

Archdiocese of San Antonio



Guidelines for Aspirancy Year and Candidacy Diaconal Formation

Revised: August 1, 2015

We begin these guidelines for the Aspirancy Program for the Archdiocese of San Antonio by acknowledging the work of those who framed the guidelines of the Dioceses of San Angelo and Lubbock. The purpose of their effort is to guide the formation process for men seeking candidacy to the Order of Deacon. We are grateful for their leadership in formulating and implementing the guidelines in their respective dioceses. Their program has proven to meet the present needs for formation of aspirants, and we are grateful for the use of their work in formulating the guidelines for the Archdiocese of San Antonio Aspirancy Program. We have extracted from their experience, and modified their guidelines to address the vision of our program. Without their expertise, we would have spent numerous hours trying to ‘reinvent’ what they have proven as essential for this program.

We will conduct an annual review of these guidelines and make any changes deemed necessary so that our program will continue to meet the expectations of the National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States.

It seems appropriate at this juncture to share the homily preached by Bishop Oscar Cantu, Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio, on November 19, 2011. This homily wonderfully expresses the vision and purpose of diaconal ministry. It speaks of celibacy, to which the majority of aspirants and candidates are not held bound; yet celibacy shares the same value of dedication, to which the vocation of marriage calls married men, by remaining faithful to your God, your Church, your spouse, and your children. Celibacy binds us in one way, as marriage binds us in another.

Homily for Diaconate Ordination
Isak Keyman-Ige
Richard Samour
John P. Nolan
November 19, 2011

“Isak, Richard, John: today your relationship to the Church changes. You have walked in your Christian journey for many years shoulder to shoulder with fellow Christians. Today you, as it were, turn and face the Church, the people of God. God calls you through the Church to do this. You turn and face the Church in order to serve the Church, in order to respond to the deepest desire of the Church—“we want to see Jesus,” *queremos ver a Jesus* (Jn 12:21), Christ who was obedient to the Father, Christ who served the poor and the infirmed, Christ who taught and preached the Kingdom of God, Christ who prayed with and for his bride, the Church. *Cristo obediente, Cristo humilde servidor, Cristo la Verdad, Cristo esposo de la iglesia.*

Su nueva relación a la iglesia viene marcada por promesas de obediencia, castidad, y oración. Today you will be ordained Deacons of the Church. Your new relationship to the Church is marked by promises of obedience, celibacy, and prayer.

Your new relationship to your bishop is one that reminds you that your call is deeply and essentially an ecclesial calling, in the heart of the Church—and it reminds the Church of the loving obedience of Christ to the Father.

God assures the young Jeremiah in the first reading today, “To whomever I send you, you shall go,” *irás a dondequiera que te envíe* (Jer 1:7). This call to obedience by God is made in the context of a covenant of intimate understanding and love, and of the prophet’s mission. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” You were very small when you were fashioned in the womb. Now you’re bigger. But this original intimacy with our Creator does not fade away. You are called to nurture that intimate love with prayer and charity.

“(Before) you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” It is in that context of intimate knowledge and love with the Creator that you are sent on mission. Today, you, Isak, Richard, and John, are sent on mission, the mission Church. It is in this context of loving trust and zeal for the Church’s mission that the Lord calls you to obedience. “To whomever I send you, you shall go...Have no fear.” *No tengas miedo, porque estoy contigo para protegerte.* It is a deep, trusting relationship with the Lord that will sustain you, and your motivation will be the very mission of Jesus Christ—“the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus came to save the world from darkness and sin. Your call is not to save the world; Jesus has already done that. Your work is that of the Church: to announce by word and example what Jesus has done, and to bring His love and grace to humanity. Your call is woven into the very fabric of the Church. Your call is an ecclesial one.

You turn and face the Church today single-heartedly. You will make a promise of celibacy “for the sake of the Kingdom and in lifelong service to God and mankind.” *Prometen permanecer celibatos “por cause del Reino de los cielos y para servicio de Dios y de los hombres.”* Celibacy must always be a sign of love: love for God, love for the Church, love for the people you serve. Joy in celibacy is a sign that God has loved you first. You are reminded of this love in prayer and in service to others. As your vocation comes from the heart of the Church and your ministry is woven into the very mission of the Church, so is your call to celibacy woven into your ministry. Celibacy is not only a sign of love, but it impels us to love. It calls us out of ourselves to find joy in the service of others, in the giving of ourselves to God and his people. Here we can say with St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, “we hold a treasure in earthen vessels.” The treasure is God’s love and grace. This is how celibacy becomes spiritually fruitful—by impelling us to give of ourselves in faithful service to others. “Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be servant.” You are called to greatness through humble service. May you find joy in your diaconal service.

Finally, Isak, Richard, and John, today you make a promise to pray—to pray “for the Church and for the whole world.” You can learn to preach beautiful and eloquent homilies; you can develop popular and effective programs in your parishes; you can extend yourselves in service to the poor and sick—but if you neglect prayer, the foundation of your ministry begins to erode. Hold fast to prayer, and the grace and love of the Lord will uphold you in your ministry.

It is in prayer that we meet with the Lord, where we take our concerns and troubles to him, and where he lightens our load with his gentle yoke. In celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours, in praying the ancient prayers of the Psalms, you will find expressed the concerns and troubles of King David, of the Jewish people, of Jesus himself, as he prayed the Psalms regularly. Make those heart-felt and inspired prayers your own. Make time for prayer, even when you are busy.

Today as you turn and face God's people because they wish to see Christ. As St. Paul says in the second reading today, "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." No nos predicamos a nosotros mismos, sino que anunciamos a Cristo Jesus como Senor. The world thirsts for truth and hope, and wants to see the light of truth and hope in a world darkened by sin and confusion. People want to hear the Gospel preached, they long to witness a living tradition of loving service to the poor and the sick. They want to see Christ in his Church.

Today, Isak, Richard, and John, you are ordained deacons of the Church. May the world see in you, in your service, the humble, obedient, and chaste Christ who brings God's love, hope, and reconciliation into the world. Que dios los bendiga y que la Virgen de Guadalupe los mantenga cerca de su hijo, los proteja, e interceda por ustedes como sus hijos."

Acceptance into Aspirancy... A time of investigating, learning, growth and discernment.

Upon completion of the initial inquiry process, the [arch]bishop may accept some inquirers into aspirancy... The aspirant path is primarily a time to discern the capability and readiness of an aspirant to be nominated to the [arch]bishop for acceptance as a candidate for diaconal ordination. 1

The year of Aspirancy is dedicated to arriving at a decision regarding each aspirant's readiness to enter into Candidacy and a more focused discernment of each one's call to the diaconate. He will be involved in academic classes, spiritual formation and pastoral experiences that, while they appear to be the same routine as found in the Candidacy (the schedules are the same), the emphasis will be on making the decision about Candidacy and installation into the formal ministries of Lector and Acolyte. Candidacy is the time period when the final discernments are made concerning readiness for ordination.

It is the responsibility of the formation director and those chosen to teach in the Diaconal Formation Program to provide a healthy and challenging program, for the formation of deacons to serve the needs of the archdiocese. In accordance with the archbishop's directive the formation director and those involved in the Diaconal Formation Program are charged with providing a practical and relevant education infused with the proper spirituality for forming deacons. In addition, working with the Deacon Advisory Committee and the program professors, the director has the responsibility of recommending to the archbishop aspirants for admission to candidacy and candidates for promotion to the Order of Deacon. (BNFPD, # 21).

While participants in the Diaconal Formation Program can expect quality formation, guidance, support and education from their faith community and the staff involved in their formation, each man must also take personal responsibility for his individual spiritual and academic development. Formation involves education, training, spiritual growth and, most importantly, ongoing conversion and discernment.

