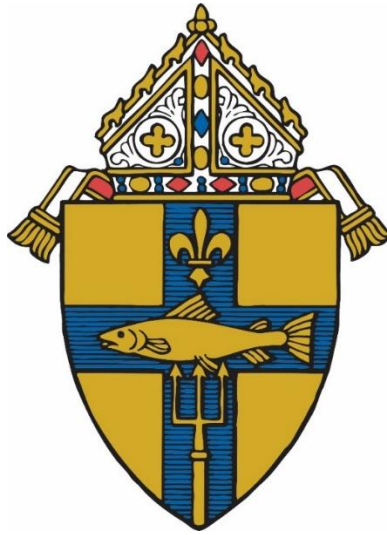


Inquirer Guide for the Permanent Diaconate



Archdiocese of Indianapolis

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ABBREVIATIONS

BNFPD: Congregation for Catholic Education, Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons (*Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Diaconorum Permanentium*), Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998).

CANON: Code of Canon Law. (1999). Canon Law society of America.

cc: canons

CCC: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd. Ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000)

NDFML: The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States of America (Second). (2021). United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

PDGFM: Permanent Deacons in the United States: Guidelines for Their Formation and Ministry, NCCB Bishops' Committee on the Permanent Diaconate, 1984 Revision.

PREFACE

Every individual receives a vocational call through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. For all Christians, this universal call is a call to holiness, and through God's grace, we share His boundless love by serving one another in charity. We express this call through various paths: the Single Life, Married Life, Ordained Ministry, and Religious Life. Discerning a vocation to the diaconate is a profound journey of faith and service inviting men to imitate Christ as servant-leaders in the Church.

Understanding your personal vocation to holiness and service is an ongoing journey—it's not a one-time occurrence, nor is it always simple. It takes time, prayer, and a commitment to truly listen to how God intends to utilize your distinctive gifts and talents to benefit His people. The insights of your spouse, family, pastor, and faith community enrich the discernment process.

This guide serves as a valuable resource for those contemplating a vocation to the Permanent Diaconate within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. If you believe God is inviting you toward Holy Orders, we encourage you to explore this inquirer's guide thoroughly. Should you seek additional information, please get in touch with the Director of Deacon Formation, Deacon Kerry Blandford, at kblandford@archindy.org or Deacon John Jacobi, Associate Director of Deacon Formation, at jjacobi@archindy.org.

INTRODUCTION

The diaconate had its origins in apostolic times and flourished in the first four centuries of the Church's history. Later, for very complex reasons, the diaconate went into decline. In the Eastern Church, the deacon's liturgical roles were fully retained, though the role of serving the needs of the community was gradually obscured. In the Western Church, the diaconate became little more than a step on the way to the priesthood.

In the present time, there exists among priests both a genuine desire to help the deacon discover his role within the Church, as well as an uncertainty as to where the deacon fits. How does the role of a permanent deacon differ from that of the transitional deacon? How much of the work of the priest should be delegated to the deacon? These questions are certainly valid and to be expected, as there are few modern precedents or models. Although not a new structure within the Church, the permanent diaconate has only been visible to the Indianapolis archdiocese since 2004. In that same year, twenty-five men were selected to begin diaconal formation and were later ordained on Saturday, June 28, 2008.

The bishops of the United States have acknowledged that: "It was the Second Vatican Council that restored the diaconate as a permanent ministry in the Church. Three primary motives were at work in the discussion before and at the council that led to this decision. The first was a desire to restore the full complement of active apostolic ministries to the Church. A second motive was a desire to integrate and strengthen with sacramental ordination and grace those who were, in fact, already exercising diaconal functions. The third goal was to provide ministers for those regions where functions vital to the Church's life could not be carried out." (PDGFM #19)

In addition, when the bishops of the United States petitioned the Holy See and sought permission for the restoration of the diaconate, the following reasons were given in their letter of May 2, 1968:

