

WHAT IS A DEACON

The Catholic Deacon, who has received a unique call of the Holy Spirit from within, the call of all Christians to service and charity, is an ordained minister of the Catholic Church. By his ordination, the deacon is publicly committed to service in the name of Jesus Christ and by the laying on of hands by the bishop. Although a layperson can exercise much of the ministry for which a deacon is ordained, what distinguishes a deacon from a layperson is his vocation to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. As one who shares in that sacrament, the work of the deacon is similar to, yet different from, that of the bishop and priest. The bishop and priest are called to be shepherds of the flock, presiding at the very source of sacramental life of the Church, the Eucharist. The deacon's ministry of Charity, Liturgy, and Word flow from the Eucharist. He is sent by Christ, through the bishop and in close fraternal cooperation with the priests. While all Christians by baptism are called to service, the deacon is an official ecclesial sign of that service.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF DIACONATE?

Tradition associates the origins of the permanent diaconate with the selection of seven men of "good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom . . ." from the Jerusalem community. They were ordained by the Apostles as mentioned by Luke in Acts. 6, in order to fulfill certain needs in the early church community. It was therefore, out of the need for service to the community that "diakonos", which is Greek for servant, was rooted. Early evidence indicates that this office soon evolved along with that of bishop and priest, and became part of the structure of the Church, which was necessary to carry on Christ's saving work.

History bears witness to great saints who served the Church as deacons: Stephen, the first martyr; Philip, the evangelist; Lawrence, the Roman martyr; Francis of Assisi, whose diaconal lifestyle embraced poverty and simplicity. For various historical reasons, the permanent diaconate declined in importance beginning with the fourth century and later became a transitional step toward the priesthood.

On June 18, 1967, in the spirit of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI restored the order of deacon as a permanent ministry in the Church. In August of 1968, the American bishops obtained permission to restore this ministry in the United States.

In 1969, under the leadership of the late Archbishop Francis J. Furey, the Archdiocese of San Antonio became one of the original thirteen dioceses of the United States to begin a permanent diaconate formation program. In 1971, the first permanent deacon was ordained in this Archdiocese. Presently, over 300 deacons serve in parishes, hospital and other archdiocesan programs.

WHAT DOES A DEACON DO?

The Dogmatic constitution on the Church speaks of three areas of diaconal service- ministry of liturgy, ministry of Word, and ministry of charity.

1. **Ministry of Liturgy:** This includes assisting at Mass; reading the Gospel; preaching the homily; administering baptism; witnessing marriages, officiating at wakes and funerals; administering sacraments; presiding at prayer services.
2. **Ministry of Word:** The deacon reads and preaches in liturgical gatherings; teaches in religious education programs; teaches at informal gatherings and meetings.
3. **Ministry of Charity:** The deacon is a man ordained to service and therefore the deacon can: witness to the Gospel through person to person encounters; minister to the aged, the sick, prisoners, young adults, youth, college campuses, schools, CCD programs, inner city poor; participate in programs dealing with community problems, marriage preparation, family life, retreats, parish and diocesan gatherings.

In short, the deacon of today has the flexibility to dedicate his special talents, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through the Church, to contribute to the mission of Christ within his own world of community activity. The Diaconate broadens the concept of ministry and makes it possible for more to share in it in varying ways.

After ordination, the deacon is assigned by the Archbishop and enters into a formal agreement with the specific parish or community.

WHAT IS THE DEACON FORMATION PROGRAM?

The formation program offers an integrated course of development for a balanced diaconal ministry of charity, the Word and liturgy. The screening procedures at the time of application seek to project the likelihood of the individual's success in this three-fold ministry, based on his demonstrated aptitude and strength. Following this initial assessment and the judgment to admit an applicant, the program is committed to the development of the candidate's potential, and the course of preparation is designed to serve two purposes: 1) to challenge the candidate to grow in and through the refinement of his gifts of nature and grace; and 2) to provide him with the practical tools and the knowledge that will enable him to function confidently as a qualified and reliable minister of the Archdiocese of San Antonio. The course of preparation must respect individual variations, but must also rest on shared understandings, so that meeting the reasonable expectations of the Church may be assured by the maintenance of uniform standards.

The formation program recognizes that the interrelationship of the three focuses in the ministry of a deacon requires that the candidate be aided in growing spiritually, intellectually, and in the conscious use of his relational and caring talent. As an official witness of the Church to the mission of the servant Christ, the deacon is to be a personal presence of that loving self-expression of God, which he is commissioned to proclaim in word and deed. In the liturgy he is a focus of the Church's service to the world, which is nourished and formed in the Eucharist. His service to the word and in liturgy springs integrally from a spirituality that is expressed immediately and consistently, in caring and in advocacy. Thus the chief components in the plan of formation are spiritual development, theological and ministerial education and training in pastoral skills for creative Christian social service.