Change takes effort and emotional energy; and learning and training take time. Those applying for diaconal formation must realize that the preparation and training necessary for becoming a

deacon demands significant time, self-discipline and real effort. The program is designed with a family perspective; however, it is the job of the participant to plan and organize his life to avoid conflicts. He must minimize stress on himself and his family as he continues to meet his responsibilities as a husband, parent and employee/business owner. At the same time, he must attend to the requirements of an Aspirant and later, a Candidate. Simply put, preparation for serving the needs of the People of God involves serious academic study and the development of necessary skills through direct experience in a variety of ministries. Those asking the Church to recognize their call to become deacons must be willing to actively pursue the knowledge, skills and depth of faith necessary to fulfill the deacon's call to the ministries of word, charity and liturgy.

Diaconate: a Call to Service

To be a deacon is to exercise apostolic ministry "which the Lord Jesus continues to entrust to the Pastors of his people..." 2

This is a call to service, as Christ was servant, which ultimately is grounded in the Cross. The Cross itself is a gift to the Church, much as the minister is a gift.

The ordained ministries, apart from the persons who receive them, are a grace for the entire Church. 3

We understand the call of a deacon as we do any other sacramental sign in our Church. We cannot...

...ignore the sacramental theology that is at the very heart of everything that is Catholic. That theology is thoroughly incarnational, seeing Jesus as the Incarnation of God, the Church as the incarnation of Jesus, and ministers as the Incarnation of the Church. 4

Keeping the above in mind, the journey through the year of aspirancy, which assists in selecting those men who best demonstrate the capacity and the desire for ordained ministry, is not seen as too long a period. The effort is always worthwhile, even for those who end their formation prior to or during Candidacy. They will leave the formation process with an enriched sense of Church, a deeper spirituality, an appreciation for the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and will be better equipped to be effective lay leaders in their communities.

As each man enter into the Aspirancy year, he should keep in prayer all the men who have journeyed with him thus far.

What is the Call? Who decides if it is genuine?

At a lower level of hierarchy are to be found deacons, who receive the imposition of hands 'not unto the priesthood, but unto ministry'. For, strengthened by sacramental grace they are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction with the [arch]bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity. 5

The essence of a call in the context of ordained ministry in the Catholic Church must not be understood as being initiated from within ourselves, but, rather, from God. In John 15:16 we read that God makes the choice. We do not make the initial choice. And, since we are in a community of believers who gain their authority from Christ, we know that the Church also chooses. The work you do is to discern whether your perceived call from God is genuine. The formation team is doing the same thing, and is hereby discerning if you have an equally genuine call from the ecclesial community. Ordination is not an installation into a job.

This sacrament configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ's instrument for his Church. By Ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ... 6

Your job during the coming year will be to discover the call, if it is genuine, and most importantly, come to a decision about how you will respond to that call. You will say "Yes", and give your life over to being the sacramental presence of Christ; or you will opt out of formation, deciding that you can better serve as a lay person. There is a possibility that the Church will ask you to step out of formation, either for a while, or for a longer period of time. The reasons are as many as there are individuals in formation. And, if that happens, despite the potential disappointment and pain that may come with that decision, you will be asked to accept the Church's decision in the spirit in which it is rendered.

If, for whatever reason, a man leaves formation, it must be understood that the Director is not at liberty to release any information about those decisions. The student may well wish to make a statement to the class, send a letter or otherwise communicate to you concerning this development - but that does not always happen. These can be very trying circumstances for a class in which the students have grown close to one another. Please accept those occurrences as a natural part of the process, and keep the student and his family in your prayers.

While you have certain feelings or inclinations or even some prodding from others in the direction of being a deacon, the ultimate decision about your ordination lies with the Church in the person of the archbishop. Simply feeling called is not sufficient. One must also be chosen. The Church makes these choices very carefully, and only after sufficient consultation and assessment of each man being considered.

Once admitted into the Aspirant path of formation, the student will have the time to discern for himself, with the help of his wife (if he is married, along with any children), his parish family and others if the call he perceived is genuine.

The formation team will be looking at you during the year, seeking a demonstration from you that you possess the possibility of a diaconal vocation and an appropriate level of readiness for selection into the Candidate path of formation. It may be that you have a genuine call from God, and possibly also from the Church, but you may not be in a position to continue formation at this time due to a variety of circumstances that are beyond your control. These are also key elements in the discernment process.

You have moved through most of the application process and so you have been found to be ready for a deeper scrutiny and are prepared to take a long, slow and deliberate look at your

personal theology, maturity, humility, and capacity to enter into Candidacy. The formation team is not making a determination about your readiness for ordination at this juncture...that is the purpose of Candidacy. You are being evaluated for the possibility that you will be ready for preparation for ordination.

The bishops have spelled out the purpose of Aspirancy in this way:

--the aspirant path must be a distinctive program that provides for a thorough discernment of a diaconal vocation. Therefore, it must provide an appropriate initiation into diaconal spirituality; supervised pastoral experiences, especially among the poor and marginalized; and an adequate assessment of the aspirant's potential to be promoted to candidate formation, and ultimately to ordination. The aspirant path also must enable the formation personnel to create an environment in which a wife of a married aspirant can be appropriately prepared to give her consent to his continuation, and more essentially, to ascertain her compatibility with her husband's diaconal vocation and eventual ministry. ⁷

During Aspirancy you will be introduced further into the study of theology and a deeper knowledge of the spirituality and ministry of a deacon. You will hear from deacons and deacon wives, learn to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in common and privately, and be further exposed to a method of thinking called 'theological reflection'.

The aspirant path in formation is also a time for a married aspirant and his wife to assess the quality of their relationship and consider the ramifications of his possible ordination to the diaconate for their married life. For the single aspirant, it is a time to discern his capacity and receptivity for celibacy. ⁸

Through the Aspirancy the four major paths of formation will be addressed: The Human, Spiritual, Intellectual and Pastoral. These same components are what make up the Candidacy years.

Toward the end of Aspirancy, you will be interviewed again by the Committee on Admissions. They make a recommendation to the Director who makes a further recommendation to the archbishop regarding each Aspirant's suitability to move into Candidacy.

You are discerning a call to become what Fr. Edward Salmon says is a maker of thin places...

Deacons should be creating, 'thin places' in our world, the ancient Celts spoke of these 'thin places' where they would experience what seemed to be a thin veil between this world and the next, between the finite and infinite, the physical and the spiritual. In meeting a deacon, we should be able, because of the 'thinness' he had created, to almost touch eternity. ⁹

Making a decision about asking the archbishop to accept you into Candidacy will require the exercise of true humility. It may be the most difficult exercise of your life, because it requires an almost brutal honesty with yourself. That honesty begins with the acknowledgment and acceptance of the fact that you are not worthy. Once you have acknowledged, accepted and recognized that fact, the gift of humility will begin to grow.

The rest of us sit around and bemoan our unworthiness which is really an utter waste of time and as I have said before, it is really pride. The only people who are bemoaning

their unworthiness are people who think they are supposed to be great. ...God is good...and the question whether you are or whether you are not is boring and uninteresting and a waste of time. Who cares? Right? Who cares, stop gazing at your naval, there is nothing there. 10

Realizing this fact, in real humility, you also recognize that, despite your unworthiness, God has plans for you. Perhaps those plans include the diaconate.

Holy Orders and the Restoration of the Permanent Diaconate

As mentioned above, a deacon is a man who is living the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He participates in this 'level' of the Sacrament of Holy Orders either permanently or transitionally. A transitional deacon is a man who is in formation for the priesthood, and will only exercise diaconal office for a short time. The permanent deacon is not destined for the priesthood, and lives out his ministerial life as a deacon.

The Second Vatican Council restored the Permanent Diaconate once again making bishops, priests and deacons the functional makeup of the hierarchy. Deacons and priests, who are the helpers of bishops, take vows of obedience to the bishop and his successors as they carry out the mission of the Church.

The deacon's ministry of service is linked with the missionary dimensions of the Church: the missionary efforts of the deacon will embrace the ministry of the word, the liturgy, and works of charity which, in turn are carried into daily life. 11

Holy Orders is the Sacrament by which the mission Christ gave to his apostles is carried out through the successors of the apostles. The reasons for the restoration of the Permanent Diaconate are found in the Vatican II documents referred to in the Directory.

