly is a Deacon?

- The Deacon is a distinct order within the ordained ministry of the Church (bishop, priests, deacons).
- The word “deacon” comes from the Greek *diakonia*, which means “service among others.”
- A deacon assists the bishop and priest in carrying out the Church’s mission, proclaiming by his life the Church's call to serve the needs of others in the diocese.
- The deacon is a living icon of Christ, the Servant
- **The deacon exercises a ministry of SERVICE.**



Deacons are Servant Leaders

- Focus on social services and issues related to social justice
- Lead and participate in the new evangelization, heralding the Gospel in today's society
- Take the initiative to identify and care for the pastoral and spiritual needs of the People of God, especially the marginalized and “poor in spirit”
- Often referred to as the “eyes and ears of the bishop”
 - Respond to the needs of the Diocese under the leadership and authority of the Bishop
 - Obedient to the Bishop and his delegates



What Do Deacons Do?

Three-fold Ministry:

- Ministry of the Word
- Ministry of the Altar (Liturgy)
- Ministry of Charity (Service)



Ministry of the Word

- Proclaim the Gospel
- Preach the homily
- Instruct catechumens and members of the faith community (e.g., CCD, RCIA, Bible Study, etc.)
- Lead retreats and prayer services
- Evangelize through personal witness of the faith at home, work, and civic life



Ministry of the Altar (Liturgy)

- Assist the Priest at Mass
 - Proclaim the Gospel
 - Preach the Homily
 - Prepare the Altar
 - Ordinary Minister of the Eucharist
- Preside at Liturgies outside of Mass
 - Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Wakes, Burials
 - Communion Services
 - Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction
 - Blessings



Ministry of Charity (Service)

- Pastoral Care
 - Visit the sick and homebound
 - Bring Viaticum to the dying
 - Youth and Young Adult Ministry
 - Assist in the parish's Social Services ministries
- Extra-Parochial Ministries
 - Prison Ministry
 - College Campus Ministry
 - Social Services (food kitchen, homeless shelter, etc.)
 - Minister to the mentally ill, chemically dependent, abused, etc.
 - Pro-Life Ministry
 - Ethnic Ministry



Ordained and Family Life



Life Balance



† The deacon's wife and family play a critical role in ensuring that the deacon does not overcommit himself in ministry



Ministry Commitment

- Twelve to fifteen hours in ministry per week
- Deacons are usually assigned within a half-hour radius of their home
- Minimum 30 CEUs annually for ongoing formation
- Annual weekend retreat
- Spiritual Direction (monthly)



Candidate Eligibility Requirements



Minimum Qualifications

- Be fully initiated in the Roman Catholic Church
 - Converts and reverts of faith will be accepted after five years have passed from their (re-)entry into the Church
- Actively practices the faith
 - Regular attendance at Sunday and Holy Day Masses and reception of the Eucharist
 - Live in accord with the laws and teachings of the Church
 - Have good moral qualities and an active prayer life
 - Be registered and actively involved with a parish in the Diocese of Worcester for at least five years
 - Be recommended by his pastor
 - Be desirous of dedicating himself to a life of service



Minimum Qualifications (cont.)

- If married, be in a marriage recognized as valid by the Church for at least five years
 - The applicant's wife must agree completely with his decision to enter the program
- If not married, be willing to accept the ecclesial discipline of perpetual celibacy
- If widowed, at least three years have elapsed since the passing of his wife



Minimum Qualifications (cont.)

