



The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington

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Selection Procedures for the Permanent Diaconate

Every two years the Diaconate Formation Program begins acceptances for those men who are members of a parish in The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington who are discerning the vocation of the diaconate. The next intake period will close in April of 2026 for a prospective ordination date of June 2031. All inquiry forms received from May of 2024 through April of 2026 will be considered for prospective offer of application to diaconate formation in that cohort.

While the formation program consists of five (5) years of formation, the two stages of formation, Aspirancy and Candidacy, are not a guarantee of proceeding to the next stage, including ordination, and there are several scrutinies that occur before acceptance into diaconate formation.

The expectation for a man contemplating a vocation as a deacon is that he is a mature adult, practicing the faith (attending Mass regularly and receiving the sacraments), and deeply committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and his Church. He must be a registered and active member of a parish in the Archdiocese of Washington, with a record of service to his parish community. He must be willing to learn, cooperate, accept suggestions for change, and be open to a shared discernment of his call to service for the Church.

Additionally, an applicant must:

- Be a baptized and confirmed Catholic man at least thirty (30) years old but not older than sixty (60) by the time formation begins. (*Formation begins with the Aspirancy period.*) The expectation is to be sixty-five (65) or younger at ordination.
- Be in a stable, healthy, valid Catholic marriage (if married) for at least five (5) years. If a man is a bachelor by choice or because he is a widower, he must be freely willing at the time of ordination to promise to live a celibate life from that day forward. Any previous marriages for either the inquirer or his wife that ended in divorce must have been canonically annulled.

- Documentation evidencing annulment will be required before the time that an inquirer is invited further along the inquiry period. Either spouse having more than one previous marriage precludes consideration.
- If a recent convert, be a practicing, confirmed Catholic for at least five (5) years. All applicants must be able to provide proof of baptism and confirmation by recent certificates (within six months of the diaconate formation application) from the parishes where they received those sacraments.
- Have the approval of his wife (if married). A wife is required to attend Aspirancy sessions with her husband so that she will be able to give informed consent for his request to be accepted as a candidate and to be ordained to the diaconate. This would include the Advent and Lenten Days of Reflection, and a weekend retreat in August between the two years of Aspirancy.
- Wives of candidates are required to attend the annual candidates' and wives' retreat held in late August every year.
- While wives are not required to attend classes in Candidacy, workshops, and days of reflection, they are encouraged and always welcomed to do so. The wife of a deacon is a welcome and included member of the diaconate community.
- Be known by his pastor and have his direct support to become a deacon. The inquirer is presented for consideration prior to application by the pastor of his current parish. If you have not talked with your pastor about your interest in the diaconate, now is the time to do so. If you are married, please include your wife in that conversation with the pastor. Stability at a parish is essential, and we ask you to remain at your current parish during the inquiry and application stages, as well as during formation.
- Be in good health and financially independent. Deacons are not employed by their parishes as ordained ministers, and the formation program and the ministerial life of a deacon does involve extra work and study.
- Be proficient in writing and speaking English. While there is a great need for bilingual deacons, especially native speakers of other languages, diaconate formation classes and continuing formation of deacons are offered in English, and proficiency in writing papers and tests in English, along with proper citation of any references and sources, is absolutely required. Comfort and ability in taking tests, giving oral presentations, and writing papers are essential to formation.
- Show concern for Christian charity and social justice.

- Be involved in some form of charitable service to others, usually under the auspices of the Church. A history of service ministry to those in need is an important part of one's discernment for the diaconate.
- Be sufficiently open and willing to discern his vocation maturely and be willing to accept the possibility that the diaconate may not be his vocation.
- Be a citizen or legal permanent resident (holding a "green card") of the United States of America. Proof of citizenship or legal residency will be required at the time of application.
- Have the expectation of residing in and worshipping in the Archdiocese of Washington during formation *and* for a period of time after ordination, usually for at least ten (10) years.
- Be able to relate sufficiently well with others and be comfortable in a group-learning process, and able to attend classes in person regularly, twice a week in the evenings, as scheduled, as well as the occasional Saturday workshop and the mandatory yearly retreat for candidates and wives, and the days of reflection.
- Possess a minimum of a high school diploma and be capable of college level studies. Coursework involves short papers, tests, quizzes, and presentations, including oral exams, and the ability to attend classes in person or at a selected remote site with others is key.
- Be willing to undergo a psychological evaluation, which includes an interview with your wife by the member of the evaluating team, and to undergo tests for drugs and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- A felony conviction is an impediment to consideration for the diaconate.

The selection procedures for the diaconate of the Archdiocese of Washington are designed to facilitate our getting to know the applicant and his background. It should be noted that all information gathered through these procedures is treated with strict confidence.

Certain situations in an inquirer's life may preclude acceptance into diaconate formation or may delay acceptance. The shared discernment of those feeling called to the diaconate and of those entrusted with scrutiny of those inquirers is a sacred trust and all is considered confidential in the discussions with the screening committee, the deacon formation review board, and the clergy and staff of the office of diaconate formation.