Since the Second Vatican Council consigned the decision of the restoration of the diaconate to individual Episcopal conferences, the bishops of the United States voted in the spring of 1968 to petition the Holy See for authorization. In their letter of May 2, 1968, the bishops presented the following reasons for the request:

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 with the sacramental grace of the diaconate
2. To enlist a new group of devout and competent men in 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 cities and sparsely settled regions where few or no priest are available.
5. To provide an impetus and source for creative adaptations of diaconal ministries to the rapidly changing needs of our society 12

To be sure, this list of purposes for restoration does not describe completely the motivation for this bold action on the part of the council fathers.

Profile of a Deacon: some pastoral/theological perspectives

The first diaconal profile is outlined for us in the First Letter of St. Paul to Timothy.

“Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for gain; they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as Deacon.” 13 “Let deacons be the husband of one wife, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith which is in Christ.” 14

The qualities listed by Paul are prevalently human, almost as if to say that deacons could carry out their ministry only if they were acceptable models of humanity—good men, well respected and filled with faith. We find echoes of Paul’s exhortation in texts down through the ages...

You must choose for yourselves overseers (episcopoi-bishops) and assistants (diaconoi-Deacons) who are worthy of the Lord: men who are humble and not eager for money, sincere and approved; for they are carrying out the ministry of the charismatists and teacher for you. Do not esteem them lightly... 15

The Church’s tradition subsequently finalized and refined the requirements, which support the authenticity of a call to the diaconate. The primary requirements that validate Orders in general are clearly stated in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council. Only those are to be promoted to Orders who have sound faith, are motivated by the right intention, are empowered with the requisite knowledge, enjoy a good reputation, and have moral integrity, proven virtue and the other physical and psychological qualities appropriate to the Order to be received.

The profile on candidates to the Order of Deacon is then completed with certain specific human qualities and evangelical virtues necessary for diakonia. Among the human qualities that are highlighted are psychological maturity, capacity for dialogue and communication, sense of responsibility, industriousness, equilibrium, and prudence. Particularly important among the evangelical virtues are prayer, Eucharistic and Marian devotion, a humble and strong sense of Church, love for the Church and her mission, a spirit of poverty, capacity for obedience and fraternal communion, apostolic zeal, openness to service and charity towards all.

The simple fact is, as all of us know full well, the deacon is more than the sum of his functions. A deacon “is” a deacon 24 hours a day, whether he’s ministering in a jail, visiting the sick in hospital, facilitating an RCIA session, baptizing, or assisting a Cardinal at Eucharist. He’s also a deacon when he’s on vacation with family, chatting with friends at work, or changing a flat tire. But while we may know and understand that reality, many of our sisters and brothers do not. The basic problem that many of us have experienced in the diaconate is that our sacramental identity as deacons has not been clearly articulated and taught. The focus has been on our functions: what we can do and what we can’t, and how other people do many of the same things we do, and that ordination is not required for what we do. We’ve all heard comments like these.

Just by way of contrast, now consider our brothers in the presbyterate. As the numbers of priests decline and the distribution of presbyters continues to increase the responsibilities a priest had for more than one parish community, there is great concern that the priest himself will no longer have the time or the energy to become an integral part of each community. The fear is that he will be reduced simply to a ‘sacramental minister’, or as some have described it, a “sacramental vending machine.” 16 (NADO-Ditewig)

That is a fear for the diaconate that has yet to be realized because we are not, as yet, identified only by the powers conferred by ordination. Perhaps one of the more central dynamics of the diaconate is that deacons are where the Church otherwise cannot be, and acts as a sanctifying presence in the marketplace. The marketplace is what Deacon Ditewig refers to the above “in the vacation with the family, chatting with friend at work, or changing a flat tire” and in every other activity where we might find the deacon.

Deacons come from all social groupings and carry out any type of secular work or professional activity as long as such activity is not against the teachings and laws of the Church, or inconsistent with the diaconal state. Furthermore, one’s occupation must be compatible in practice with the commitments to formation and effective exercise of ministry as a deacon after ordination.

The Directory speaks at length about the characteristics and attributes of a good candidate for ordination. During your Aspirancy year, one of the main objectives is to determine how many of those characteristics you have, and to know them through having observed them in class, in the parish and in your supervised ministry.

Ministry is not an abstraction. Ministry is realized among people and within relationships that are always situated in a particular place and a particular time. Terms like “priest” “deacon” “bishop” and “lay minister” should not be treated as if they were Platonic ideals, as if they were perfect essential definition of each ministry. It is true that our church offers a set of doctrinal teachings that say something about ministry in general and ordained ministry in particular, but these are surprisingly sparse and serve more as survey lines that map out the boundaries of our faith, leaving considerable theological and pastoral territory within which to roam.

The research of John Collins suggests that diakonia ‘had as its foundational biblical meaning, the sense of publicly commissioned or sent forth on behalf of another. Thus, the deacon is the one who is “sent forth” by the bishop (and at times, indirectly by the local pastor) in service of the needs of the Church as seen by the one charged with oversight of the local church.

It is true that all ministries, lay and ordained, are subject to the ordering of the bishop or pastor, but the ministry of the deacon is not only ordered by the one responsible for apostolic oversight, his ministry is explicitly placed at the service of that ministry of oversight. 17 (Gaillardetz)

General Requirements for the Archdiocese of San Antonio

The Archdiocese of San Antonio follows the guidance of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) which has prepared a document entitled the *National Directory for The Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States* (Directory). The document was issued in final form in February, 2005. While it is not necessary for you to read the document, doing so will give you an idea about how the formation effort is designed. The document is available on –line at the time of this publication at <http://www.usccb.org/deacon/DeaconDirectory.pdf>

Basic Admission Requirements

Age: You must be at least 35 years old for admission to Aspirancy and no older than 59 when your application is filed.

Marriage: If married you must have been in a stable, valid marriage for at least five years. Ask your pastor if you are unsure of validity.

Your Reputation within the community—must have a good reputation.

Your Residence: You must live within the geographical boundaries of the Archdiocese of San Antonio; and be a registered, active member of a parish within the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

Religious Status: You must be a baptized Catholic; and have received the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.

Practice of Faith: You must be living as a faithful, responsible lay member of your parish, active in lay ministry.

Physical Health: Applicants must be healthy enough to assume the rigors of formation and, if ordained, duties of a deacon. A physical exam will be required to be completed by a physician at your own expense, and reported on a form provided by the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

Financial Security is required, with a history of steady employment in a position that does not require frequent travel or reassignment.

Citizenship: You must be a citizen of the United States; or a legal, permanent resident at the time of admission.

Spousal support is required; and wives of Aspirants and Candidates must be involved in the formation process. **Both are required to attend the classes during the Aspirancy year and all years of formation.**

Parish Leadership/Lay ministry: Be recognized and accepted as an active leader in the parish community.

Education: a high school diploma or its equivalency is required. Aspirants must demonstrate the ability to complete the course requirements satisfactorily.

Commitment: be willing and able to make a life-long commitment to serve the Church of the Archdiocese of San Antonio as determined by the Archbishop. Be willing to promise obedience to the Archbishop and his successors, and be willing to accept any pastoral assignment that may be given by him. The ordained deacon is not ordained for his parish but to be of service to the Archbishop and the parish (pastor) or ministry to which he is assigned. **A deacon may not be employed by a parish and assigned to minister in that same parish, as this could be viewed as a conflict of interest.**

Applicant interview and behavioral assessment/ Home Visitation: After receipt of a complete application and review of the application and the required supporting documentation, including the spiritual autobiography, an interview will be scheduled with the applicant. The purpose of this interview is to make an introductory assessment of the aspirant's maturity and readiness to enter the aspirancy program. This interview does not suggest that one is approved or admitted to enter the aspirancy program. The admissions process includes the reviews of the application, supporting documents, recommendations and the results of the interview process. During the admissions process, aspirants will be required to allow home visitation. This visitation to be conducted by members of the Deacon Advisory Committee are intended to provide insights into the home life of those seeking admittance to the aspirant program. There will be an interview

with the spouses of those who are married, as well any children living at home. This report will be returned to the Diaconate Office for further review.

