



## **OFFICE OF THE DIACONATE DIOCESE OF GALVESTON-HOUSTON**

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### **THE DIACONATE & DIACONATE FORMATION**

**DEACONS:** Deacons are public ministers of the Church, ordained for the three-fold ministries of the Word, Liturgy and Charity. At present, there are more than 350 deacons serving in parishes and special ministries throughout the Diocese of Galveston-Houston. Fundamentally, a deacon is a Man of Service who is called from the Church Community to a lifelong and public commitment to service through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Deacons are not taught to be servants; rather they are men who are best characterized as “having a deacon’s heart.” Their lived faith is one of caring for others, helping where needed, giving of themselves in the works of their parish community or the Diocesan Church.

**MINISTRIES:** Deacons serve in a variety of ministries: as parish ministers, prison chaplains, hospital chaplains, diocesan administration and services. Most deacons are assigned to their home parish but should realize that in the future deacons will be assigned according to the needs of the diocese. Deacons minister under the authority of the Bishop of the diocese and are assigned to meet the needs of the diocese.

**PROGRAM OF FORMATION:** Prior to admission to formation, those desiring to apply for the diaconate will participate in a series of pre-requisite educational programs including FTCM (Formation Toward Christian Ministry) and introductory courses in Philosophy, Biblical Studies and Theological Methods. After admission to formation, there is a one year period of Aspirancy during which the integrated program of academic, pastoral and spiritual formation begins. The year of Aspirancy is followed by formal admission to Candidacy for ordination and three years of continuing academic, pastoral and spiritual formation.

**PREREQUISITES:** Aspirants are expected to have completed FTCM (Formation Toward Christian Ministry) and three introductory courses in Philosophy, Biblical Studies and Theological Methods, or to have an adequate theological and philosophical grounding to begin academic, pastoral and spiritual formation.

**ACADEMIC FORMATION:** The academic formation includes two programs. The Diploma Program includes 40 hours of undergraduate courses in theology and related subjects. This program does *not* lead to an academic degree. The Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies is a 47 hour *masters degree* program that is designed to offer graduate level theological courses related

to diaconal ministry. Both the Diploma and the MAPS programs include pastoral courses as well as academic courses. Each academic course meets one evening per week. Pastoral courses are offered one Saturday morning each month, while the same Saturday afternoon is devoted to spiritual formation.

**SPIRITUAL FORMATION:** Spiritual formation sessions are held one Saturday each month except during June and July. Spiritual formation introduces the aspirant and his wife to the spiritual life of the deacon, prayer forms and practices, and the history of the Church's spiritual traditions. An annual retreat is also an essential part of the spiritual formation process.

**LOCATION:** All classes meet at the University of St. Thomas School of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary unless otherwise noted.

**WIVES:** Spouses are required to participate in all spiritual formation sessions and pastoral formation classes which are held on Saturdays as well as the annual retreat. Wives are encouraged but not required to participate in the academic courses for credit and/or audit. Those wives who desire to take academic and pastoral courses for credit and who do not have the requisite theological and philosophical grounding will be required to participate in the prerequisite courses.

**ASPIRANT MINISTRY:** Aspirants are expected to have been involved in non-liturgical parochial ministry and will be expected to remain active in at least one non-liturgical ministry throughout the term of the diaconate formation program. The specific ministry assignment will be monitored and directed by the diaconate formation staff.

**QUALIFICATIONS:** At the time of application, those seeking admission to the diaconate formation program must meet the following standards:

- Be a fully initiated Catholic – baptized and confirmed
- Have a vibrant and living Catholic faith as evidenced in daily life
- If a convert, must have been baptized or received into the Catholic Church for at least five years.
- If married, be in a valid sacramental marriage not less than five years.
- Have a stable marriage and family life
- Have the support of his wife and children
- Have a high school education, GED or higher degree
- Be in good physical and psychological health
- Be sponsored by a parish in which the applicant has been a member for at least five years – with pastor's endorsement
- Be involved in non-liturgical parish ministry
- Have successfully completed Formation Toward Christian Ministry (FTCM), and the introductory courses in Philosophy, Biblical Studies and Theological Methods or equivalent adult education or formal academic programs with theological content.
- At the time of admission to the period of Aspirancy, the applicant must be between the ages of 31 and 60 years.

**DEMONSTRATED HISTORY OF SERVICE:** Those selected to become aspirants will be individuals with a history of service in the Church beyond altar ministries. Serving as lectors, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist and other roles of liturgical ministry, while important, are not considered when evaluating applicants for admission. It must always be remembered that formation for the diaconate does not make a servant. One must first be a servant to be a genuine deacon.

**BILINGUAL LANGUAGE SKILLS:** Due to the needs of the diocese, those with bilingual skills in Spanish or other languages prevalent in the diocese will be accorded a priority in the admissions process. However, it is essential that those applying for admission be fluent enough in English to handle the demands of the academic classes, which are conducted only in English.

**IMPEDIMENTS:** Canonical prohibitions which can lead to denial of admission to Aspirancy include:

- Insanity, a diagnosed mental illness or addiction;
- Commission of apostasy, heresy or schism;
- Being ordained or in perpetual vows as a member of a religious order;
- Being married outside of the church or being in an invalid marriage;
- Commission of voluntary homicide;
- Performing, financing, procuring or cooperating in an abortion;
- Attempting suicide;
- Self-mutilation including vasectomy or tubal ligation;
- Impersonation of an ordained minister;
- Involvement in any activity that would be unbecoming to the clerical state or that would bring scandal to the Church.

Note that Catholics are required to report impediments of those seeking admission to formation or ordination. Should any of these impediments pertain to someone who is considering applying for admission to formation for the diaconate (or to his spouse), they should discuss the circumstances of the possible impediment with the Director of the Permanent Diaconate before applying.

**ADMISSION:** The admission of aspirants to the formation process for the permanent diaconate involves a rigorous process of application, interview, scrutiny, evaluation, discernment and the successful completion of the prerequisite courses. The goal of this process is to discern which men are called by the Church to a vocation of permanent ordained service to the Church. The process includes the following steps:

- Contacting the Office of the Permanent Diaconate for an initial inquiry
- Submitting the written application and spouse's application
- Obtain letters of recommendation from the pastor and others
- Review of application materials and possible impediments, followed by an invitation to interview or a formal decline of the application
- Behavioral assessment interview of the applicant
- Administration of the Deacon Perceiver Skills Assessment
- Psychological evaluation of the Candidate
- Interview of the spouse

- ❑ Admission to Aspirancy. Note that Aspirancy is a one year period of formal discernment prior to the admission to Candidacy for the diaconate.

Admission to Aspirancy does not assure admission to Candidacy for the diaconate. Applicants may be informed that they will not be admitted to the program at any point in the admission or formation processes.

For more information contact:

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