- Between the ages of 31 and 60 years at the time of acceptance into the program
- United States Citizen or permanent resident
- Have a college degree or equivalent (e.g. life experience)
- Be free of mental and physical deficiencies that would prevent one from fulfilling ministry effectively
- Be clear of canonical irregularities and impediments to Holy Orders



Diaconate Formation



Two Phases of Formation

1. Aspirancy
2. Candidacy



Aspirancy Phase

Two years of formation, including:

- Initial discernment period
- Academic course work
- Spiritual gatherings



Initial Discernment Period

Designed to help the aspirant discern and probe the mystery and authenticity of the call to diaconal ministry

- Gain a stronger understanding the ministry of the deacon, the impact on family and work, and the human behaviors that are proper to diaconal ministry
- Develop a higher degree of self-knowledge and self-esteem
- Develop one's prayer life and personal relationship with God



Discernment Schedule

- Begins around Labor Day for ten weeks
- Two nights per week (usually Mondays and Wednesdays)
- Centrally located (greater Worcester area)
- 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.
- Wives of married applicants are required to attend



Discernment Topics

Temporal Discernment

- History of the Diaconate
- Introduction to forms of prayer
- Wife panel (what is it like to be the wife of a deacon?)
- Diaconal and special ministries
- Impact of ministry on family and work

Spiritual Discernment

- Guided prayer, meditation, and self-reflection
- Understanding the call from God
- Developing an awareness of one's inner self
- Understanding the harmonic relationship between ministry and self



Admission into Formation

At the conclusion of the initial discernment period, the aspirant will be formally invited into formation if he meets the following criteria:

- He has discerned that God's will is validly leading him on the path to diaconal ministry
- His wife has discerned the same and supports him in his journey
- He has demonstrated the fundamental human and spiritual qualities needed for formation, as determined by the Office of the Diaconate.

If any of the three criteria are missing, the aspirant may be delayed to a future date or released from consideration.



Academic Course Work

Three ten- to twelve-week trimesters per academic year, two classes per trimester

Anna Maria College

- Graduate degree program at Anna Maria College, Master's in Pastoral Ministry
- Supplemental courses may be offered online through St. Joseph College, with up to six credits transferable to Anna Maria College

Diocesan

- Non-credit courses related to diaconal ministry that are not offered through the College
- Held on site at the parish or facility where the instructor is located

During the pandemic, some courses were held virtually through Zoom and/or other such remote communications media.



Academic Classes

Introductory courses are offered at first, with increasing degrees of difficulty as the candidate progresses in formation. Sample topics include:

- Foundations of Catholic Theology
- Catechism of the Catholic Church
- World Religions
- Old Testament Scripture
- New Testament Scripture

Wives of married aspirants are invited, but not required, to attend classes with the aspirant



Spiritual Activities

Designed to help the aspirant develop his spirituality and prayer life. Activities continue into Candidacy and include:

- Prayer and reflection before each in-person class
- Monthly prayer gatherings
- Afternoons of recollection
- Annual candidate and wife weekend retreat
- Regular meetings with a qualified spiritual director (must be a priest)

The aspirant's personal discernment is now part of his ongoing spiritual consciousness. He continues to probe the mystery of his call to ministry, validating its authenticity throughout every part of his journey toward ordination and beyond.



Other Formation Activities

In addition to his course work and spiritual activities, the aspirant also participates in the following activities:

- Mentoring by a seasoned, experienced deacon
- Continued development of interpersonal and leadership skills, such as time management and communications
- Lay ministries in his home parish as allowed by his personal schedule and based on parish needs



Candidacy Phase

Three years of formation, including:

- More advanced course work
- Spiritual gatherings
- Pastoral internship



Candidacy Eligibility

At the conclusion of the Aspirancy Phase, the aspirant will request in writing to the Bishop, admission into Candidacy for Holy Orders. Criteria for admission into Candidacy include:

- He has discerned that God's will continues to lead him on the path to ordained ministry
- His wife has discerned the same and supports him in his journey
- He has maintained the academic standards in his course work, is able to balance his family and job responsibilities with his formation activities, and has demonstrated a deepening of the human qualities and spirituality required of a future deacon.

If any of these criteria are missing, the aspirant's continued formation may be postponed to a future date, or he may be dismissed from formation.