Admissions Committee review: The Deacon Advisory Committee, chaired by the Associate Director of the Office of Diaconate Ministry and Formation will meet prior to the formation of a class of aspirants to review the application files and interview results for each applicant. The committee will make recommendations to the archbishop about applicants regarding admissions to formation as aspirants. Admissions into the aspirancy program is admission to a continuing process of discernment involving the aspirant, his wife and family, and the archdiocesan church as represented in the parish community and to the formation team.

Deferment: For some applicants, the Deacon Advisory Committee may recommend a deferment for any of several reasons. A deferment recommendation may be to allow the applicant an opportunity to remedy some particular defect or challenge to their readiness for formation. For example, the causes for a deferment could range from the addressing of a marriage concern or impediment, to a need to address a personal financial circumstance. A recommendation of deferment may also be for other current temporary, personal situations. Being deferred for admission to Aspirancy does not preclude application at a later date.

Denial of Admission: It should be noted that denial of admission to the diaconate formation program should not be viewed as a judgment concerning the moral goodness or holiness of an individual. Instead, denial of admission may be an indication that an individual's true calling may be in continued lay ministry within his home parish. As has been mentioned throughout this document, admission or denial is based upon many physical, mental, emotional and spiritual factors, including a history and continued inclination of service and ministry within an applicant's home parish.

Celibacy: During the period of aspirancy, those in formation and their spouses will be introduced to the meaning of the promise involving obedience and celibacy that are constitutive of the diaconal ministry. Single men who are ordained will take the vow of celibacy at the time of ordination. Married men, in the event of the death or divorce and annulment of a spouse after ordination, will be bound by the rule of celibacy unless a dispensation is granted by the Holy See.

Annual Retreat: The annual retreat is a required and an important spiritual formation activity. The dates for retreats are typically published at least one year in advance, thus, husbands and wives should make plans to attend the retreat, as it is mandatory for both. Typically, the retreat is held in October. Each parish is asked to pay the cost of the retreat for each aspirant and wife.

Books: Books are required for each semester (academic courses, pastoral course, and spiritual formation) are designed well in advance of the beginning of the term and are made available by the Mexican American Catholic College (MACC). Students may choose to obtain their books from another source if available. **The cost of all textbooks is the responsibility of the aspirant/candidate.**

Special Concerns

Impact of Formation/Ordination on Families

The Impact of Formation and Ordination on Families: “The family is the primary community accompanying the candidate (aspirant) on the formative journey. For the married candidates, the communion of the life and love, established by marriage and consecrated by the Sacrament of Matrimony, offers a singular contribution to the formation process. The single candidate’s family also contributes to his formation.” (ND #212)

For those applying for aspirancy a “personal handwritten statement from the wife of the married applicant indicating her initial consent for his application and entrance into aspirant formation” is required. (ND #178.e.) The wife’s support is required for the balance of the period of formation. Before each major rite: candidacy, reader, acolyte and ordination, the wife must demonstrate her support and approval of her husband’s petition with a similar handwritten letter.

The Candidate should pay particular attention to the special sacrifice which is made by the wife or mother who freely gives herself in an act of sacrifice not for the good of her husband but for the good of the Church.

The years of formation present numerous opportunities for spouses and families to enrich their relationships and family life itself. The activities of theological study and discussions, parochial and special ministries and the communal experience of formation offer numerous opportunities for aspirants, spouses and children to explore the meaning of the Christian family. Wives are to participate in the academic program and are expected to participate in the spiritual formation and retreat programs. These shared learning and prayer occasions will provide a context for a shared growth and deeper appreciation for one another.

Spouses should be prepared for the stress which academic, pastoral and spiritual formation can add to family and marriage. The need to spend time in focused study may, at times, mean time away from the family members. Formation program requirements will entail missing family obligations or children’s activities that would have been high priorities in prior years. While these conflicts will generate stress they also begin to provide occasions for married couples as spouses and parents to deal with the issues of calendars, shifting responsibilities and the availability which marks the life of a diaconal family. The demands on time do suggest that husbands, wives and children spend time developing a system of time management and personal accountability.

Wives are expected to attend all spiritual formation sessions and the annual retreat. Failure to do so could be construed as a sign of disinterest or, worse, a withholding of support for her aspirant-husband. Continuous absences of a wife could lead to the aspirant being asked to withdraw from this program.

Spouses absences can be addressed by notifying the diaconate office prior to the period with an appropriate reason for an excused absence (i.e. sickness of a child, family death, required business trip or personal illness).

Marriage, Separation and Divorce: Prior to admission, an aspirant must have been in a valid church marriage for at least **five years**. This term is indicative of a stable marriage and further suggests a stable and lasting relationship of the couple to the Church.

Those who marry during the formation must marry within the Church in order to continue to be considered as a candidate for ordination; however, any consideration of ordination will be delayed for at least **five years** from the date of marriage.

Being civilly married or otherwise married outside the Church for more than five years does not fulfill the stable marriage requirement. Validation of the marriage by the Church must take place at least **five years** prior to application for the Aspirancy year of formation.

Separation and divorce will automatically delay consideration for ordination although neither is an impediment to ordination. One who becomes separated or divorced during the course of formation will be allowed to continue formation; however, any recommendation for ordination will be withdrawn pending an investigation and recommendation regarding the readiness of the candidate for ordination. The Director, Office of Diaconate Ministry and Formation, after consultation with the Deacon Advisory Committee and the candidate, will make a recommendation for or against the candidate continuing toward ordination. The final determination regarding continuation will be made by the Archbishop.

Parochial Support for Aspirant and Wives

The support of the pastor of the sponsoring parish is required for the entire period of formation from the application to aspirancy through ordination. “The inquirer who seeks consideration for ordination to the diaconate needs to enter into dialogue with his parish community. It is the pastor who initially presents him for consideration into diaconal formation through a letter that he confirms he is a practicing Catholic of good repute and in good standing.” (ND # 174)

As previously stated, it is Christ who calls but the Church that affirms the vocation of those called to diaconal ministry. The affirmation of the pastor is viewed as an essential element of the ecclesial affirmation of the vocation.

In the event that a pastor notifies the Office of Diaconate Ministry and Formation or the archbishop of his desire to withdraw his support of an aspirant or candidate, the first response will be an investigation by the Director of Diaconate Ministry and Formation. An attempt will be made to identify specific issues or behaviors which must be addressed for the candidate to continue formation.

Without the support of a pastor-sponsor, the Aspirant/Candidate will be removed from the formation process with notification in writing.

An aspirant cannot rectify the withdrawal of a pastor's support by negotiating a transfer on his own or being invited to a parish by another pastor. Any opportunity to transfer would be based upon the direction of the Director in conjunction with the Archbishop and the Vicar for Clergy. The transfer of parish support is not a norm for rectifying withdrawal of pastoral support.

Beyond the pastor, the parish community and parish staff should have a special relationship with the aspirant, his wife and family. Support should take the form of prayers, invitation and inclusion in parochial events. It should be noted that, because of the tremendous gift and sacrifice made by wives and children's of deacons, parishioners and the parish staff should work to find opportunities to express support of the wives and children of deacons.

Sponsoring parishes are asked to cover the cost of the annual formation retreat registration for the aspirant and his spouse.

Psychological health: Aspirants will be required to take a psychological examination the results of which will be shared with the Archbishop and the Director. A release will be required to be executed allowing diocesan officials access to the results.

Canonical impediments (Code of Canon Law, 1041, 1042) - can be set aside by the Archbishop or by the Pope. However such cases are handled on an individual basis, and the individual does not have the option of petitioning the Archbishop or the Pope on his own. A summary of the irregularities and impediments follows but are not limited to:

- Men suffering from amnesia, dementia or other debilitating psychic illnesses
- Men who have committed apostasy, heresy, or schism
- Men who have attempted a marriage while not free to do so
- Men who have attempted a marriage with a woman who is not free to do so
- Men who have committed or positively cooperated in homicide or successful abortion
- Men have maliciously mutilated self or others – including vasectomy
- Men who are neophytes, unless judged ready for orders by competent authority

In addition, all students must be fluent in the English language. It is most beneficial when a person is bilingual, as there is an ever increasing demand for those who are English/Spanish bilingual. As of September 1, 2014, it is required within the first three years after ordination for an ordained deacon to be proficient in both English and Spanish, at least to be able to proclaim and preach in either language.

