Roman Catholic
Diocese of Albany
Office of Diaconate Formation

A Prayerful Guide
for
Discerning a Vocation to the Diaconate

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Note: The Diaconate Logo on the cover was designed by Deacon Gerald P. Rooney (+May, 2002), Archdiocese of Boston. Used with permission. Please keep Gerald in your prayers.
ABOUT THIS GUIDE
Always check for interim revisions on the Deacon Web Site, New Vocations to the Diaconate, for any changes since the revision date on the cover.

A PRAYER FOR YOUR VOCATION
Before you go any further with this Guide, please pray now! Then pray often.

O Lord, help me to know your will for me. Let your light shine in the depths of my heart that I may know what you want me to do with my life. Help me believe that you have a special plan for me. Lord, I know I pass through this life only once; help me decide how you want me to make a difference. Like our Blessed Mother, give me the wisdom to hear your voice and the courage to answer your call. Above all give me peace of mind and heart. I offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Used with permission: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops USCCB)

1. INTRODUCTION

Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
(Matthew 28:19-20)

Do you hear our Lord Jesus Christ calling you to serve him; his Church; the Body of Christ; and all of God’s people with a lifestyle dedicated to service, love, justice, the Word of God and the Liturgy? God may be inviting you to the lifestyle and ministry of deacon, a special vocation called forth by the Holy Spirit. The seeds of all vocations are sown during the Sacraments of Initiation and nurtured to maturity in the life of the Church. Authentic vocations to ministry should be a dialogue between God and human beings, between the love of God who calls and the freedom of individuals who respond lovingly to God.

A vocation, from the Latin word for “to call,” is more than a strong feeling. It is a divine call to God's service, to the Christian life described in the passage above from the Gospel of Matthew. God, who formed humans out of love, calls us to love others in return. Deacons are called to love intensely by being living icons of Jesus Christ the Servant.

If you think you are called to the lifestyle of an ordained deacon, please carefully review this guide. We urge you to make yourself as knowledgeable as possible by surfing the Web to find more information about the Order of Deacon (known as the Diaconate), and to read as much as possible about the diaconal ministry as you begin the discernment process.

A Brief History of the Renewal of the Permanent Diaconate

Around the middle of the Fourth Century, the Order of Deacon—originally a ministry of service—gradually became a transitional stepping-stone toward the priesthood along with some other minor orders. In the mid-1960s the Diaconate, as a permanent order of ministry in the Roman Catholic Church, was re-established to its’ fullness as a result of the Second Vatican
Council. Pope Paul VI restored the Order of Deacon as a permanent ministry on June 18, 1967 on the feast of St. Ephrem, the Deacon (died June, 373). The new norms for the Diaconate were published in Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Letter, “Ad Pascendum.” He described the deacon as:

“The interpreter of the needs and desires of the Christian communities, and the sign or sacrament of Christ the Lord himself who came not to be served but to serve.”

On April 23, 1968, the American Bishops petitioned for the restoration of the permanent diaconate in the United States, “both to complete the hierarchy of sacred orders and to enrich and strengthen the various diaconal ministries at work in the United States with the sacramental grace of the diaconate.” The request was granted in August of the same year. Finally, on June 19, 1976, following three years of study and formation in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, NY under Bishop Edwin B. Broderick, the first group of twenty-four men were ordained as permanent deacons.

Who is a Deacon?

While all members of the Church are called to minister to others by virtue of their baptism, some are ordained to special ministries through the Sacrament of Holy Orders to serve the rest of the Church. A deacon is a member of the clergy and shares in the one Sacrament of Orders. In the Catholic Church, “the clergy” includes only ordained ministers; bishops, priests and deacons. As noted in the brief history above, for many centuries prior to Vatican Council II, the diaconate was one of several stepping-stones on the path to priesthood and was subordinate to priests and bishops. Since the renewal of the diaconate as a permanent order, the relationship between the ranks of the clergy is no longer the hierarchal arrangement of bishop-priest-deacon; rather, it is now bishop-priest AND bishop-deacon.

