



The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington

Archdiocesan Pastoral Center: 5001 Eastern Avenue, Hyattsville, MD 20782-3447
Mailing Address: Post Office Box 29260, Washington, DC 20017-0260
(301) 853-4500 | adw.org

Office of Permanent Diaconate Formation

Phone: (301) 853-4582

Fax: (301) 853-7669

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 March of 2026 will be considered for prospective offer of application to diaconate formation in that cohort. The *Inquirers Information Sheet* can be found at: <https://adw.org/vocations/deacons/formation-program/>

While the formation program consists of five (5) years of formation, acceptance into the two stages of formation, Aspirancy and Candidacy, is not a guarantee of proceeding to the next stage, including ordination, and there are several scrutinies that occur before acceptance into diaconate formation. Not all aspirants or candidates go through in five years. Also, candidates have to be positively recommended to the next year every year.

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 meet the following requirements:

Sacraments and Spirituality

- Be a baptized and confirmed Catholic man at least thirty (30) years old but not older than fifty-five (55) by the time formation begins. (*Formation begins with the Aspirancy period.*) The requirement is to be sixty years old (60) or younger at ordination.
- 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.

- Married applicants and applicants who were previously married must provide documentation relating to their marriage, both civil marriage certificate and recent documentation from the parish of their wedding. *Photocopies will not be accepted.*

Marriage

- 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, and should have a history of living a celibate life.
- Any previous marriages for either the inquirer or his wife that ended in divorce must have been canonically annulled, and an inquirer who is in a second marriage, whether he was previously married or if his wife was previously married, must be in a stable marriage for at least eight (8) years.
- 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.

Family Life and Employment

- 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 of candidates are not required to attend classes in Candidacy, workshops, and days of reflection, they are strongly encouraged and always welcomed to do so. The wife of a deacon is a welcome and included member of the diaconate community, and these opportunities for the wife of a candidate's spiritual formation and community also help her in her discernment and assent for her husband's formation and potential ordination.

- An unmarried candidate, whether previously married, never married, or widowed, must have the support of family members with whom he can freely discuss his potential vocation, and who can be helpful in his discernment in formation. This can be parents, siblings, or children. He should also be able to demonstrate support for any minor children.
- Unmarried candidates must be willing to live a celibate life in formation and to take a public vow at ordination to permanently live in the celibate state. He should be living in celibacy for some time prior to application, and a recently widowed applicant must wait at least three years before application.
- 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 do involve extra work and study.
- Additionally, the applicant must have no visible tattoos, and promise to not get any tattoos once accepted into formation.

Parish Involvement and Practice

- 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.
- Show concern for Christian charity and social justice.
- 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 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 prepared for liturgical ministry as a reader at Mass and as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. *These roles are related to the instituted ministries of Lector and Acolyte that are required of all men in formation for the Sacrament of Holy Orders.* Those inquirers not yet serving in those roles should speak with their pastor about doing so and sign up at their parish for training prior to application.

The expectation is for aspirants and candidates to serve at diaconate liturgies during formation as servers, readers, and sacristans, as well as at their parish.

Academic and Intellectual Formation

- 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 currently only offered in English, so 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.
- 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. Those candidates with advanced theological studies often have the ability to do longer papers or more advanced presentations.
- 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.

Residency and Ministry Requirements

- 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 fifteen (15) years of service as a deacon at an assigned parish and ministry of charity.
- 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).
- Sign up for VIRTUS® or be already signed up and active in reading required VIRTUS® bulletins and training. This can be done at your parish.
- 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.

General Timeline of Formation

Formation consists of two stages: Two (2) years of Aspirancy: (*Aspirancy I, consisting of Saturday workshops, & Aspirancy II, consisting of weeknight classes*), and Three (3) Years of Candidacy: (*Candidacy I & II consist of weeknight classes, Candidacy III consists of weeknight classes and practicum courses*). There is also a requirement of supervised summer pastoral ministry with Catholic Charities or a similar organization, usually about forty (40) hours each summer, coordinated with the Coordinator of Pastoral Field Formation.

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.

Please also note that the timeline below is a *possibility* of a man's formation process.

It sometimes occurs that an aspirant or candidate is delayed from proceeding through formation in five years, due to various reasons, such as: health, either his, his wife's, or a close family member; work requirements, including relocation, either temporary or permanent; spiritual growth; academic requirements; or personal discernment.

The expectation is for the aspirants and candidates to keep the formation director and his instructors informed of any situations that impinge on formation, such as listed above, as well as his wife, if married, to communicate any questions about her husband's formation experience.

Since a married man's first vocation is to his wife and family, he must ensure that he can adequately integrate formation into his responsibilities at home and at work, and for his wife to feel free to raise concerns to both him and the formation director, either in the yearly formation review, or at appropriate times.

It is partly for this reason that a wife of an aspirant or candidate should attend formation events, to get to know other wives in her husband's cohort, as well as other wives of candidates and deacons. Often, deacon mentors and their wives may meet with aspirants and candidates to share their experiences and build fellowship.

The wives of aspirants and candidates are not required to attend spiritual direction, but it can be helpful, and the Office of Diaconate Formation may be able to assist in making connections with spiritual directors.

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 will be informed that the inquirer wishes to be considered for the diaconate, and he 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 who has received 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 information provided.

(Summer of 2026)

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

(Fall of 2026)

- The Aspirancy I begins. Roughly 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 Aspirancy II consists of academic classes two nights a week. Wives are welcome to attend classes. During Aspirancy, as part of the discernment process, aspirants can meet with the Assistant Director of Deacon Formation. A summer interview of the aspirant and his wife will be arranged with the screening committee. Aspirants under consideration to advance to Candidacy will undergo required psychological, drug, and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) testing in Aspirancy II.

(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.

(Starting September of 2028)

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 and 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.