



Permanent Diaconate Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who is a Deacon?

A Catholic deacon is an ordained minister who shares in the apostolic work of the Archbishop. The title “deacon” comes from the Greek word “diakonos,” which means “servant.” The vocation of deacon carries the profound responsibility to pour out one’s life in service to others, just as Christ who came “not to be served, but to serve.”

2. Why does the Church need deacons?

The Second Vatican Council emphasized the Church as Servant to all humanity, in its every condition, weakness and need. As a response to this vision, the Church restored the order of deacons as a concrete sacramental sign of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and at the service of the world. Through his ministry, the deacon serves as a reminder and a challenge to all the baptized, who are called to imitate Christ in their care for others. As Blessed John Paul II said, “the service of the deacon is the Church’s service sacramentalized.”

3. What do Deacons do?

Through their ordination, deacons share, to a lesser extent, in the threefold apostolic ministry of the bishop: a ministry of Word, of Sacrament, and of Charity. Deacons are official teachers and preachers of the Gospel, they preside at celebrations of baptism, funerals, matrimony and they visit the infirm, the imprisoned, and the needy. They do not celebrate Mass, hear confessions, or anoint the sick.”

4. Do all Deacons eventually become Priests?

No. The diaconate was restored as a permanent order, not simply a step to becoming a priest. Men who are discerning a vocation to the priesthood are often ordained to the diaconate. If they are later ordained priests, they do not stop being deacons, in the same way that a man does not cease to be a priest should he be ordained a bishop.

5. What is the difference between a Deacon and a Priest?

Deacons are ordained “not for the priesthood, but for service.” The permanent diaconate is not a lesser version of the priesthood, but a unique vocation unto itself. Unlike a priest, a deacon may have a wife, a family, and a secular job; they are particularly called to bring Christ’s service outside of church buildings and ecclesial structures, into their workplaces and family lives.

6. May a married man be ordained a Deacon?

Yes, married men may be ordained deacons. Once ordained, however, a man may not marry. Both men who are single at ordination and deacons who are widowed after ordination have an



obligation to celibacy. Understanding and valuing celibacy is thus an important matter for all deacons, married or single.

7. How is a married candidate's family involved?

Married men who wish to become deacons must be married for a number of years and have shown stability in their commitment. Moreover, they require the express written consent and support of their wives. Deacons with children must have already provided for, or must continue providing for their children; their ministry must not unduly affect their family life. A deacon's wife and children are of good reputation, leading strong Catholic lives in and outside the home.

8. What is expected of the wife of a Deacon?

The wife of a diaconal candidate must be willing to participate, to the extent required, in her husband's formation, in order to understand the possible impact on her and on their family. The wife of a deacon is not obligated to any official or public ministry once her husband is ordained. There is no single model for her to follow and she may choose her level of involvement in ministry freely. Many wives are and continue to be heavily involved in ministry, but this involvement flows from their baptismal call as Christians, not as a result of their husbands' ordination.

9. Do Deacons quit their jobs to work for the Church full-time?

The majority of deacons remain employed at their secular jobs, but some deacons may be hired part-time or full-time to hold various positions within the Church as the Archbishop deems necessary. They are paid in the same manner as laypeople.

10. How will a married Deacon find time for ministry with a job and a family?

It is important to remember that the deacon extends the sacramental presence of Christ's service outside of the church and into the secular world. A deacon is just as engaged in his ministry when he is at home or at work; he is a permanent and public sign of Christ the Servant, not matter where he is, or what he is doing. That being said, each deacon will collaborate with his family, his employer, his pastor, and his bishop on how to meet the needs of his ministry.

11. Is there an age limit for Deacons?

In the Archdiocese of Vancouver, candidates must be between the ages of 35 to 65 at the time of their ordination.

12. Do candidates need to have university degrees?

Candidates to the diaconate need not hold university degrees, but they require the educational preparation to complete the academic theological component of the formation program, which is currently entrusted to St. Mark's College. The program accommodates candidates with different educational backgrounds.



13. How are candidates trained for the diaconate?

The formation program rests on four pillars: human, spiritual, theological, and pastoral. Candidates build upon their existing human qualities to prepare for ministry, further developing the ability to work collaboratively with others, the capacity to relate to others' feelings maturely and appropriately, and the willingness to grow in the virtue of chastity.

Spiritual formation will consist of study days and annual retreats, days of recollection, and the regular guidance of a spiritual director. Candidates are expected to deepen their existing spiritual life through frequent participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance, constant reflection on Holy Scripture, and dedication to the public prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours.