A deacon is an ordained member of the Catholic Church but most dress and act a lot like laypersons. In the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, like many other dioceses in the United States—except for specialized assignments such as prison and hospital ministry—deacons do not wear clerical garb. The deacon may be married before ordination. Most deacons have a paying job outside the Church, while also living a life of service to the Church and God’s people, usually without monetary compensation. While the deacon is a member of the clergy, he is firmly rooted in the day-to-day world of family life, workplace, and community.

By virtue of his ordination, a deacon is an interpreter of the needs and the desires of the Christian community and the sign or sacrament of Christ. According to Patrick McCaslin and Michael Lawler:

*A deacon is a member of the Church who, in response to God’s perceived election and call, reaches out to be of service to the Church, and, in this way, incarnates the presence of Jesus, who is the deacon of the presence of God.* (Sacrament of Service, Vision of the Permanent Diaconate Today)
The deacon has a special relationship to the bishop and reports directly to him. This is signified by his special place at the bishop’s side during liturgy; furthermore, at an ordination to the diaconate, only the bishop lays hands on the candidate, thus signifying the deacon’s special attachment to the bishop in the tasks of his “diakonia,” the Greek word for service.

What is Diaconal Ministry?

_Deacons share in Christ's mission and grace in a special way. The sacrament of Holy Orders marks them with an imprint ("character") which cannot be removed and which configures them to Christ, who made himself the “deacon” or servant of all. Among other tasks, it is the task of deacons to assist the bishop and priests in the celebration of the divine mysteries, above all the Eucharist, in the distribution of Holy Communion, in assisting at and blessing marriages, in the proclamation of the Gospel and preaching, in presiding over funerals, and in dedicating themselves to the various ministries of charity._ (1570 Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Before you are guided to an explanation of the three components of diaconal ministry, it is important to understand that the deacon is called to a lifestyle marked by a self-emptying; he is identified by his self-sacrificing love in imitation of Jesus, “who emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave . . . (Phil 2:6-11).” To paraphrase Susan K. Wood’s work, _Sacramental Orders_, deacons minister more by who they are than what they perform; diaconal ministry is more about presence than task; and, about who the deacon is more than what he does.

According to the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education, _Congregation for the Clergy_, _Directory for Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons_, paragraph #47 (which is the basis for our National Directory), “the primary and most fundamental relationship of the deacon must be with Christ, who assumed the condition of a slave for love of the Father and humankind. In virtue of ordination, the deacon is truly called to act in conformity with Christ the Servant.” Deacon William T. Ditewig, in his book _The Emerging Diaconate, Servant Leaders in a Servant Church_, concludes that the diaconate sacramentalizes the _diakonia_ (ministry of service and charity) of the Church itself through the integral and balanced exercise of what is essentially servant-leadership. We urge you to acquire a copy of this important contemporary work as you discern your call.

With this very brief theological reflection of diaconate fresh in your mind, we can now introduce several unique but integrated components of diaconal ministry as follows:

**Ministry of Charity or Service**

A deacon is ordained by the local bishop for service to the diocesan Church. In communion with the bishop and priests, deacons are ordained for service ministry, which is indicated by their title
“deacon,” translated from the Greek word “diakonia” to serve. A deacon in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany is given assignments for both service and liturgy; the latter is usually in a parish. Ministries of charity or service may be in the parish, diocese and other areas of need in the secular world, such as hospitals, prisons, homeless shelters, food pantries, etc. Deacons also have a variety of service ministries to the aged, battered women, abused children, the bereaved, people with a variety of physical and mental disabilities, the divorced, drug addicts, the poor and any other area where the human condition cries out for the love and sacramental presence of Jesus. Deacons do all this in the name of the Church while representing the love of Jesus.

**Ministry of the Word**

As the ordinary minister, the deacon’s role includes the proclamation of the Gospel during liturgy and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet) at the Easter Vigil. He preaches, usually on some pre-arranged schedule with the Priest/Parish Life Director, and is responsible for the Prayers of the Faithful. Additional duties associated with the Word include catechetical instruction and sacramental preparation. Other forms of this ministry may also include formal teaching, counseling, Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), evangelization and outreach to alienated Catholics, to name a few.

