

THE INQUIRY PERIOD

After more than 35 years of experience with the reestablished diaconate, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops approved in June 2003 *The National Directory for the Formation, Life and Ministry of Permanent Deacons in the United States*. The National Directory was then submitted to the Congregations for the Clergy and Catholic Education for review. On October 30, 2004, the congregations approved the document and returned it to the USCCB for promulgation and implementation. A Decree of Promulgation was issued by the USCCB on December 26, 2004 with full implementation of the National Directory on August 10, 2005.

Since 2005, the Inquiry period has become a part of the Admission procedure. A man discerning his vocation to the permanent diaconate must **fully participate in the Inquiry period** in order to be considered an applicant.

The Inquiry period is a time set aside to discern the Lord's will. The National Directory states:

The first stirrings of a vocation to the diaconate are often explored at a personal level and usually begins with seeking information about the diaconate and formation....an individual initially reflects upon the nature of his perceived call. Primacy must be given at this time to the spiritual dimension...[§169, p. 78].

An inquiry and eventual application for entrance into diaconal formation is not just a personal and family journey. The Church must accompany it.

The parish is the primary experience of Church for most inquirers. It is the responsibility of this community and, in particular, its pastor to invite from among its members those who may be qualified to serve as ordained ministers of the Church [§170, p. 78]. The pastor and others on the parish staff are particular resources at this time [§169, p. 78].

Discernment: *Sorting out God's will for me*

The process of making a decision about your life with the help of the Holy Spirit is called "discernment." It is a process of discovering God's will for you. In this process you deal with two persons: you and God. During the process you will get to know both better. As you begin, remember, that both you and God ultimately desire the same thing - your happiness.

The process of discernment, though often a struggle, is not complicated. It consists of four steps:

1. BE IN TOUCH WITH YOURSELF

Know your likes and dislikes, your fears and dreams, your hopes and interests, your abilities and limitations. Get to know how you work under stress, what kind of leadership you respond to, how much structure you need in your life.

See how others view you in work situations, under stress and at leisure. Reflect how you view others. Are you able to accept others, to work with them?

One way to look at a call for the Lord is to see Him acting all through your life. He created you with a unique personality and allowed you to experience a personal history. Your personality and personal history are part of your call.

2. BE IN TOUCH WITH THE LORD

Develop a life of prayer, not just in times of crisis, but regularly. No relationship develops between persons unless they listen to each other. You must learn to listen to the Lord in prayer and not merely ask Him to listen to you. You have to spend time with Him, listen to Him, be honest with Him, and occasionally be willing to wait on Him.

3. THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS ITSELF

As you become more in touch with yourself and with the Lord, prayerfully gather the facts about your decision. Consider alternatives. Write out the pros and cons of each alternative. Try to project what effect each alternative will have on you five and ten years from now.

4. CONFIRM YOUR DECISION

After you have made your decision, spend time in prayer for an extended period to see if the decision still seems right. If it is, there should be a continuation of inner peace and satisfaction. You can also be confirmed in your decision by sharing it with your spiritual director and your pastor with whom you have worked throughout the year.

(The discernment process is courtesy of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Vocation Office)

DIACONATE FORMATION PROGRAM
Diocese of Bridgeport

Guidelines on the selection and evaluation of Inquirers

I. Checklist for Pastors

The following are questions that should be addressed and resolved before sponsoring an applicant for the diaconate formation program:

1. Does the inquirer give clear evidence of a solid spirituality and balanced theology?

2. Does the inquirer live in and / or have strong roots in the sponsoring parish?

2a. The pastor of residence will be consulted to provide written clearance for the inquirer to enter the program under the sponsorship of another parish.

3. For at least the past two years, has the inquirer been involved in the life of the parish to a noticeably more active degree than the average active lay person in the parish? Would he have the support of the parish council?

4. Has the pastor taken the initiative in suggesting the inquirer consider the diaconate? If not, is the pastor convinced that the inquirer could effectively serve the parish as a deacon?

5. Is the inquirer's family life stable?

6. Does his wife support his desire to enter the formation program? Is she able to participate in the formation program?

7. Are his children under 12 years old? Serious consideration should be given to family life. If entering the program at this stage would hinder family life, the inquirer is advised to wait for a more appropriate time.