ALTERNATIVE PATH TO DIACONATE?

There is no “*alternative path*” to Diaconate Ordination. If you have a Degree, although it is important, Diaconate Formation is more than degrees and cannot be put aside. *Have you and are you now living a life in conformity to the call to Diaconate? What does Diaconate mean to you?* Time is necessary to begin living the Diaconal commitment. This is very different from an academic degree. As valuable as the degree is, so is the bonding with the rest of the Diaconal family of the Archdiocese.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION

1. The applicant must be minimally 32 years of age in order to begin the program
2. The applicant, if married, must have been married 5 years and demonstrate evidence of a stable marriage.
 - a. At least 5 years must have elapsed since annulment of a previous marriage and/or marriage to present spouse
3. If married, his wife must be supportive of his decision and give written consent of such support.
4. The applicant, if single, must demonstrate evidence of a stable lifestyle and occupation.
5. The applicant should be in good health emotionally and physically.
6. Applicant must be economically stable and self-sufficient.
7. The applicant must have a minimum of one year's experience of involvement and/or leadership in the parish community. This presupposes an ability to dialogue with and relate maturely to individuals and groups.
8. High school graduation or equivalent is required.
9. The applicant must possess a healthy understanding of the Church, contemporary Church ministry, and of Diaconate.
 - a. At least 3 years must have elapsed since the applicant came into communion with the Roman Catholic Faith.
10. The applicant must demonstrate a willingness to make a commitment of time and talent in the deacon formation program.
11. The applicant must be sponsored by a parish.
12. Each candidate should show evidence of potential progress toward the following goals of diaconal ministry. Therefore the candidate should be:
 - a. Authentic: Shows a free, prayerful response to a sincerely-felt calling, reflects a realistic understanding of the role of a deacon. Is self-motivated in his service.
 - b. Credible: Manifests gospel values in his lifestyle, is a man of integrity in family life, business and diaconal service. Is a good and positive influence on the Christian faith for others.
 - c. Responsible: Is capable of initiative and leadership, willingly and dependably undertakes whatever is necessary to fulfill his commitments. Deals well with accountability, able to do justice to family, business and diaconal responsibilities.
 - d. Prayerful: Has developed a personal prayer-life, takes advantage of opportunities to deepen spiritual life. Spiritual director, retreat, reading, etc. Participates faithfully in the Church's sacramental life.
 - e. Ecclesial: Sees the Church as the people of God and ministry as service to them, is neither overly submissive nor rebellious towards the Church's law and authority, appreciates tradition, yet operates out of a contemporary post-Vatican II Catholicism, is able to accept and carry out directions from his assigned pastor or his ordinary,
 - f. Collaborative. Is cooperative and collaborative in his ministry, open, flexible, communicative, has good working relationship with parish staff.
 - g. Intelligent: Is able to reflect on his experiences and integrate learning into his life, has a sound understanding of the faith and able to articulate it in a contemporary way, takes advantage of opportunities for continuing education: reading, workshops, etc. Has a good understanding of contemporary life and thought.
 - h. Service-oriented: Sees service as the priority of his diaconal ministry is sensitive to social issues and the plight of the poor willingly seeks out and responds to the needs of people, is relaxed, empathetic, perceptive, and

responsive to people, is able to Communicate well with others, individuals and groups. Is able to respond, as a whole person is humble in his service.

- i. **Balanced:** Has a realistic self-appreciation and is able to deal constructively with problems and difficulties. Has a sense of the appropriate in behavior, language, dress, etc. Is balanced and consistent in thoughts, emotions and behavior, is realistic in his Diaconal commitments in order to do justice to family and business, paces himself and maintains good health.

PROCEDURES FOR ADMISSION:

1. Interested individuals should contact the Director, Rev. Jim Rutkowski or Maria Gonzalez, Fr. Jim's Secretary.

Application requires submission of the following documentation

Application

Autobiography

Education record (transcripts)

Baptism certificate (current and annotated)

First Communion and Confirmation certificates

Updated Criminal Background Check

Marriage certificate

Decrees (Divorce, Annulments)

Proof of Citizenship

High School Diploma

Military Discharge (If applicable)

Letters of recommendation from pastor, Spouse, Member of Pastoral Staff of Parish, Member of the Parish Council, Deacon friend and a Priest friend.

Medical Record

2. After necessary documentation has been submitted to the Director, the applicant and his spouse will be scheduled for a series of interviews and tests.

All inquiries should be addressed to:

**The Director, Diaconate Program
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San Antonio TX 78228**

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