**Liturgical and Sacramental Ministry**

The deacon solemnly administers the Sacrament of Baptism, witness’s marriages, and presides at wakes, funerals, Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest, Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction, Liturgy of the Hours, and other formal prayer sessions both as a planner and presider. During the Mass, the deacon carries the Book of the Gospel in procession and is the Ordinary Minister of the Chalice. He also prepares the altar for the reception of the gifts and is responsible to assist the priest during Mass especially with instructions to the congregation.

**Other Functions**

Deacons may also use their talents, training and experience in performing various administrative duties at the diocesan and parish level and other church-related offices. Of particular importance is the responsibility to enable and encourage others by example and action so they too can become effective ecclesial lay ministers. By their lifestyle, deacons bear witness to the Gospel to all they meet at prayer, work and at play; they give definition to the meaning of the Body of Christ!
Call to be a Holy Family

Most deacons are married. A deacon’s wife and family play an important support role during his years of formation and after ordination; in fact, so intimate is their partnership and unity in the sacrament of marriage, that the Church requires the wife’s consent before her husband can be ordained a permanent deacon.

One of the best opportunities the wife of a deacon has to grow in her knowledge of the diaconate and its impact on her and their family is to participate in the formation process to the greatest extent possible; at the same time, her own spiritual growth is enhanced. After ordination, there are continuing opportunities available to the wives and widows, such as personal prayer; Scripture study; faith sharing groups; participation in the ongoing deacon study days; the annual deacon convocation; and the annual deacon, wives and widows retreat. These are all opportunities for prayer, study, hospitality and community building.

In terms of official ministry, there is no specific role for the deacon’s wife. The deacon’s ordination does not confer any ministerial responsibility to his wife; yet the unity of the deacon and his wife is a sign to the entire parish of the unity of Christ with his Church. Many times the deacon’s wife serves the parish or local community in a concrete way herself. After ordination, the deacon and his wife may work together in various ways to build up the kingdom of God. Together they can show how the obligations of family, work and ministry can be harmonized in the service of the Church’s mission.

One Order of Deacons - Permanent and Transitional

There is only one Order of Deacon. All priests are first ordained as deacons, usually a year before their priestly ordination. The diaconate for them is transitional because they go on to be ordained priests. They then live their life in priestly ministry. Permanent deacons are what the name implies: they are ordained for a life-long commitment to a ministry of service in the stable and permanent rank of deacon. Instead of seminary, permanent deacons receive their initial training and formation through the Office of Diaconate Formation.

It is a recent tradition in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany that the permanent and transitional deacons are ordained during the same liturgy to reflect the unity of the Order.

Recommended Reading

Men who are discerning a possible vocation to the diaconate and their wives have an obligation to themselves to fully investigate the call.

Reading suggestions:
1. *The Emerging Diaconate: Servant Leaders in a Servant Church*, William T. Ditewig, as well as any other books written by Deacon Ditewig.

4. **Deacons Bring Life to the Diocese**, Bishop Howard J. Hubbard, on-line at: [www.evangelist.org/archive/htm7/0601bish.htm](http://www.evangelist.org/archive/htm7/0601bish.htm)

5. The official web site for the Diocese of Albany: [www.rcda.org/offices/deacons/](http://www.rcda.org/offices/deacons/). Check out the “New Vocations to the Diaconate” sidebar link. At this web site, you may also find the manuals associated with Aspirancy and Candidacy, which you are encouraged to review.

YOUR NOTES:
2. REQUIREMENTS

So when Jesus had washed their feet (and) put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” (John 13:12-15)

The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons (DMLPD) in the United States sets forth minimum standards: the most important requirement for an applicant discerning a vocation to the lifestyle of a deacon is to have a natural inclination of service to the Christian community and all of God’s people in need. This can be best described as “the heart of a servant” modeled after the Servant Leader Jesus Christ. He may be married or single, and must possess psychological integrity, a capacity to communicate and dialogue, and an openness to share his faith while listening to another’s point of view. The applicant must be able to listen carefully and without prejudices—respecting people in the context of religion, race, gender, ethnicity and culture. A sense of responsibility that includes fulfilling one’s word and completing one’s work are important as is the ability to engage in Christian collaboration. Balanced and prudent judgments, generosity of service, the ability to lead, motivate, facilitate and animate others are also desirable traits. In the modern world, computer skills are increasingly important, especially in the aspirancy and candidacy phases of the formation process and during courses at St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry.