Questions may always be directed to the Assistant Director of Diaconate Formation, Deacon Charles Huber, at HuberC@adw.org. Pastors and deacons are encouraged to ask the assistant formation director any questions they may have about a potential inquirer or candidate, and to encourage the spiritual growth and charitable service of a man discerning for the diaconate. Inquirers are encouraged to pray for vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life, and marriage.

Formation consists of two stages: Two (2) years of Aspirancy, and Three (3) Years of Candidacy. Sometimes aspirants or candidates either ask to step out of formation for a time or are asked to step out of formation due to academic, personal, family, health, or work issues that require their attention. Also, a candidate may be asked to take a pastoral year for discernment and development. Inquirers may have their acceptance into formation delayed if certain matters need to be dealt with first, or if requirements of time married, time as a Catholic, or parish involvement must be met.

We expect that a man and his wife be stable and involved in the parish during the inquiry period and during formation, as their pastor must give an initial recommendation to start formation and give recommendations as an aspirant or candidate progresses through formation. Previous pastors, including from previous parishes of registration or involvement, will also be asked for their recommendations, as will, at the time of application, current employers, since the formation period and ordained ministry do require flexibility and adjustment of work duties and schedules.

Please pay attention to the following timeline of the next inquiry and application stage for the upcoming cohort, as timing is important.

General Process and Timeline

- Come and See meetings will be held at several parishes of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington. At these meetings, a presentation on the diaconate and discussion will be held, and those interested can fill out an Inquirer's Information Form. Inquirers completing the information form and indicating a readiness to apply for the deacon formation program will be contacted after the form is reviewed. Those interested in learning more about the permanent diaconate are encouraged to attend the Come and See meetings.

(January through March of 2026)

- The inquirer's current pastor will be contacted if he meets all essential requirements for the diaconate. The pastor is informed that the inquirer wishes to be considered for the diaconate. Accordingly, the pastor is asked to formally present the inquirer for consideration, focusing on his abilities and potential for ordained ministry.

(January through April of 2026)

- The inquirer receiving the expressed support of his current pastor to apply for this year's application class will be asked by the formation office to provide via email a detailed typewritten autobiography of at least eight (8), but not more than twelve (12) double spaced pages. The emailed request will specify the details required.

(April & May of 2026)

- After receipt and review of the recommendations from pastors and the submitted autobiographies, initial interviews with the screening committee may be arranged with an inquirer (and his wife, if married). It is required that both the inquirer and his wife be present for the initial interview.

(May & June of 2026)

- After the initial interview, inquirers may be invited to complete the detailed application for admission to Aspirancy, which would be mailed out.

(June & July of 2026)

- Follow-up interviews with applicants may be arranged as needed, as well as requests for clarification of the information provided.

(Summer of 2026)

- Individuals are selected for the Aspirancy period of formation with the approval of the Archbishop and notified by the Director of Formation. Aspirancy is an extended period of inquiry and serious discernment, involving a year of Saturday workshops and talks, to determine a calling to the diaconate, and a second year of coursework.

(Fall of 2026)

- The First Year of Aspirancy begins. Two in-person information sessions per month are scheduled. Attendance is required for aspirants and wives, to better understand the nature, history, and theology of diaconal ministry. There will be a mandatory weekend retreat to start Aspirancy for the aspirants in October 2026.

(October of 2026 through May of 2027)

- The Second Year of Aspirancy consists of academic classes two nights a week. Wives are welcome to attend classes. During Aspirancy, as part of the discernment process, aspirants will meet regularly with the Assistant Director of Deacon Formation. Additional interviews of the aspirant and his wife may also be arranged with the screening committee. Aspirants under consideration to advance to Candidacy will undergo required psychological, drug, and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) testing.

(Fall of 2027 & Spring of 2028)

- Selection and advancement to Candidacy is made upon the recommendation of the Deacon Formation Review Board and with the final approval of the Archbishop of Washington. Interviews of the aspirant and his wife are conducted by the Deacon Formation Review Board.

(May of 2028)

- Candidacy begins each academic year with a mandatory annual weekend retreat in late August for the candidates and wives. Candidacy includes three years of academic coursework, meeting twice a week on weekday evenings, with occasional required Saturday morning workshops, days of reflection, and monthly class Masses. All costs except for books and vestments are covered.

(September of 2028 to June of 2031)

Candidates are also required to meet with a spiritual director monthly and a deacon mentor quarterly, as well as attend the annual Advent and Lent days of reflection for deacons, candidates, and wives of deacons or candidates. Wives are always welcome at the Saturday workshops and days of reflection. A candidate and his wife should meet with their pastor formally at least twice a year to discuss his progress in formation. The canonically required Rite of Candidacy and Institutions of Lector and of Acolyte will be held in the first and second years of candidacy, and a week-long retreat, held in May of the final year, is canonically required prior to ordination.

For More Information

Inquirers are invited to contact Deacon Charles Huber, Assistant Director of Formation, at HuberC@adw.org for further information. Please also check out our website at: <https://adw.org/vocations/deacons/formation-program/> and the linked webpages.