Candidacy Course Work

Continued course work on more advanced topics of Catholic theology and diaconal ministry. Sample topics include:

- Christology
- Ecclesiology
- Mariology
- Moral Theology
- Liturgical Theology
- Sacramental Theology
- Catholic Social Teaching
- Pastoral Counseling
- Homiletics
- Presiding at Liturgy
- Sacramental Preparation
- Altar Practicum

Wives of married candidates are invited, but not required, to attend classes with the candidate



Other Formation Activities

- The candidate continues to be mentored by a seasoned, experienced deacon
- The candidate is instituted by the Bishop into the ministries of Lector and Acolyte
- In the last eighteen months of formation, he is assigned an internship within a local parish, where he will exercise various lay ministries including preaching and others as identified by the pastor
- Within the final six months of formation prior to ordination, the candidate attends a five-day retreat as required by Canon Law (no wives)



Ordination Readiness

Prior to ordination, the candidate petitions the Bishop in writing, requesting Holy Orders. At that time, the candidate must meet the following criteria:

- He has achieved the academic standards required in his course work
- He has demonstrated the necessary human, spiritual, and pastoral characteristics needed to enter into ordained ministry
- His wife has provided her written consent of his request for ordination
- Unmarried men must accept and commit to the ecclesial discipline of perpetual celibacy



Formation Expenses



Formation Cost Share Model

Category	Candidate	Diocese
Course Tuition		
Diocesan Courses	0%	100%
Anna Maria College	33.3% (the current tuition rate per credit hour)	33.3% (the current tuition rate per credit hour)
St. Joseph College	50%	50%
Books and related course materials	100%	0%

At the current tuition rate of \$585 per course at Anna Maria College, the candidate's total cost of formation is approximately \$6,435 plus the cost of books and related course materials. Additional Diocesan subsidies may be offered to candidates who demonstrate a financial need.



Application Process



Pre-Application

- Prior to applying, the inquirer is strongly encouraged to seek spiritual guidance from a qualified spiritual director, such as his local pastor or trusted member of the clergy or religious order.
- The inquirer is invited to contact the Office of the Diaconate to meet and discuss any detailed questions he may have regarding formation and ordained ministry.
- The inquirer is encouraged to speak with other deacons to gain a better understanding of ordained life and family-ministry balance.
- If he is married, the inquirer must gain the consent of his wife to pursue a vocation in the diaconate.
- Most importantly, the inquirer must pray and allow the Holy Spirit to guide him as he discerns ordained ministry.



Application[†]

- The applicant submits an application, including the candidate questionnaire, to the Office of the Diaconate containing his personal background, photo, and sacramental records.
- The applicant signs a Document of Waiver, waiving his rights to access information regarding evaluation of his application, readiness for ordination, and judgments about ministry.
- An initial interview is held at the Chancery with the applicant, his wife, and the Diaconate Director.
- Two or three interviews are conducted with a deacon or deacon couple; at least one is held in the applicant's home.

[†] All forms are available for download at:

<https://worcesterdiocese.org/diaconate-application-material>



Additional Evaluations

- Physical examination
- Eye (ophthalmological) examination
- Psychological, academic, and behavioral assessments
- Background check
- Three personal references
- Pastor's reference



Application Decision

- All materials are reviewed confidentially by the staff of the Office of the Diaconate, leading to a decision of acceptance, delay, or denial to enter the Discernment Phase of formation.
- A letter is sent to the applicant informing him of the decision. If accepted, he will also receive information with the schedule and location of the discernment sessions.
- The applicant responds in writing with his acceptance of the invitation to begin discernment.



Questions and Answers



Closing Prayer



Prayer to St. Stephen

O holy martyr and deacon St. Stephen,

We come before you today on behalf of all who faithfully serve the Church, and on all of us as we discern God's will in our lives.

We pray that you ask the Lord to fill our hearts with compassion, our minds with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, our hearts with zeal, and a deep desire for the salvation of souls.

Amen.





Thank You!

For more information:

- Web: www.worcesterdiocese.org/diaconate
- Phone: 508-929-4335
- Email: diaconate@worcesterdiocese.org