Evangelical and spiritual qualities include:
- A deep spirituality and prayer life.
- Sound faith and regular participation in the Church’s Sacramental life.
- Good Christian reputation and personal integrity.
- Active involvement in the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.
- Participation in faith enrichment opportunities such as Bible study, Spring Enrichment, retreats, adult education, etc.

There are additional mandatory requirements in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany before admission to the Aspirancy and Candidacy Paths of formation. At times the bishop, in consultation with the Diaconate Board and the Chancellor for Pastoral Services, may choose to accept a candidate who may not meet certain requirements for acceptance. In such cases the bishop’s direct acceptance of a candidate results from specific diocesan and pastoral needs.

Personal Requirements

Inquirers must:
- Be a Catholic male who is fully initiated; that is, having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation.
- Be in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. At least two or three years should elapse between a convert’s, or returning Catholic’s, entry into the Church and acceptance into formation (DMLPD #174 footnote 8b).
- Be a U.S. citizen or a legal, permanent resident at the time of admission with a working knowledge of the English language.
- Be at least thirty-two (32) years of age at the time of admission to the formation process.
- Be less than sixty-two (62) years of age at the time of ordination.
- Enjoy good physical and mental health with no conditions that would impede diaconal ministry.
- Have successfully completed high school (or GED) and be able to handle college graduate-level course work.
- Possess financial security with a history of steady employment in a position that does not require frequent travel or reassignment.
- Be a registered parishioner within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, NY.

**Family Requirements**

- If married, normally, be married for at least three (3) years prior to the formal application (DMLPD #174 footnote 8d) and live in a stable and valid marriage enjoying the full support of his wife, and be willing to remain in the celibate state if your wife pre-deceases you.
- If single, enjoy a stable, settled life with a history of healthy relationships and understand the implications of celibacy, which will be required of the single candidate.
- Enjoy with your family a good reputation within the community.
- Be able to give the time required for study and service without detriment to your family or employment.

**Ministry Requirements**

- Be willing to commit yourself to a lifestyle of daily prayer.
- Have successfully completed a minimum of two years of the Kateri Institute for Lay Ministry Program or its predecessor, the Formation for Ministry Program (FMP). **Important:** Study in the lay ministry programs should be done for its own worth to improve your skills in bringing the Kingdom of God and the love of Jesus into reality. If you have taken or are planning on taking these courses only to apply to the diaconate, your motivation requires reassessment and discernment.
- While the Kateri Institute and Diaconal Formation will collaborate in certain areas of formation, acceptance into either certificate option of the Institute does not guarantee acceptance into Diaconal Formation, which is a completely separate application process. You must have completed or be in your second or third year of the Kateri Institute for Lay Ministry Formation (Kateri) before you may be considered to submit an application.
- The bishop has determined that the maximum age for men being ordained to the diaconate is 62 years. Therefore, if a man is considering a call to diaconate, he will need to begin his work at the Kateri Institute no later than his 56th
birthday.
- Participate in the aspirancy process (minimum of one year).
- Be willing to make a life-long commitment to serve the people of God and the Church of Albany as determined by our bishop.
- Be willing to promise obedience to the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany and his successors, accepting any pastoral assignments that may be given to you.
- Be active in the Church and be recognized and accepted as a leader in your community.
- Be recommended by those who have worked with you in ministry—especially your pastor or parish life director—and who can attest to your potential to be an ordained minister for the Church.

YOUR NOTES:
3. PRAYERFULLY PURSUING YOUR VOCATION

The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, “Here I am. You called me.” Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth. So he said to Samuel, “Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the LORD came and revealed his presence, calling out as before, “Samuel, Samuel!” Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:8-10)

Vocation is all about listening: listening to God; listening to the inner self; listening to family; and listening to formators and spiritual directors. Diaconate is not a lifestyle to be entered into lightly. It requires prayerful discernment and willingness to self-empty and surrender one’s life (kenosis) into the hands of Jesus. The process requires that you determine where Jesus and his Holy Spirit are leading you. It may not be toward ordination; rather, your call may be to another role as one of God’s priestly people.