The academic component of theological formation will consist of a Diploma in Pastoral Studies. Candidates are placed in one of two streams based on their past academic work. The Graduate Diploma stream requires the work of a three-credit graduate course, and can later be used towards a Master's Degree. Those in the Diploma stream may not use their courses toward a degree, as they are assigned less work, chiefly one integrative assignment per course. Candidates who meet the requirements of the Graduate Diploma must pursue it, unless, for serious reason, the Director permits them otherwise. Diploma candidates may likewise be accepted to the Graduate stream if they qualify as "non-traditional learners."

The foundation of pastoral formation is supervised fieldwork, which integrates all the components of the formation program. Fieldwork is assigned according to the needs of the individual candidate, including: proclamation and preaching of the Word, homiletics, catechesis, liturgical ministry; liturgical ministry, the administration of the sacraments and sacramentals, service at the altar; works of charity and social justice, work in prisons, hospitals, and social service agencies; and servant leadership, guidance of small groups, volunteers, movements. Technical subjects that pertain to specific ministerial activities may also be included in the program: psychology, catechetical pedagogy, sacred music, information technology and so on.

14. How long does it take to complete the formation program?

Diaconal candidates undergo at least four years of formation. The first phase is a one-year period called the aspirancy path. Aspirants and their wives take part in a six-weekend "Human and Spiritual Formation for Aspirancy" program, Friday to Sunday, to assist them in their discernment. The formation takes place in a residential setting, and no formal reports are made on performance or sharing during the workshops. During this period, the aspirant and his wife take time to assess how their lives and their family impacted if he proceeds to ordination. Unmarried aspirants use this time to discern their readiness to commit to celibacy.

The second phase, the candidacy path, lasts at least three years. Aspirants and their wives must first write to the Archbishop requesting admission and expressing consent to the candidate path of formation. The Advisory Committee makes a recommendation to the Archbishop, who meets with each aspirant and selects those to be admitted to candidacy. Candidates with some theological preparation may be dispensed from courses covering material already studied.



15. When does the formation take place?

The formation of candidates will take place on weekends, evenings, and holidays. Courses at St. Mark's College will take place during formation weekends from September to June during the candidacy phase, but may include courses during the aspirancy phase. There will be a directed reading program during the summer months.

During the final three years of formation, the candidates spend one weekend together each month (Friday evening to after lunch Sunday). They are also involved in reading and online study throughout the month, and may be asked to attend other seminars or events, along with an annual retreat.

16. How are Deacons assessed in their readiness for the diaconate?

Each year of the candidacy, formation personnel will assess the candidate's readiness for ordination: his understanding of the diaconal vocation with its responsibilities and obligations, his human and affective maturity, his growth in the spiritual life, his knowledge of theology, and his practical skills in pastoral ministry. Psychological testing will be administered to all candidates at least before the beginning of the third year of the program. At the completion of each stage of formation, the candidate's spouse will be interviewed by a panel of two members of the Advisory Committee, at least one of whom will be a woman.

17. How can I learn more about becoming a Deacon?

Contact our Director of the Permanent Diaconate Program, Msgr. Gregory Smith, who coordinates the overall application process. Msgr. Smith will review what you (and your wife) need to know, and will advise you to schedule an appointment with your pastor to seek his recommendation. Your pastor must confirm that you are: a practicing Catholic for at least five years, of good moral character and reputation, living married or celibate life conscientiously, involved actively in the parish or an ecclesial movement, and living a deep spiritual life by frequent attendance to Mass and participation in additional spiritual activities.

18. What happens next?

If your initial application and pastor's letter suggest that you are a suitable candidate, the Director arranges a tape-recorded Deacon Perceiver Interview to identify your talents and gifts for the diaconate. After the interview, the Director will meet with you (and your wife) to discuss the results as well as any other questions or concerns the two of you may have.

Suitable candidates are then given a formal application form and two confidential reference forms. Applicants must submit these forms, along with documentation confirming the applicant's age, identity, residency, academic achievement, and any previous theological formation, as well as a personal statement requesting admission into the program, a signed statement from the wife of a married applicant indicating consent for his application, recent photographs of the applicant and his wife, a consent form regarding psychological consultation, and a criminal record check. A medical report from the applicant's physician may be requested.



A suitable married couple will interview the applicant and his wife in their home and provide a formal report to the Director and the committee.

19. Who chooses the candidates for the diaconate?

After completing the application process, the applicant is interviewed by three members of the PDP Advisory Committee, using a standard questionnaire. The Advisory Committee makes one of three recommendations to the Archbishop: immediate acceptance, deferral, or refusal. The Archbishop communicates his decision to the applicant by letter.

20. What are the key qualities of a Deacon?

Deacons nurture a deep interior life and friendship with Christ that enables them to meet and balance their ministerial, work, and family obligations. Discerning a vocation to the diaconate requires prayer, dialogue and evaluation, as well as the involvement of the candidate, his family, and his parish. With the assistance of many, the Archbishop examines each individual's suitability using objective criteria that rely on the Church's tradition and recognize the particular pastoral needs of the Archdiocese.