The People involved in your Formation

Many people are involved in the formation process. Those most directly affected at this stage will be one's family. If married, one's wife, primarily, will be involved on a regular basis in this Aspirancy period; and, if one is accepted into formation, she will continue this journey along with the Aspirant. If children are involved, they are also affected and have an influence in an aspirant's activities. Parents, in-laws and siblings, as well, will be involved to some degree in formation by virtue of being a part of the family dynamic.

The Archbishop: The Most Rev. Gustavo Garcia-Siller, M.Sp.S. is the most important person in the process of evaluating an Aspirant. It is ultimately his decision if a man will be accepted into formation at this level. And, later, he will decide if one advances to Candidacy and Ordination.¹⁸ (BNFPD, 19) Each Aspirant will have opportunities during Aspirancy to meet the Archbishop and get to know his outlook on the formation process and his perspectives of diaconal service in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. As the shepherd of us all, the Archbishop is vitally concerned with, and involved in, the formation of deacons; and he takes a deep interest in each individual's progress and ability to be a servant-leader in a dynamic environment of challenge, growth, expectation and grace.

While the discipline of obedience will be brought up again in the process of formation, it is good to point out that it is not an oppressive idea at all.

If we understand and choose obedience as it is intended to be understood by the Church -- as the unconditional expression of our love for God and our submission of life to Him — obedience will not show itself in our daily lives so much as conformity or agreement but as humility of word and action. St. Francis de Sales wrote in his wonderful work, Introduction to the Devout Life that a person makes progress in the cultivation of the virtue of humility, as he says: “We are humble only in so far as are obedient.”¹⁹ (Kagan)

Director of Diaconal Ministry: Msgr. Patrick J. Ragsdale, the current Director of Diaconate Ministry and Formation, is the first person at the diocesan level with whom one will likely have an ongoing relationship. His job is to help the Aspirant discern his vocation, then help him prepare for a potential calling as deacon. The Director reports to the Vicar for Clergy and the Archbishop his recommendations, for admission or deferral, based on the findings of the home visitation, as well as the application on file. Once one is admitted into the Aspirancy Program the Director, at his discretion, further reports the progress of each Aspirant.

Aspirants will also become familiar with the Associate Director of Diaconate Ministry and Formation. Some of the Associate Director's primary duties involve chairing the Deacon Advisory Committee. The Deacon Advisory Committee conducts home visitations of applicants, with the applicant's spouse and children present. At this visitation, committee members use prepared questions and tabulate their findings. Their assessments are of vital importance as these committee members are made up of ordained deacons. Their findings are, in turn, reported to the Associate Director for further review.

The Parish Pastor: At the parish level, the pastor will have already reviewed an applicant's qualification and is confident enough in that applicant that he will recommend him. The parish pastoral council should be a body that you are familiar with as well; and you will get to know better. They are most likely people in the parish with whom you are most associated within ministry, or even just for recreation. Each of them will impact your development because they are all members of the Body of Christ, the Church, to whom you aspire serve.

The pastor will be involved in an aspirant's formation at regular intervals for evaluation and consultation. He should be available as an advisor and will also be asked to assist particularly in liturgical and homiletic formation. In many cases the pastor will also be involved in some supervised ministry activities. After ordination, deacons will likely be assigned some duties at

their parish of assignment and will, then, be involved in collaborative ministry with the pastor, and enter into a covenant of service with the parish.

Spiritual Director: During Aspirancy, individuals will be introduced to the purpose and process of spiritual direction. At some point early in Aspirancy you will be asked to secure an approved spiritual director with whom you are to meet **at least quarterly, and preferably more often.** The spiritual director must report to the Diaconate Office of the faithfulness of the aspirant in attending sessions with him/her. The information discussed and shared with a spiritual director cannot be reported or discussed with anyone. You are encouraged to be completely open and honest and trusting in this relationship since spiritual direction is provided in an effort, not only to help with discernment but, to explore and understand one's relationship with God.

Faculty members are drawn from a variety of sources. They can be both clergy and lay people who are used to develop the pastoral side of your formation, teach a variety of subjects and provide support throughout formation. We have developed our relationship with MAAC and have contracted them for the aspirancy year, and the years of formation in candidacy.

Mentors: During Aspirancy year we ask that Aspirants choose a mentor, preferably an ordained permanent deacon, whose mission is to journey with the Aspirant during years of formation in a variety of areas such as homiletics, sacramental practices and help with theological reflections. The mentors are also available to answer questions, provide opinions and offer advice. You are encouraged to keep in contact with this mentor often - even if only to 'check in' so that he knows how things are going, what the assignments are and where help might be needed. Aspirants are encouraged to meet with or contact their mentor each month. The mentors do not make detailed reports to the director, but do report to the Diaconate Office on a regular basis and will provide information when areas of concern arise. Some members of the Deacon Advisory Committee will serve as mentors for the year of aspirancy.

The Goal of Aspirancy—Candidacy through discernment

When invited to begin the process of Aspirancy, it does not mean that the Church has made any commitment in terms of ordination. It means, rather, that we are willing to work with aspirants in an effort to come to an informed decision about whether or not one should request Candidacy. During the Aspirancy year each will be evaluated again by the Admissions Committee for readiness to continue into Candidacy. It is during Candidacy that each individual begins to bear more of the responsibility for discerning a vocational call as we work together to help each become a pastorally effective minister of God's Word and Sacraments.

In the meantime focus should not on ordination; but on whether God's call to each is one of a life-changing challenge to serve as an ordained minister. As stated before, and as you will hear again and again, one must also be called by the Church. This Aspirancy year is the second major phase in the Church's process of making the decision about your vocation.

Expenses

Each man in formation will be responsible for the costs of all textbooks and the costs of the annual retreat if the parish of origin is not able to offer their financial support. Tuition is

not required as the Archdiocese has budgeted this in the annual expenses. However, we invite each parish to help with retreat and text book costs when there is true need. Each man in formation should speak with his pastor about these expenses and determine whatever is best for each.

The monies that help cover the expenses for professors and stipends for guest speakers come from the Archdiocesan Service Funds and grants and donations from benefactors. We ask that you remember our benefactors.

Curriculum and Evaluation

Classes begin as scheduled by MACC and follow the traditional college calendars with breaks for Christmas, and end in mid-May. Other holidays and holydays may make it necessary for a change in scheduling.

A description of diaconal preparation can be found in the Directory. For our purposes here, a synopsis of the four main areas of formation will give you a sense of the scope of the formation process.

The Dimensions and Content of Aspirancy

There are three distinct but integral parts in the formation of a deacon: Aspirancy, Candidacy and Post ordination training. Each of these periods of formation can be broken into four elements: the Human Dimension, Spiritual Dimension, Intellectual Dimension, and the Pastoral Dimension.

1. Human Dimension:

The human dimension during Aspirancy will focus on developing a high degree of self-knowledge and self-esteem to help develop confidence for diaconal ministry and understanding of the vocation. Time spent on analyzing the dynamic relationship between family and diaconal life as well as other interpersonal and relationship matters will provide ample opportunity for the aspirant and his wife to assess the current state of their marriage, family life and the ramifications of his possible ordination to the diaconate on their family life. Sufficient attention will also be spent on helping the single aspirant discern his capacity for celibacy.

2. The Spiritual Dimension:

The following paragraph is taken from, "The deacon is called to a life of holiness" by Pope John Paul II (Catechesis during a general audience, Oct. 20, 1993)

Here is the source of diaconal spirituality, which is rooted in what the Second Vatican Council calls the "sacramental grace of the diaconate" (<Ad gentes>, n. 16). In addition to being a valuable help in carrying out various tasks, it deeply affects the deacon's heart, spurring him to offer, to give his whole self to serving the kingdom of God in the Church. As the very word "diaconate" indicates, what characterizes the interior mind and will of the one who receives the sacrament is the <spirit of service>. In the diaconate an effort is made to carry out what Jesus stated about his mission: "The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve—to give his life in ransom for many" (Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28).