1. "To complete the hierarchy of sacred orders and to enrich and strengthen the many and various diaconal ministries at work in the United States of America with the sacramental grace of the diaconate
2. To enlist a new group of devout and competent men in the active ministry of the Church
3. To aid in extending needed liturgical and charitable services to the faithful in both large urban and small rural communities

4. To provide an official and sacramental presence of the Church in areas of secular life, as well as in communities within large and sparsely settled regions where few or no priests are available
5. To provide an impetus and source for creative adaptations of diaconal ministries to the rapidly changing needs of our society.” (NDFML #5)

Undoubtedly, the role of the parish priest has become increasingly complicated, he is expected to function as an administrator, liturgist, counselor, educator, minister, etc. No one individual can be all things to all people. Therefore, there is a need to take a creative look at parish structures in terms of what tasks can be delegated to others willing and able to become involved. As an ordained minister of the Church, the Permanent Deacon is among these persons.

I. THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS

“The Church, itself the great sacrament of Christ’s presence, rejoices in another outpouring of the Spirit—the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Out of the body of initiated believers—anointed in the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Baptism, strengthened in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and nurtured with the Bread of Life—Christ calls some to ordained service. The Church, discerning their vocational charism, asks the diocesan bishop to ordain them to *diakonia*.

Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles and their successors continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time. Thus, it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry: The mission of the Apostles, which the Lord Jesus continues to entrust to the Pastors of his people, is a true service, significantly referred to in Sacred Scripture as ‘*diakonia*,’ namely, service or ministry. This *diakonia* is exercised on different levels by those who from antiquity have been called bishops, priests and deacons. The ordained ministries, apart from the persons who receive them, are a grace for the entire Church. These two terms—apostle and servant—go together. They can never be separated. They are like the two sides of a medal. Those who proclaim Jesus are called to serve, and those who serve proclaim Jesus.” (NDFML #25-26)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the Sacrament of Holy Orders in this way:

Catholic doctrine, expressed in the liturgy, the Magisterium, and the constant practice of the Church, recognizes that there are two degrees of ministerial participation in the priesthood of Christ: the episcopacy and the presbyterate. The diaconate is intended to help and serve them. For this reason, the term *sacerdos*¹ in current usage denotes bishops and priests but not deacons. Yet Catholic doctrine teaches that the degrees of priestly participation (episcopate and presbyterate) and the degree of service (diaconate) are all three conferred by a sacramental act called “ordination,” that is, by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. (CCC #1554)

¹ *Sacerdos* is a Latin word that means “priest” or “priestess.” It was used in antiquity to refer to a person who performed rituals to maintain the relationship between gods and the state or a group within the state.

“St. Paul points out that the Holy Spirit is the source of all ministries in the Church and that these services are quite distinct (see 1 Cor 12:4- 11; Rom 12:4-8). The distribution of ministerial gifts follows a design set by Christ: In the building up of Christ’s Body various members and functions have their part to play. There is only one Spirit who, according to His own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives His different gifts for the welfare of the Church. What has a special place among these gifts is the grace of the apostles to whose authority the Spirit Himself subjected even those who are endowed with charisms.”
(NDFML #27)

The Permanent Deacon is ordained as a living icon of Christ the Servant within the Church. He is a visible sign or sacrament of the Lord Christ himself.

II. THE CALL TO THE DIACONATE

1. First Principle

“Those who have worked closely with the re-establishment of the diaconate conclude that the diaconate is a particular vocation called forth by the Holy Spirit, that a successful process of training and development can only cooperate with and build upon fundamental preexisting traits and dispositions that point to a diaconal vocation, and that the process of training and development can be successful only in supportive life circumstances. Such life circumstances include but are not limited to a stable marriage (if the candidate is married), a stable family life, and a career that does not violate Church teaching or canon law and allows sufficient time and energy for formation.” (NDFML #167)

The call to ordained ministry comes from God through the Church, which is responsible for determining a vocation if it is truly present. The essential principle is that the diaconate is a ministry, a way of serving the Church, and never merely an honor or personal reward.