Another important consideration: you probably have many commitments to family, career, the community and church service. It is a matter of prudent judgment to explore, not only whether the call to the diaconate is from the Holy Spirit, but also whether you are ready and able to respond to that call at the present time.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, the Office of Diaconate Formation, and the body of staff known as “Formators,” will do everything possible to walk with you on this journey and to support and guide you and your family. Those considering taking the path toward ordination must be mature and responsible enough to be open to the will of God during the entire inquiry, aspirancy and candidacy process. It takes courage to say, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Inquiry Phase

The fact that you are reading this guide indicates that you have begun to discern a call or vocation to live the lifestyle of a deacon. Careful investigation and discernment by both you and the Church are required before you are invited to submit an application. During your inquiry phase, you are required to attend at least one Deacon Information Gathering. If you are married, your wife is encouraged to participate. Dates and locations will be provided.

Gather as much information as possible by reviewing the suggested readings, and by speaking to current deacons, deacon’s wives, and the deacon formation staff. A list of deacons, by county, who are willing to share their experience about deacon formation and their lifestyle of servant-leadership, is available online.

Discernment Phases

The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes “discernment” as the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure. To discern a call from God, who is beyond our understanding, may seem like an impossible task. It is impossible without fervent prayer and spiritual help. To
paraphrase Sr. Kitty Hanley, CSJ, Ph.D. at St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry. *At its root, the word 'discernment' means “to sift” or “to sort.” Discerning a call to the diaconate will require you to sift and sort through the various movements and voices you experience (both from within and without) to discover which are authentically from God.*

Therefore, we suggest that all serious inquirers seek the assistance of a qualified spiritual director who can help you navigate the discernment process and continue with you should you be accepted to the Aspirancy and Candidacy Paths of formation. As far as obtaining information is concerned, we again strongly suggest you obtain a copy of *The Emerging Diaconate: Servant Leaders in a Servant Church,* by Deacon William T. Dietwig.

**Personal Discernment**

The first stirring of a vocation to the diaconate is often explored at a personal level and usually begins with seeking information about the deacon lifestyle and the formation process. Here, you may initially prayerfully reflect upon the nature of your perceived call. The spiritual dimension is critical and you are encouraged to engage a spiritual director because discerning your call is primarily a spiritual journey; discernment is personal and individual to you and therefore requires personal guidance. The Office of Diaconate Formation is able to recommend a qualified spiritual director.

As part of your personal discernment (and we urge that you include your wife if married) you must have attended at least one (1) Diaconate Information Gathering. The agenda includes prayer, a brief presentation from the faculty and staff, a time for interaction, questions and clarification, and an opportunity to meet other men and their families who are discerning a vocation to the diaconate. Information session schedules are on the web site.

Before you are invited to apply to the diaconate formation program, you must participate in three (3) Discernment Sessions which are held one Saturday a month in October, November, December, and if necessary, January. These sessions focus on Scripture and theological reflection, both written and verbal. You will work directly with our Formators and will meet men who have moved on to the Candidate Path of formation. In virtually all cases, the Inquirer is married and therefore we require the wife of the Inquirer to attend one discernment session so that she is fully aware of the time commitment for formation and the responsibilities of the Office of Deacon in our diocese.

**Family Discernment**

The majority of men who inquire about the diaconate are married. It is critical to pay special attention to discussing a possible vocation with your wife and family. The initial information you gather and conversations with your pastor or parish life director and others should assist you with these discussions. If you are married, the support of your wife, based upon honest, effective and prayerful communication, is important for the health of the marriage. Consent of your wife is mandatory to begin the formation process, during the process and again before ordination. Therefore, even at this early stage of discernment, decisions you make together must come from an informed understanding.
**Communal Discernment**

The Church, the Body of Christ, is the third leg of the discernment process. Your parish is probably your primary experience of Church. It is the responsibility of this parish community, including your pastor or parish life director, to invite and encourage those who may be qualified to serve as ordained ministers of the Church. In addition, those church and community agencies that carry out the Church’s mission of charity and justice have a unique opportunity to help you to recognize that God may be calling you to ordained ministry.