The primary call of every Christian is the call to holiness which, in addition to living the sacramental life, requires individuals to be involved in the life of their faith community. It is generally in this involvement that we discover and develop the gifts that God has given us. This participation in the life of the parish is necessary for our spiritual maturity and the development of the parish and is also essential for discernment of a call to the diaconate. However, participation in the faith community is not necessarily an indication that a man is called to be a deacon. The Church needs lay people to be involved in all the various ministries and there is much that they can do without being ordained.

“The Church’s mission of salvation in the world is realized not only by the ministers in virtue of the sacrament of Orders, but also by all the lay faithful; indeed, because of their Baptismal state and their specific vocation, in the measure proper to each person, the lay faithful participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ.”
The pastors, therefore, ought to acknowledge and foster the ministries, the offices and roles of the lay faithful that find their foundation in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, for a good many of them, in the Sacrament of Matrimony.” Christifideles Laici pg 54

Each man must discern if the Lord wants him to use his gifts as a lay person; or if the Lord is truly calling him to be a deacon. It is possible to be ordained without truly being called by God. But to continue on to ordination without that true call could lead to disillusionment and frustration while doing a great disservice to the Church.

The spiritual goal of a deacon is to be formed into the likeness of Jesus Christ who “came not to be served, but to serve.” This is only possible with the help of his grace, which he freely offers through the Sacraments of his Church if we are properly prepared and disposed. Like Jesus, our first desire must be to do the will of God, to surrender our will to His will.

We discover the will of God in what He has revealed to us through the Church and through the Scriptures. We have the benefit of looking at the lives of the saints who knew the Scriptures and embraced the teachings of the Church. Even though they also experienced difficulties and trials as we do, their lives were filled with joy because of their intimate relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They took to heart the words of Jesus: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” Mk 8:34

The spiritual dimension during Aspirancy will assist the aspirant in the ongoing process of configuring himself to Christ. The very goal of spiritual formation is “putting on the mind of Christ,” 20 (ND 191) therefore; this aspect of the program will nurture attitudes, habits and practices that provide opportunity for this type of growth.

To enhance this growth, this portion of formation will involve classes on understanding diaconal vocation, the meaning of obedience, celibacy and simplicity, matrimonial spirituality and spiritual writings for the Catholic tradition. Along with community activities, individuals are expected to actively participate in the following on a regular basis:

Daily Mass (when possible)
Sacrament of Reconciliation

Intentional efforts to overcome sin and grow in virtue
Liturgy of the Hours (at least morning and evening prayer daily)
Spend time in adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament
If married, daily prayer with spouse and children
Private prayer (Rosary, devotions, meditation)
Scripture reading (Lectio Divina)
Faithfulness to the Catechism of the Catholic Church and all her teachings
Spiritual Direction
Obedience to the Archbishop

3. Intellectual Dimension:

The intellectual dimension is not isolated from the other elements of Aspirancy. In fact, it draws the other dimensions together and helps to clarify and increase their purpose by providing understanding of the spirituality and human aspects of formation while also providing practical knowledge to support the development of pastoral skills.

Academic classes during Aspirancy include Theology, Christology, doctrinal study of the diaconate and its particular charism, ministries and tradition, application of the Church's social teachings, Church History and operation, and traditional Catholic spirituality.

Beyond the goal of providing a common base from which the class will begin, in Candidacy the intellectual aspect of Aspirancy helps the aspirant to develop his understanding of his own call and the necessary vocabulary to discuss it. Because teaching aspirants the fundamentals of theological reflection improves their ability to discuss their call, it makes evaluating their readiness all the more possible for those charged with discerning that call. The aspirant's performance in these basic academic classes also provides a strong indication as to whether the aspirant is prepared (and willing to make the effort) for the academic rigors of candidate formation. 21 (ND 196)

4. Pastoral Dimension:

This dimension's focus is ultimately the discernment of the aspirant's gifts for the threefold ministry of Word, Liturgy and Charity and his capacity to make a lifelong commitment to these ministries. This is also a time to learn about appropriate tolerance and the need to apply all the Church's teachings on social justice. Classes in this area will concentrate on developing the necessary interpersonal skills for ministerial work in a multicultural Church.

By introducing the aspirant to the realities of the ministerial life, the pastoral dimension provides the information and time for the aspirant and his spouse to consider carefully the impact of having diaconal ministry as part of their family's priorities. This insures that the aspirant's wife can give informed consent and support to the Aspirant's desire to pursue the diaconate. Likewise, this aspect of formation also allows for the external assessment of the readiness of the aspirant's wife and family to give their full consent and support.

By means of these four dimensions in the initial formation of a deacon, the following academic, spiritual and inter-personal topics will be covered during the year dedicated to Aspirancy:

**Diaconal Ministry and Life
Marriage and Diaconate
Diaconal Spirituality
Discernment (personal and ecclesial)
Theology
Scripture
Christology
History of Christian Religion
Culture and Religion
Introduction to Supervised Ministry**

The curriculum anticipates the involvement of your wife, if you are married. While your wife is not required to turn in assignments, she may, if she chooses and her work will be graded and she will receive the same feedback as you. If the aspirant/candidate or the spouse wish to inquire about a degree program, you must consult with the academic dean at MAAC.

You are evaluated in a number of ways. The core academic classes will be graded with the following scale:

**A= 90-100 average grade
B= 80-90 average grade
C= 70-80 average grade
D= 60-70- average grade
F=below average
W= Withdrawal**

Grades for core academic classes are averaged taking the individual grades obtained on papers, verbal reports, class participation, and observation by faculty and formation staff and the results of written exams.

You will be asked to sign a release in accordance with Public Law 93030, The Education Rights and Privacy Act (Buckley Amendment) , allowing the professors to release grades and ‘transcripts’ on your performance to the Director who will be, in turn, sharing that information with the Deacon Advisory Committee and the Archbishop.

Men in formation are expected to maintain and overall average of “C” or better in their academic work. Failure to meet that level is a serious matter, and may result in a special review to determine the continuation of formation. A grade of “D” indicates additional work is needed in order to show a minimal level of mastery of the topic. A grade of “F” indicates failure and will result in a considered recommendation from the Deacon Advisory

Committee and/or the Director to the Archbishop concerning the continuation of formation for the student.

Neither Aspirants nor Candidates may advance to the following year of academics with an overall grade average in course work for the year below “C”. The Director will counsel any student who is not meeting academic requirements throughout the year.

At the end of each semester, an aspirant/candidate may be placed on academic probation subject to further review at the end of the next semester.

Our goal is to form men obedient to the archbishop, entirely committed to the truth, deeply rooted in Catholic spirituality, instructed in the best course work available, and to be of service to the local and universal Church. Additionally, it is a goal to begin a process of integrating the students into the community of deacons and priests in the archdiocese. Therefore, no single part of the formation process supersedes any other.

Men in formation are evaluated on the extent to which they possess the qualities of a pastorally effective minister, which means that they are judged concerning their attitude, competency and ability.

- attitude of service, generosity and humility**
- competency, intellectually and pastorally**
- ability to work in collaboration for the good of individuals and the Church.**

One could summarize these qualities and characteristics by saying that the program of formation both develops and seeks to find pastoral effectiveness in the individual.

At the end of each academic year, the Director will issue a letter to the Archbishop reporting each student’s grades. In addition, that letter will contain the recommendations of the Committee on Admissions regarding each individual. He will, then, decide to grant permission to advance, direct probation, or removal from formation.

Formation programming strives to instill and confirm in the students the following:

1. An increase in holiness of life
2. An ability to clearly articulate the Catholic faith.
3. The capacity to apply church teaching and practice to concrete societal issues and pastoral concerns.
4. A sensitivity to inculturate the Gospel within the communities in which he lives, works, and ministers.
5. His embrace of the universal nature of the Church and its missionary-evangelical Spirit.
6. A balanced capacity for, and commitment to, the ministries of word, liturgy, and charity, demonstrated in his words and deeds.
7. A commitment to ongoing growth in the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions of formation.

