



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE — OF YOUNGSTOWN —

## Office of the Permanent Diaconate

### Questions and Answers about the Permanent Diaconate

#### ***1 - What is a deacon?***

The diaconate is the Church's pre-eminent sign of the basic mission of all believers to serve others. Deacons give sacramental witness to what makes us fundamentally human: an other-centered responsibility for those in need. Deacons are servants of the liturgy, the Word, and of charity. In this way, deacons, in their active involvement in the community, their outreach to the poor and the marginalized, and their fostering of the Eucharistic communion of the Church, sacramentalize the Church's service. The sign of the diaconate celebrates, manifests, and makes effective the service of all good people everywhere. Deacons show what service is, when it is done in the self-giving love of Christ.

#### ***2 - What is a permanent deacon?***

Among the ranks of the Church's ordained ministers, there are three orders, bishops, priests, and deacons. Several months before a man is ordained a priest, he is ordained to the diaconate, which is called the transitional diaconate as the man first receives a sacramental configuration to Christ the Servant before being configured to Christ the Priest in priestly ordination. A *permanent* deacon is one whose vocation is to remain a deacon permanently, not passing on to another grade of holy orders.

#### ***3 - Where does the word deacon come from?***

It comes from the Greek word *diakonia*, which literally means service. A deacon, then, is one who serves after the pattern of Christ the Servant. As Pope Francis once remarked, "For you as deacons, selfless service is not a secondary aspect of your activity, but an essential dimension of your very being. Indeed, through your ministry, you devote yourselves to being "sculptors" and "painters" of the merciful face of the Father, and witnesses to the mystery of the Triune God" (Pope Francis, homily addressed to those to be ordained permanent deacons at St. Peter's Basilica during the Jubilee Year of Hope, February 23, 2025).

**4 - How many years does it take to become a deacon?**

The permanent deacon formation program is five years long.

**5 - I'm a convert to Catholicism. Is it possible to enter the permanent deacon formation program?**

Yes, it is possible. An applicant must be a Catholic for at least three years before he can be admitted into the formation program.

**6 - At what age can I enter into formation to become a deacon?**

In the United States, a man, whether married or single, must be 35 years old at the time of his ordination to the permanent diaconate. For that reason, the Diocese of Youngstown will only accept men into the program who will turn 35 before the projected date of ordination. As an upper limit, the Diocese of Youngstown will not accept into the formation program any man who is above the age of 60.

**7 - If I'm single, may I get married after I get ordained a deacon?**

No. A single man must, before being ordained a deacon, make a promise to remain celibate.

**8 - If I'm married, does my wife have any role to play in the formation process?**

Most certainly! During the application process, the applicant's wife must give her consent, write a short autobiography, and be interviewed before the Formation Team. At different points in the process, the applicant's wife will be asked to give her consent anew to her husband's continuing in the formation program and, eventually, to his ordination to the permanent diaconate. In addition, she is welcome to participate in any formation classes except when otherwise noted. A man's participation in formation and subsequent ordained ministry will have a significant impact on his family's life. For that reason, it is impossible for a married man to pursue ordained ministry in the Church without the loving support of his wife.

**9 - What are the different dimensions of the formation program?**

There are four dimensions: human, intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral. The Church, then, is concerned that her ordained ministers be well-rounded men who can effectively and compassionately carry out their ministries.

**10 - Who is involved in the formation process?**

Those admitted to the permanent deacon formation program will be assisted by several individuals. The Diocese's Director of Formation for the Permanent Diaconate will oversee the program and ensure that those in formation are integrating the four dimensions of diaconal formation. Those in formation will also be served by a formation advisor and a spiritual director who will accompany them. Those in formation are expected to meet with their formation advisor and spiritual director every 4-6 weeks. The applicant's Pastor will oversee and accompany him

during the course of his pastoral field experiences. These meetings and ministry experiences constitute a serious time commitment on the part of those in formation, but the most significant time commitment is given to the intellectual dimension.

***11 - How does the intellectual dimension of formation take place?***

The Diocese of Youngstown is currently collaborating with the Diocese of Cleveland. As a result, those in formation are required to attend classes during the academic year on Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings at St. Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in Wickliffe, OH. Attendance in person is obligatory. Since the cost of tuition is significant (over \$16,000), those in the formation program are required to cover \$4,500 of the total cost of tuition according to this timetable: \$1,500 in year one; \$1,200 in year two; \$900 in year three; \$600 in year four; and \$300 in year five. Those in the formation program are also responsible for purchasing their textbooks. Financial aid is available for those who qualify.

***12 - Why is the Diocese of Youngstown collaborating with the Diocese of Cleveland?***

The faithful have a right to ordained ministers that are well-equipped to serve them, which necessitates a thorough intellectual formation. With a seminary faculty already in place, the Diocese of Cleveland is well-positioned to provide an intellectual formation that is challenging and robust so as to prepare future ordained ministers to meet the needs of the faithful.

***13 - What are the different stages or steps of the formation process?***

During the first two years of the program, the man in formation is called an aspirant. The aspirant stage provides for a thorough discernment of a diaconal vocation. It also provides for an appropriate introduction into diaconal spirituality, supervised pastoral experiences, and an adequate assessment of the aspirant's potential to be promoted to candidate formation, and ultimately to ordination. At the conclusion of two years, an aspirant may petition the Diocesan Bishop for entry into the candidacy stage of formation. If, upon the positive recommendation of the Formation Team, the Diocesan Bishop accepts the aspirant's petition, he then begins the candidate stage in formation with the Rite of Admission to Candidacy. In this rite, the one who aspires to ordination publicly manifests his will to offer himself to God and the Church.

Admission to candidacy does not constitute a right to receive diaconal ordination. During the three-year candidacy stage, a candidate is instituted into two ministries, lector and acolyte.

***14 - What does the application process consist of?***

It is a lengthy process that requires the applicant to complete a formal application, be interviewed by the Formation Team, compile several documents (e.g., sacramental records, transcripts, etc.), write an autobiography, submit to a psychological examination, and provide reference letters.

***15 - Why is the application process so rigorous?***

To ensure that a man's calling to the permanent diaconate comes from God and that he has the necessary aptitude to begin the work of formation.

***16 - If I'm ordained to the permanent diaconate, will I serve in my home parish?***

While not impossible, it is very unlikely. Upon ordination, a deacon is in a direct relationship with the Diocesan Bishop, with whom he is in communion and under whose authority he exercises his ministry. The principal criteria for the deacon's assignment are the pastoral needs of the Diocese of Youngstown and his personal qualifications. At the same time, any assignment will take into consideration the deacon's family and occupational responsibilities.