The diocesan Church and the bishop are also part of the communal discernment. Information sessions, the exploration of the criteria for a diaconal vocation, providing resource material and guidance will help you make a prayerful decision to move forward with a formal application. Prior to being invited to submit an application after completing the inquiry and discernment phases, you and your wife must meet with the Director of Initial Diaconate Formation. Details on how to make an appointment will be provided during the three Discernment Sessions.

When you are recommended by your pastor or parish life director and submit an application with the supporting documentation, the formal process for admission begins. At that point, your focus on discernment will continue with an emphasis on your abilities and potential for ordained ministry, concentrating on your intellectual, pastoral, spiritual and human formation. Both you and the Church of Albany will begin an intensive screening process.

**Application Phase**

As has been explained in this guide, there are mandatory requirements that must be completed before you will be invited to submit an application:

1. The process begins by contacting the Office for Diaconate Formation staff, in person at the Pastoral Center, via e-mail (initial.formation@rcda.org) or by telephone (518-453-6670) and then providing basic information for an Inquiry Information Form.
2. Anticipation of successful completion of a minimum two years of study at the Kateri Institute.

Details of the process are as follows:

**Step 1:**
With your wife if married, request and participate in a preliminary interview with Director of Diaconate Formation (This may take place before the Kateri Institute or at any other time during the Inquiry Phase, but again after the Discernment Sessions).

**Step 2:**
After participating in the three required Discernment Sessions, the Director will invite potentially qualified inquirers to submit an application. The formal application process begins with the submission of an application form and packet, which is available through the Office of Diaconate Formation or on-line for review. This completed packet includes a life essay, one or more theological reflections, and a letter from your pastor or parish life director presenting you for consideration for diaconal Formation.
The following documents are required:
- Applicant Application Form.
- Required Essays and other Application writings described in the packet.
- A Baptism certificate with a Church seal with notations on the Sacraments of Confirmation, Marriage and Holy Orders issued within the past six-months.
- Proof of age (birth certificate).
- Signed consent to psychological examination.
- Signed consent to a background screening check form.
- A recent photograph of Applicant, and if married, a separate photo of his wife.
- A personal hand-written statement from the wife of a married applicant indicating her initial consent for his application and entrance into aspirant formation.
- A recommendation letter from the pastor, parish life director or parish administrator.
- Recommendation letter from the Applicant’s employer.
- Additional recommendation letters as indicated in the application packet.
- A recent medical certificate, clearly stating the health of the Applicant.
- Copy of high school diploma, GED certificate, or an official transcript of undergraduate or graduate level academic studies.
- A special letter if the applicant ever attended a seminary.
- Proof of legal residency in the diocese, usually a copy of photo driver’s license.
- A copy of the Social Security card.
- Certificate of completion from Formation for Ministry Program (FMP) or proof of attendance from the Kateri Institute for Lay Ministry Program (This may be added later for those completing the last six months of their second year of the Institute).
- A signed permission slip to use photographs of you, your wife and your children.
- Proof of Virtus Training for the applicant and his wife, if married.
- Signed Code of Conduct Form.

Step 3:
When you are given the formal application package, you will also be given instructions for making an appointment with the approved psychological centre to undergo a comprehensive psychological examination.

Step 4:
The fourth step in the application process is a formal interview by two members of the Diaconate Board with the applicant (and your wife if married) to:
- assess the applicant’s level of awareness of diaconal vocation.
- assess information and background on his family life, employment stability, and general aptitude for diaconal ministry.

The Office of Diaconate Formation and the Diaconate Board must, with appropriate care for the confidentiality of and manifestation of conscience, explore the presence of impediments to ordination. If canonical dispensations are required, these must be obtained before admission to aspirant formation.

Step 5: The next step is a background screening check.
Discernment of Readiness for the Aspirant Path of Formation

Your readiness to continue on to the Aspirant Path of formation is determined in several ways. This includes a careful review of your application, your life-story, your ministry experiences (especially with the poor and marginalized), your theological reflections, letters of recommendation, and the interview with the Diaconate Board members. Intellectual readiness is based upon prior experience identified by academic transcripts and through evidence of participation in the diocesan lay ecclesial ministry programs, adult education programs and other documented learning experiences.