2. What is Expected of a Deacon?

- A. An understanding that he has a diocesan responsibility responding to a call to serve in a variety of settings;
- B. Competence in the threefold ministries of Word, Liturgy, and Charity;

- C. A willingness to serve the diocesan Church wherever needed and strengthen the diaconal character of the Church as a presence within diocesan structures and parish communities.

3. The Parish and Beyond

- A. Deacons are ordained to assist the bishop in his pastoral service; he appoints them to their assigned ministry. Deacons are typically given a parish and encouraged to have a diocesan (or “extra-parochial”) assignment, primarily in agencies such as hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons.
- B. In the parish, deacons serve in a variety of ministries, including social ministry, pastoral outreach, ministry of care, Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA), Christian Formation, Youth Ministry, etc..
- C. Deacons are called to serve as ministers of the Word. They teach, preach, and proclaim the Gospel.
- D. Deacons are called to serve as ministers of Liturgy. In addition to assisting the presider during the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy, they may solemnly baptize, witness marriages, bring Viaticum to the dying, preside over funerals and burials, preside over Liturgies of the Word, and communion services in the absence of a priest, officiate at celebrations of the Liturgy of the Hours and at exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, conduct public rites of blessings, offer prayer services for the sick and dying and administer the Church’s sacramentals, as designated in the *Book of Blessings*. Deacons are ordinary ministers of Holy Communion and have a special responsibility for the distribution of the chalice.
- E. Deacons are also called to serve as ministers of Charity, ministering to both the physical and spiritual needs of others. They provide outreach to those who are forgotten and are on the fringes of society: the poor, the sick, the homeless, and the outcast. Deacons serve in the social arena, calling forth the gifts of the community in service to others.
- F. With sacred ordination, the deacon is constituted a living icon of Christ the Servant within the Church” (BNFPD, nos. 9 and 11)

III. ADMISSION PROCESS

1. Process Outline

- A. Review and prayerfully consider the criteria for a vocation to the permanent diaconate (see below, *Criteria for Admission*), along with the *Model Standards for Readiness to the Aspirant Path*, found in the appendix, page A2.
- B. Meet with your pastor to express your interest in the permanent diaconate, seeking his input and support. He will supervise each stage of your formation and will offer, along with the whole parish, prayer, presence, and ministerial support. He will observe your relational practice of pastoral service and will provide assessments of you and your spouse (if married), the goal of which is to enable the formation staff to support and challenge you during your discernment.
- C. Secure a spiritual director (not your pastor or a member of your pastoral staff) to begin discerning a potential vocational calling to the permanent diaconate. Information on how to find a spiritual director is found in the appendix, page A3.

For clarification: if a man is selected to begin formation to the permanent diaconate, his spiritual director must be a priest.

- D. Contact the Office of Deacon Formation to schedule a personal meeting and begin an initial assessment of your readiness for admission.
- E. Attend the Inquiry for Discernment Sessions provided by the Office of the Diaconate (this is required for both the inquirer and his spouse, if married).
- F. When applications are being accepted, seek your pastor's endorsement. This requirement is a formal process to be considered for selection.
- G. Complete the application process.

2. Criteria for Admission

- A. The following are deemed necessary for admission into formation, namely:
 - i. He must be at least 35 years old at the time of ordination and must begin formation before his 61st birthday (exceptions at the discretion of the archbishop can be made for those over 60 years of age)