8. A capacity to foster the communion and mission of the lay faithful, in collaboration with the Archbishop and diocesan or religious priests.
9. An obedient and humble service to all in the name of the Church.
10. His ability to celebrate, in accordance with the Church's legislation and with due reverence and devotion, those liturgical and sacramental acts that the Church entrusts to the deacon. 22 (ND 157)

Late Assignments:

Generally, late papers or assignments will not be accepted. If you feel you have a justified reason for being late with an assignment, see Fr. Len Brown, the liaison between MACC and the Diaconate office. Professors may make provisions for late papers and may only receive such papers when an arrangement has been made. This exception should be very rare. Failure to turn in assignments will result in a failing grade for the course and a consequent review by the Director and Professor.

Communications:

You are encouraged to communicate with each other, with your pastor, deacons at your parish or elsewhere, the director and all faculty and staff members of the formation team. The more you communicate, the more you will develop an insight for diaconal ministry.

In addition, each student is required to maintain an email address that he checks frequently and is available to him often each day. Email is the major means of communicating for students, faculty and staff. A class roster will be provided to you so that you can begin to build your own diaconate electronic address book.

Students are encouraged to gather at informal times and places to share experiences and to study, or share 'down time'.

Spiritual Direction:

Spiritual direction is an integral part of the formation of a deacon, indeed, the formation of any mature Catholic. While most people never have the opportunity to meet with a spiritual director, our understanding of our own relationship with God and others (the definition of spirituality itself) should not be something we leave to chance. The purpose of a spiritual director is to help each person develop a deeper relationship with God and to hold ourselves accountable to that relationship through a long-term dialogue.

Those in formation will be required to have a personal spiritual director who is approved through the Office of Diaconate Ministry and Formation. Each man must meet with his spiritual director at least quarterly; but preferably monthly. Naturally, the matters discussed between spiritual director and directee are confidential and may not be reported to the Director of Diaconate Ministry and Formation or anyone else. Aspirants' and Candidates' faithful attendance at spiritual direction sessions will, however, be reported; and is required for continuation in formation. It is highly recommended that wives of those in formation have a spiritual director..

Supervised Ministry

One key component in making a determination of the pastoral effectiveness of each aspirant, and how much each grows over his five years of formation, is the experience in supervised ministry. The pastor, or his designee, will be involved in giving feedback and evaluations. That information will be shared with the Director and the Admissions Committee and be used as part of the overall assessment and effectiveness of each aspirant's participation in parish ministry.

Child Care

The program does not provide child care; and there are no facilities for child care at MACC for weekday classes or Saturday days of reflection. If an aspirant's children are not of age to care for themselves, he must arrange for their care while he is away.

Attendance/Tardy policy

There is no make-up policy for missed class material - because students (including wives) are not allowed to miss any sessions, with the very rare exceptions of illness, jury duty or family emergencies. We do realize, however, there are times when circumstances beyond our control overcome all attempts to attend. Since there is no make-up policy, as soon as one gains knowledge of an acceptable absence or lateness for any formation event, he must contact Fr. Len Brown, liaison between MACC and the Diaconate office, as far in advance as possible. He will instruct with possible options for covering the material missed if any are available.

A student who cannot attend all the formation classes, for whatever reason, has already been provided with a huge indication regarding his own readiness for formation. This is also a critical component of discernment for the formation team.

The Spouse of the Aspirant

Too little is said of the role of the wife in the Directory, perhaps because there is no specific role for the wife of a Catholic clergyman. The only definite requirement is that the wife gives her consent and support at several stages of development and formation. This is the primary reason why spouses are asked to attend all classes during the aspirant year/ years of candidacy, as well as all Saturdays of reflection and some other functions as specified by the Director. She can only give her consent and support to what she knows, and there is simply no other way to know about the impact of ordination on any individual or the family without an extensive reference point.

Further, the Directory says...

In deciding to pursue a possible diaconal vocation, a married man must comply with the wishes of his wife, in a spirit of mutual commitment and love. A wife is an equal partner in the Sacrament of Matrimony and is an individual person with her own gifts, talents, and call from God. A candidate's diaconal formation can be a unique and challenging situation and opportunity for his wife. She should be involved in the program in appropriate ways, remembering, however, that it is the husband who is responding to a

call to the diaconate. The Church has determined that a married man cannot be considered for the diaconate without the consent of his wife. After ordination, a deacon's wife needs to "be duly informed of (her) husband's activities in order to arrive at a harmonious balance between family, professional and ecclesial responsibilities. 23 (ND 138)

It is always important that the manner in which a deacon balances his life is: first, **his call to be Catholic; his vocational call to Marriage; his vocational call to parenting; his call to his professional career; and finally his vocational call to the order of deacon.** These priorities must be kept in that order to assure the proper balance for all if one is called to the diaconal ministry.

The Children of the Aspirant

There is very little documentation concerning the role of a child in the formation of a man for the diaconate, or after ordination for that matter. This is what the Directory states:

Children of participants also need to be included in the formation process in "appropriate ways." This will depend, among other considerations, on ages, circumstances, and interests. These occasions provide opportunities for parents and children to support and assist each other in keeping communication open and expectations clear. Younger children and teens, especially, need to be encouraged to express their concerns about the public role of this ministry and how it affects their lives both within the family and among their peers. They need to express honestly their concerns over the commitment of time and energy by their parents and what this means to the life of the family and to each member. This is not only a family concern; it is a formation concern. 24 (ND 140)

Summary of Expectations for the Aspirant

The Aspirant/Candidate is expected to:

1. adapt to the aspirancy/candidacy regimen and thrive in the experience, based upon his personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
2. participate wholeheartedly in all aspects of the aspirancy/candidacy program, in anticipation of a possible life of wholehearted diaconal ministry;
3. take the initiative to discuss any concerns or questions with the members of the aspirancy/candidacy team;
4. plan a personal calendar, in advance, around all scheduled events shown in the academic calendar, and otherwise inform the Director of the program when unable to participate in any required activity, due to unforeseen conflicts;
5. strive to attend the celebration of all joint activities of the diaconal formation community during the aspirancy year, including those of Candidate, Reader, Acolyte, and Diaconal Ordination, in addition to whatever is designated by the Director of the program;
6. pray morning and evening prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours;
7. help cultivate the experience of community within the Aspirancy/candidacy group of men and wives;

8. prayerfully discern continuously on one's vocation and readiness for candidate formation, in consultation with spouse and family (if married), as well as in any later stage of diaconal formation; and proceed without any assumption of one's entry into candidate formation or subsequent ordination. Although wives figure very importantly in discerning the possibility of a vocation to the permanent diaconate, the ultimate responsibility for discernment rests with the Director of the Program and finally, the Archbishop.

Summary of Responsibilities of the Aspirant/Candidate

It is the responsibility of each Aspirant/Candidate to:

1. participate in the orientation session at the initial meeting upon beginning the aspirancy year of formation;
2. reconcile the acceptance of any transferred academic credits, which can be applied to the degrees offered by MAAC;
3. cease over involvement in lay parish ministry allowing time for prayer, study and required weekday and Saturday sessions and completion of all assignments on time;
4. learn to pray the Liturgy of the Hours morning and evening prayer;
5. attend ALL Aspirancy/Candidacy Saturdays;
6. satisfactorily complete all the pre-requisite courses as outlined by MAAC by the end of the Aspirancy year and the years of Candidacy formation;
7. inform the Director or Associate Director of any development in your life that might adversely affect the fulfillment of your responsibilities as an Aspirant/Candidate;
8. participate in an Assessment Interview toward the end of the Aspirancy year and each successive Candidacy years.