In collaboration with the Diaconate Board, the Director of Diaconate Formation will make a recommendation, with supporting facts, to the bishop recommending:

- The applicant not be accepted into the Aspirant Path of formation.
- The applicant is not ready to be accepted at this time, with clearly stated reasons for the recommendation and any additional areas the applicant must discern or improve.
- A recommendation to accept the applicant into the Aspirant Path of formation.

The final decision rests with the bishop. In addition to a letter from the bishop, the applicant (and his wife if married) will be invited to review the decision of the bishop with the Director of Diaconate Formation.

YOUR NOTES:
4. THE FORMATION PROCESS

The two formation paths will only be lightly touched upon so that you have a clear picture of the formation process. Additional information may be found at the following at the Initial Formation web site. Please remember that your personal, family and Church discernment process continues during formation (as your on-going assessment) on your journey toward ordination.

Aspirant Path

The one-year aspirancy period is a time of prayer and reflection by you (and your wife if married) prior to formal acceptance as a candidate for ordination. It lasts for a minimum of one year beginning in July and ending in June. After the initial orientation meeting in July, the summer will be spent in prayerful discernment and you will be given assignments to complete. Beginning in September, you will meet for ten Saturdays for a session lasting about six hours. If you are married, your wife should make every effort possible to be with you for all ten sessions. The questions is not “Do I have to attend every session?” but rather, “How informed will I be to give my loving consent unless I have taken advantage of opportunities to make myself informed about the formation process and my husband’s potential role as a public minister?” Some topics you will cover include: Qualities of Diaconal Ministry; Personal Discernment; Dimensions of Formation; Elements of Being Chosen; presentations by deacons and their wives; and, the Theology of the Diaconate. You will also be required to have a spiritual director and complete the Ignatian Exercises.

Personal, family and Church discernment continues during the aspirancy year; in addition, you are assessed—and will self-assess—during the entire time. Either you, (or your wife if married) or the diocese may postpone or stop the process at any time by advising the formation staff and then submitting a letter to the bishop. At the end of the aspirancy year, the bishop, with the recommendation of the Diaconate Board and Director of Diaconate Formation, will make the final decision concerning your acceptance into the three-year candidate path toward ordination as a deacon.

Candidate Path

The candidacy process takes three years during which time you (and your wife if married) will participate in four areas of formation described below:

1. Intellectual Formation
You will attend graduate theology courses 26 to 34 evenings per year at St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry. Classes are held at the Pastoral Center and will count toward a graduate degree if you continue with your studies. If attending graduate school causes anxiety, please feel free to contact the Office of Diaconate Formation. We’ll arrange for you to sit in on a class. Wives are also invited to audit courses that you take at the expense of the diocese.

2. Pastoral Formation
Internship at local hospitals, nursing homes, homeless shelters, parishes and with Catholic
Charities allows you to experience and apply the love of Jesus in a pastoral setting. Pastoral formation also includes practicums, and training in liturgy and homiletics.

3. **Spiritual Formation**
Your spirituality will be supported and strengthened through Spiritual Direction, participation in retreats, and introduction to the Liturgy of the Hours and other methods of prayer.

4. **Human Formation**
Formation begins with human formation and development. The Formators will help you to cultivate a series of human qualities not only as a person but also as a future minister of the Church. Ten weekends per year from Saturday morning until Sunday afternoon, you (and your wife if married) will attend sessions relating to the Human Dimension of your formation. The weekends also are used for Spiritual and Pastoral formation through classes on Homiletics and Liturgy.

Theological reflection is an important part of all four dimensions. As with the Aspirancy phase assessment and evaluation with the option to continue, postpone, or leave the formation process apply.

**Ordination**

With the Holy Spirit as a guide during the candidacy process, when you, your family and your Church community decide you are ready, ordination will take place in the spring of your third year. Your intellectual, pastoral, spiritual and human formation will, however, continue with the support of the Order of Deacons with which you are forever one.

**YOUR NOTES:**

5. CONTACT INFORMATION

Office of Diaconate Formation
The Office is located in the Pastoral Center:
40 North Main Avenue
Albany, New York 12203.