- ii. He and his wife, if married, are citizens or permanent residents of the United States
- iii. He has achieved the minimum educational requirement of a High School diploma or GED
- iv. Sufficient economic security and job security
- v. Good health and an understanding and willingness to accept the demands of formation and subsequent lifelong learning and commitment to diaconal ministry
- vi. Embraces a love and fidelity for all that the Church teaches
- vii. He is actively involved in parish and other community service.
- viii. He is in full communion with the Church. (At least five years should elapse between a convert's or returning Catholic's entry into the Church and his acceptance into formation; care must be given to someone in whom a sudden conversion experience seems to precipitate a diaconal vocation)
- ix. He is in a stable marriage for at least five years, if married, or in a mature celibate state of life, if single
- x. If married, he has the consent of his wife
- xi. If civilly divorced, he must receive a declaration of nullity prior to entry into the diaconal formation program
- xii. If widowed, at least five years should elapse before his acceptance into formation
- xiii. He is properly motivated and gives evidence of an overall personal balance and moral character
- xiv. He is a frequent participant in adult faith enrichment opportunities (e.g., retreats, days of reflection, spiritual direction, study of Scripture and church teachings)
- xv. He is free of canonical impediments or irregularities (cc. 1040-1042)
- xvi. Complete the archdiocesan Safe Parish program for the protection and care of children

- B. The following are behavioral patterns, spiritual and evangelical qualities discerned among exemplary deacons from *The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*. (NDFML)
- i. A natural inclination of service to the...Christian community and to all in need
 - ii. Psychological integrity
 - iii. A capacity for dialogue, which implies a sense of docility and openness
 - iv. The ability to share one's faith yet listen respectfully to other points of view
 - v. The capacity to listen carefully and without prejudice—respecting people in the context of their religion, race, gender, ethnicity, and culture
 - vi. Good communication skills
 - vii. A sense of responsibility that includes fulfilling one's word and completing one's work
 - viii. Self-directed and collaborative accountability
 - ix. Balanced and prudent judgment
 - x. Generosity in service
 - xi. The ability to lead, motivate, facilitate, and animate others into appropriate action and service
 - xii. A sound faith and a good Christian reputation
 - xiii. Active involvement in the Church's apostolate
 - xiv. Personal integrity, maturity, and holiness
 - xv. Regular participation in the Church's sacramental life
 - xvi. Evidence of recognized, ongoing love and commitment to the Church's life and service
 - xvii. Participation in faith enrichment opportunities (retreats, days of reflection, adult education programming)
 - xviii. A stable marriage, if married, or a mature celibate state of life, if single
 - xix. If married, the support and consent of his wife is required

- xx. Active membership in a Christian community
- xxi. Capacity for obedience and fraternal communion
- xxii. A deep spirituality and prayer life

C. Additional Considerations:

Since inquirers to the diaconate have many commitments to family, career, employment, community, and church service, it is a matter of prudential judgment to explore not only whether the call to the diaconate comes from the Holy Spirit, but also whether the inquirer is ready and able to respond to the call at the present time.

IV. CONCLUSION

There are three periods of discernment for a man who feels called to the Permanent Diaconate. The first begins with a period of inquiry. Upon completion of the initial inquiry process, the diocesan bishop may accept some inquirers into aspirancy, the second period of discernment. This aspirant phase begins the initial start of formation and corresponds to the propaedeutic period required by the *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* of the Congregation for Catholic Education. (BNFPD, nos. 41-44) Lasting two years, this stage involves discernment with an emphasis on human elements, spiritual readiness, intellectual capacity, and pastoral abilities. “The aspirant stage is primarily a time to discern the capability and readiness of an aspirant to be nominated to the diocesan bishop for acceptance as a candidate for diaconal ordination.” (NDFML #190)

As the final period of discernment, the candidate stage of formation is the occasion to confirm a man’s diaconal vocation and prepare him for ordination. In accord with the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* by the Congregation for Catholic Education (BNFPD, nos. 49-50), the candidate stage of diaconal formation lasts three years in addition to the propaedeutic period, the goal of which is to enable a man to be “a specific sacramental sign, in the Church, of Christ the Servant.” (BNFPD, no. 5)

APPENDIX

MODEL STANDARDS FOR READINESS.....	A2
SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS.....	A3