Expectations and Responsibilities of the Wife of a Married Aspirant/Candidate

Because the wife of a married Aspirant must determine, by the end of the aspirancy year, whether she can wholeheartedly consent to her husband's continuance into Candidate formation, it is expected that she will fully immerse herself in the Aspirancy/Candidacy program in order to reach a sound basis for that judgment. That being said, it is MANDATORY that the wife of an Aspirant attend all the classes and Saturday reflections during the Aspirancy year and thereafter. Whatever the degree the wife of an Aspirant may begin the year with unresolved anxieties about the diaconate, she is encouraged to go through the year with prayerful confidence, expecting to see the uncertainties and concerns become addressed, clarified, and assessed.

In general, an Aspirant's/Candidate's wife is called to judge her own compatibility to journey with her husband's diaconal formation and eventual ministry. Clearly, a sincere and humble faith is needed on her part as she accepts this supportive role. She needs faith, for example, to embrace the regimen of Aspirancy/Candidacy, itself, believing (and praying) that the Spirit of God is using this process to bring about the most healthy and holy outcome for her marriage and her family. With confidence that their marriage vows have precedence over any further promises that would be part of ordination, she must discern whether her and her husband's married love is becoming enriched and deepened over the course of the Aspirancy year/Candidacy years, notwithstanding the temporary heartaches and struggles that almost

inevitably occur along the way. Accordingly, she is asked to honor the expectations and responsibilities that are outlined below, recognizing that they are intended to help her discern God's guidance from the Aspirancy experience and years of Candidacy. (ND 184)

This is not, in any way, intended to suggest that an Aspirant's wife should feel pressured into accepting at all cost her husband's desire to be ordained a deacon. On the contrary! If, at any time, an Aspirant/Candidate's wife, his partner for life, should discern that her husband's ordained ministry would put undue strain on their marriage, she should make that discernment known, first to her husband and, if necessary, to the Director or Associate Director of the Diaconate. This decision might also best be discussed and discerned with her spiritual director or pastor.

Summary of Expectations for the wife of a Married Aspirant/Candidate

The aspirant's wife is expected to:

1. grow in candid and prayerful communication with her husband-Aspirant/Candidate, recognizing that her observations, sensitivities, and encouragement constitute a central means by which the diaconal vocation will be discerned;
2. participate wholeheartedly in those aspects of the Aspirancy/Candidacy program that call for her involvement and strive to interpret the overall experience in light of personal, marriage, and family considerations;
3. take the opportunity to discuss any concerns or questions with the members of the Deacon Committee and/or the Director or Associate Director;
4. support her husband's participation in all aspects of the aspirancy program.
5. plan her own personal calendar, in advance, around all scheduled events shown in the required events of the Aspirancy/Candidacy program;
6. strive to attend the celebrations of the diaconal formation community, including those of Candidate, Reader, Acolyte, and Diaconal Ordination plus the couples' retreat.
7. Help cultivate the experience of community within the Aspirancy/Candidacy group as a whole;
8. conduct continual prayerful discernment of her own readiness for proceeding into Candidate formation, in consultation with her husband and family;
9. understand that participation in Aspirancy, as well as in any later stage of diaconal formation, proceeds without any assumption of her husband's entry into Candidate formation or subsequent ordination. Although Aspirants/Candidates and wives figure very importantly in discerning the possibility of a vocation to the permanent diaconate, the ultimate responsibility for discernment rests with the Director of Diaconate Ministry and Formation and, ultimately, with the Archbishop.

Summary of Responsibilities of the Wife of a Married Aspirant/Candidate

1. participate in the initial information night, upon beginning the Aspirancy year of formation and other called meetings;
2. attend all Aspirancy/Candidacy Saturdays;
3. support her husband's participation in the full complement of Aspirancy/Candidacy activities for which he is responsible;

4. participate in an Assessment Interview toward the end of the Aspirancy year;
5. submit a personal, handwritten, and signed letter of consent for her husband to proceed into diaconal formation, when requested at the end of the Aspirancy year and each following year prior to the next step in formation and ordination.

Assessment

The process of assessment takes the place on a somewhat informal basis throughout the Aspirancy period. Thus, if concerns arise regarding the vocation and/or readiness of an Aspirant/Candidate during the program year, either the Director/Associate Director of Diaconate Ministry and Formation, the Diaconate Advisory Committee or the Aspirant/Candidate (or his wife) can ask to arrange a meeting to discuss the issues in question, along the way. In any case, the Aspirancy/Candidacy period concludes with a formalized assessment at the end of the program year. (National Directory 198-200)

Overview of the Process of Aspirant Assessment

The Aspirancy period concludes with the individualized assessment. A composite assessment is made based upon input from the self-evaluation by the Aspirant/Candidate, the Deacon Advisory Committee, a confirmation of faithful participation by the Spiritual Director, and those instructors of his various classes. Through this discernment process, and upon recommendations from the above, a list of Aspirants is submitted to the Archbishop for his approval. (ND 198)

Interviews of Aspirants and Wives

The Deacon Advisory Committee will schedule and conduct interviews with each Aspirant and wife in the period following conclusion of the academic year. The interview results are reported in writing as part of the assessment portfolio. On the basis of the interviews and the other pertinent information cited in the Overview above, a recommendation will be taken from the Deacon Advisory Committee. (ND-200)

Record of Deacon Advisory Committee Recommendation and Declaration to the Archbishop

The recommendations are compiled in a written record for each Aspirant/Candidate. This record is presented to the Director of Diaconate Ministry and Formation, declaring a statement of suitability. This information is presented to the Archbishop. (ND 200)

Permission to Prepare a Written Petition

When, at the end of the Aspirancy period, and the Director had discerned that a possible vocation and suitable state of readiness exists, express permission is given for the Aspirant (and his wife) to prepare written petitions to the Archbishop for admission into Candidate formation. (ND 198)

Director's Conference

The Director will meet with each Aspirant at a scheduled time late in the Aspirancy period to share and discuss the outcome of the assessment process.

Selection of Those Being Admitted to Candidacy

The Archbishop selects those to be admitted to candidate formation. The Declaration and a copy of the Archbishop's Letter of Acceptance to the Aspirant are placed in the petitioner's file. Once the selections are made for admission to candidacy, formation begins with reception into the Rite of Candidacy at a time set by the Archbishop's Office. (ND 200)

Whatever the outcome of the Aspirancy process, Aspirants and wives are encouraged to seek and submit to God's will which never fails to bless the individuals involved while also serving the Church.

Conclusion:

This is where the journey really begins. The months of the formal discernment are done, and each Aspirant has accepted the challenge to look more deeply, pray more frequently and learn more broadly in order to be certain of his calling to the diaconate. Know that all are in the prayers of the director, staff, the archbishop and all the deacons and wives as this new journey begins. May the peace of the Lord be with each Aspirant/Candidate and their wives always! May Our Lady of Guadalupe invoke her Son's blessing upon each! And may the Holy Spirit inspire and enlighten all as each begins their years of formation!

ABBREVIATIONS

- Directory** *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., 2005*
- CCC** *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000*
- BNFPD** *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons (Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Diaconorum Permanentium). Congregation for Catholic Education (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998*
- LG** *Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitutions on the Church, Second Vatican Council, 21, Nov. 1964*

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All Scripture references are taken from the New American Bible, Thomas Nelson, Inc, Nashville, 1987

Listing of quotations:

- 1. Directory, 182**
- 2. Directory, 24**
- 3. Blessed John Paul II, *Christifideles Lalic*, no. 22.**
- 4. McCalis/Lawler, pg. 51**
- 5. LG, 29**
- 6. CCC, 1581**
- 7. Directory, 186**
- 8. Directory, 190**
- 9. Salmon, 11**
- 10. Rohr, 10**
- 11. Directory, 3**
- 12. Directory, 5**
- 13. I Tim 3:8-10**
- 14. I Tim 3:12-13**
- 15. Staniforth, from the *Didace*, 15, page 234.**
- 16. Ditewig, NADD address**

- 17. Gaillardetz: Toward a Contemporary Theology of the Diaconate**
- 18. BNFPD, 19**
- 19. Kagan**
- 20. ND, 191**
- 21. ND, 196**
- 22. ND, 157**
- 23. Nd, 138**
- 24. ND, 140**