7a. If an inquirer with children under 12 wishes to apply for formation, there must be evidence that there is an extended family present (grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc.) to supervise the children.

8. Is the inquirer's reputation (and that of his immediate family) beyond dispute?

9. Does he show active involvement in carrying out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy?

10. Is the inquirer a "reconciling influence" in the parish, and does he work easily with the pastoral staff and parishioners?

11. Are his motives appropriate?

12. Can he afford the time in light of family and occupational obligations that the four-year program requires?

13. Is the inquirer accepting of celibacy if he is not married, or, if his wife should die or leave him?

14. Is he an effective public speaker?

15. Is he at ease in the sanctuary?

16. Does he seek to serve without need of constant recognition and coaching?

17. Is the pastor willing and ready to take a principal role in complementing the formation efforts?

18. Is the inquirer's health strong?

19. Does he realize that the diaconate is not a right?

It is important to explain to the inquirer that ordination is not a right, and that, even after considerable investment of time and study, he may be told at anytime by the Bishop that he may not possess a call to the diaconate.

Guidelines on the selection and evaluation of inquirers Diocese of Bridgeport

Conscious of Luke's admonition in the Acts of the Apostles (6:3), "You, brothers, must select from among yourselves...men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and wisdom," an inquirer for the Archdiocesan Diaconate Formation Program must bring a record of past satisfactory performance in his personal, familial, professional, ecclesial and social life.

The inquirer must also meet the Church's requirements for acceptance as a deacon. The deacon is an ordained minister, a cleric, who shares in the sacrament of holy orders with bishops and priests. He is called to serve and to lead through word, liturgy, and charity. Because of this the deacon will exercise a great responsibility to God, the church, and the people whom he serves. In light of this and the nature of the diaconate in the Church today, the following admissions requirements have been established. An applicant be / have:

a) a man of prayer and of good character who is prudent and possesses good common sense and who has the guidance of a spiritual director;

b) at least 31 years old at the time of entrance into the program (minimum age for ordination is 35); between 31 and 61 years of age (The diaconate formation program is four years. The diocese hopes to have the deacon serve the parish for 8 - 10 years);

c) sponsored by a pastor or diocesan agency;

d) understand the possible commitment to celibacy, if single; and be willing to accept the church law which does not allow deacons (single or widowed) to marry after ordination;

e) validly married in the eyes of the Church or single:

> ***if married***

- be able to demonstrate a stable marriage
- have the approval and support of wife and family to enter the formation program; This requirement is easily fulfilled through letters of recommendation submitted by those who have known the applicant for several years and home visitation by an ordained deacon and his spouse;

> ***if divorced and "remarried"***

- be able to prove that the first marriage was declared invalid or null in the first instance by the Church
- be validly married for at least five years

> ***if single***

- be willing to make a commitment to celibacy upon ordination

e) in good mental and physical health. It is required that he have a physical examination within six months of the application date and that a report from the examining physician be submitted to the director;

f) economically stable and self-sufficient. It is expected that the diaconate will be part-time for most deacons, so that each must have a source of income for support;

g) a minimum of three years of pastoral involvement in the parish community. Evidence of such involvement should be found in the recommendations submitted by the applicant himself. Involvement in parish/community activities not only indicates leadership qualities - desirable in anyone involved in Church ministry - but also an ability to dialogue with others.

h) faithful to the official teachings of the Church and be willing to deepen his own understanding of our rich Catholic theological tradition;

i) a member of the Roman Catholic Church for at least five years; if a convert to the Catholic faith, he must be at least three years professed and actively involved in the parish for the same amount of time;

j) a graduate from high school or the equivalent;

k) able and willing to dedicate himself enthusiastically to four years of spiritual, theological and pastoral formation; studies designed to discern and refine his gifts for ministry; aware that even after ordination his spiritual formation and education will necessarily continue

l) realize that even after ordination, his formation and education will necessarily continue;

m) a reasonable knowledge of the deacon's role in parish life;

n) have a spiritual and prayerful life prior to entering into the formation and training program. Spirituality should be strengthened while the candidate is in the discerning period of training;

o) willing and able to make a definite and concrete commitment of one's time (between 8 - 10 hours a month) and talent to the Christian community, without conflict with his family and/or occupational responsibilities.