MODEL STANDARDS FOR READINESS INTO THE ASPIRANT PATH

Appreciation/Knowledge of:	Demonstrated Ability/Skill
Human Dimension	
His emotional, intellectual, physical, and personal limitations	To speak appropriately of his personal limitations and known boundaries with a sense of how these affect his life, family, employment, and present service ministry
A family perspective in his life	To balance and prioritize his commitments to family, work, leisure, and ministry; to be self-disciplined
Spiritual Dimension	
God's redeeming activity in his state of life, experience, and ministry	To reflect/meditate in faith on his life with a sense of discovering God's will
The importance of both a personal and communal prayer life	To commit as a reader or extraordinary minister of the Eucharist
	To serve his parish community especially in charity and outreach to the needy
	To be responsible and confident
	To be both a leader and a follower
	To fulfill a commitment to a pattern of prayer
	To participate frequently in the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation
	To participate in retreat experiences or a renewal group
	To support others' growth in prayer
Intellectual Dimension	
The basic teachings of the Church	To demonstrate familiarity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church
Pastoral Dimension	
Living the Gospel in his life, home, place of employment, and neighborhood	To connect the teachings of the Church to daily living and his personal/communal (family, church, civic) responsibilities
	To be flexible in attitude and behavior
	To be open to change
	To analyze situations in light of the Gospel and the Church's teaching
Diaconal Call and Ministry	
A personal call to diaconal ministry with the Church and a sense of his capacity to commit himself to it in fidelity to his state in life and employment, with sufficient time for formation	To witness to Gospel values in ways that are life-giving
	To articulate his sense of a call to the diaconate primarily because of the needs of the Church as well as for personal growth
	To articulate reasons that support his desire to be a deacon
	To be interested in and attracted to the diaconal mission of Word, Liturgy, and Charity
	To be of service, beyond liturgical ministries, through church or civic involvement
	To support and encourage his pastor, as a representative for the parish community and staff
	To be docile to the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the application and screening processes, acknowledging that ultimately it is the Church that verifies the call

SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS

Secretariat for Worship and Evangelization
Archdiocese of Indianapolis

Those seeking spiritual direction (seekers) may send an email to the Secretariat for Worship and Evangelization at spiritualdirection@archindy.org. Their emails are then forwarded to a Discernment Companion. (Discernment Companions assist people looking for trained/formed Catholic spiritual directors by providing a referral service.) These are the steps the Discernment Companion will follow:

- 1) The Discernment Companion will contact the seeker to schedule a either a 30-minute phone conversation or a face-to-face meeting (especially if the person has not previously participated in a spiritual direction session.)
- 2) During the phone call/meeting, the Discernment Companion will make sure that what the person is seeking *is* spiritual direction and will gather the necessary information to be able to make referrals.
- 3) After the conversation is complete, the Discernment Companion will communicate the names of 3 or 4 possible directors within 3 -5 days.
- 4) The Discernment Companion will inform the Secretariat for Worship and Evangelization that the referral has been made.

Questions the Discernment Companion will ask the seeker:

- 1) Describe your spiritual background: where are you in your faith journey now? – describe the history of that journey – are you currently a part of a faith community?
- 2) Can you verbalize why they looking for spiritual direction at this time?
- 3) Have you received spiritual direction in the past? If yes, for how long, and what were the benefits? How did it end?
- 4) Identify desired preferences for a spiritual director: denomination, male/female, part of town, any special expertise, stage in life, etc.

Other topics typically addressed include:

- 1) A brief description of spiritual direction and typical frequency for meetings. (once a month)
- 2) Reinforcement of the confidential nature of the relationship.
- 3) Mention the expense for spiritual direction (\$25 to \$50 an hour.) Ask if this will work for them and, if not, refer them to a director that can take a reduced or waived fee.

After the meeting with the Discernment Companion and receiving the referral of the names of 3 or four spiritual directors, the seeker will be instructed to do the following:

1. Let a spirit of prayer guide you in these next steps.
2. Have a phone conversation with the recommended directors.
3. Then, meet the director(s) with whom you feel most comfortable.
4. Discern your choice and begin your journey.

For the guidelines for Spiritual Direction in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis:

<http://www.archindy.org/worship/guidelines-spiritualdirection.html>