Deacon Frank Berning, D.Min.
Director of Diaconate Formation
518 453-6670 - Diaconate Formation Administrative Assistant
518 453-6679 - Direct line
518 641-6841 - Fax
E-Mail - initial.formation@rcda.org

Diaconate Board and Formators
The complete an up-to-date list of members of the Diaconate Board and those women and men involved in the Deacon Formation process may be found on-line at the deacon’s web site.

Personal Deacon Contacts by County
A list of deacons, by county, who are available to talk with you about the diaconate and their experiences in ministry, may be found on-line at the deacon’s web site.

Acknowledgments
The Diocese of Albany and the Office of Diaconate Formation wish to acknowledge and thank the following for their ideas, assistance and/or sharing of materials used to create this guide:

- **Archdiocese of Boston, MA** - Deacon Daniel Burns, copyright permission to use the diaconate logo on the cover designed by Deacon Gerald P. Rooney.
- **Diocese of Albany, NY** - The women and men of the Diaconate Formation Team who shared their time, talents, ideas, knowledge and experience.
- **Diocese of Green Bay, WI** - Ideas from their Deacons Home Page at www.gbdio.org/vocations/deacons.
- **Diocese of Lafayette, IN** - Deacon Steve Miller, his article in the Deacon’s Corner - “The Vocation of Deacon: to be an icon of Christ the Servant.”
- **Diocese of Metuchen, NJ** - Deacon Samuel J. Costantino, for sharing the Diaconate Booklet, covering all stages of the inquiry, application and formation process.
### APPENDIX 1 - MODEL STANDARDS FOR READINESS FOR ADMISSION INTO THE ASPIRANT PATH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appreciation/Knowledge of</th>
<th>Demonstrated Ability/Skill</th>
<th>Verified in Interview</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HUMAN DIMENSION</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- His emotional, intellectual, physical, and personal limitations</td>
<td>- To speak appropriately of his personal limitations and known boundaries with a sense of how these affect his life, family, employment, and present service ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>- A family perspective in his life</td>
<td>- To balance and prioritize his commitments to family, work, leisure, and ministry; to be self-disciplined</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INTELLECTUAL DIMENSION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- The basic teachings of the Church</td>
<td>- To demonstrate familiarity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>PASTORAL DIMENSION</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Living the Gospel in his life, home, place of employment, and neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ To connect the teachings of the Church to daily living and his personal/communal (family, church, civic) responsibilities</td>
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<td>▪ To be flexible in attitude and behavior; to be open to change; to analyze situations in light of the Gospel and the Church’s teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appreciation/Knowledge of DIACONAL VOCATION AND MINISTRY</td>
<td>Demonstrated Ability/Skill</td>
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<td>▪ A personal call to diaconal ministry with the Church and a sense of his capacity to commit himself to it in fidelity to his state in life and employment, with sufficient time for formation</td>
<td>▪ To witness to Gospel values in ways that are life-giving; to articulate his sense of a call to the diaconate primarily because of the needs of the Church, as well as for personal growth; and to articulate reasons that support his desire to be a deacon</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ To be interested in and attracted to the diaconal munera of word, liturgy, and charity</td>
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<td>▪ To be of service, beyond liturgical ministries, thorough church or civic involvement</td>
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<td>▪ To support and encourage his pastor, as a representative for the parish community and staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ To be docile to the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the application and screening processes, acknowledging that ultimately it is the Church that verifies the call</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appreciation/Knowledge of SPIRITUAL DIMENSION</td>
<td>Demonstrated Ability/Skill</td>
<td>Verified in Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>• God’s redeeming activity in his state of life, experience, and ministry</td>
<td>• To reflect/meditate in faith on his life with a sense of discovering God’s will</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The importance of a both personal and communal prayer life</td>
<td>• To convey examples of God’s presence in his life</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• To commit as a reader or extraordinary minister of the Eucharist; to serve his parish community, especially in charity and outreach to the needy; to be responsible and confident</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• To be both a leader and follower</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• To fulfill a commitment to a pattern of prayer; to participate frequently in the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation; to participate in retreat experiences or a renewal group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• To support other’s growth in prayer; to show interest in sharing and serving with others</td>
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