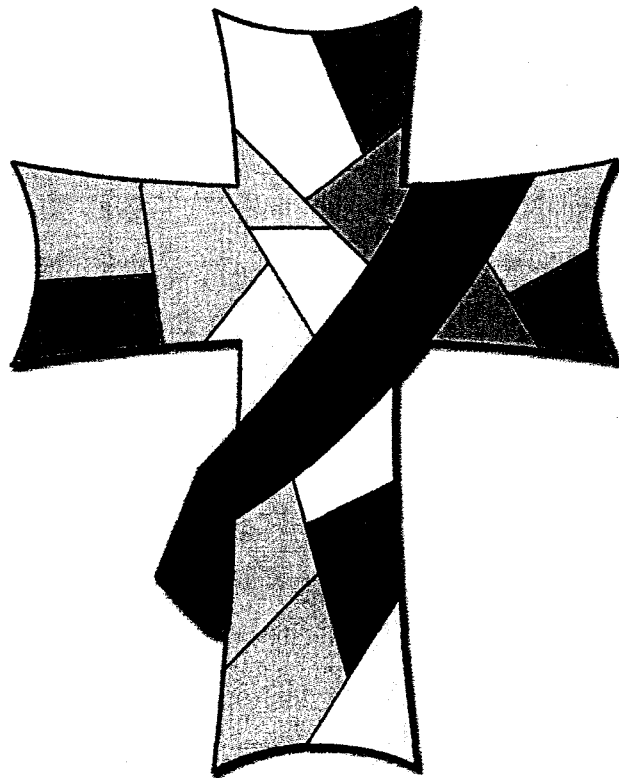


# Discerning a Vocation to the Permanent Diaconate



**Diaconate Ministry  
Diocese of Steubenville**

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**March 2009**

A vocation to the diaconate comes from God and is verified by the Church for which it is given. The discernment of a vocation for ministry in the Church requires one to gain knowledge, seek information, converse with other people, and be sustained in prayer. The permanent diaconate is a ministry of service and charity to the faith community, thus requiring from the deacon a real commitment involving time, effort, and hard work. A man who believes the Lord is calling him to serve the Church as a deacon is called forth by the bishop and ordained for the Church. The deacon ministers alongside priests and bishops while also maintaining his obligations to family and career. Below is information about the range of various responsibilities undertaken by deacons, the desirable attributes for those involved in diaconal ministry, and ways others might encourage men to discern a vocation to the diaconate.

### **Areas of Diaconal Ministry to be exercised potentially at the parish, regional, diocesan or institutional level**

#### **1) Ministry of the Word Tasks:**

- Teach religious education: adult and children
- Conduct inquiry classes for those interested in the Catholic Faith
- Proclaim the Gospel during Mass and at times deliver homilies
- Give baptismal instructions to parents
- Lead or assist with marriage preparation programs
- Participate-in/coordinate youth ministry programs
- Assist with catechetical programs
- Mentor Catechists

#### **2) Ministry of Sacrament Tasks:**

- Serve as deacon at the Eucharistic and distribute Holy Communion
- Take Communion to the sick and shut-ins
- Celebrate Baptisms, witness marriages, and preside at funerals outside of Mass
- Lead prayers at funeral home and at the cemetery
- Serve as minister of exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament
- Preside at the celebration of Morning or Evening Prayer

#### **3) Ministry of Charity and Justice Tasks:**

- Visit the hospitalized and minister to persons with disabilities
- Visit the imprisoned, the aged, and homebound
- Provide information, referral, and assistance for the poor and disadvantaged
- Promote parish social action and coordinate efforts to promote Catholic social teaching
- Assist parish organizations (Saint Vincent de Paul, etc.)
- Minister for at-risk children (detention centers, group homes, etc.)
- Assist with ministries directed to food pantries, etc.
- Serve as advocate for marriage nullity cases

#### **4) The overall goal of a person living out the Diaconate:**

The overall goal of a person serving as a deacon goes far beyond the tasks listed above. For what is listed above are just that, tasks. Almost any lay person can perform many of these particular ministries. A deacon is a person who enlivens the call to ministry in others. He does this animation by actively living out his personal call to ministry and building the support that others need.

## **Behavioral and Spiritual Attributes**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in its *National Directory* on the formation of men to the permanent diaconate identifies behavioral attributes of exemplary deacons which can assist an inquirer in his discernment:

- Natural inclination to serve the Christian community and those in need
- Demonstrates psychological integrity
- Has a capacity for dialogue
- Ability to share one's faith yet listen respectfully to other points of view
- Capacity to listen carefully and without prejudice to race, gender or ethnicity
- Good communication skills
- Self-directed and collaborative accountability
- Balanced and prudent judgment
- Generosity in service
- Ability to lead, motivate, facilitate, and animate others into appropriate action and service

**The USCCB also emphasizes the following spiritual attributes of exemplary deacons:**

- Sound faith and good Christian reputation
- Active involvement in the Church's apostolate
- Personal integrity, maturity, and holiness
- Regular participation in the Church's sacramental life
- Evidence of recognized, ongoing commitment to the Church's life and service
- Participation in faith enrichment opportunities (e.g., retreats, days of recollection, adult education programming)
- Positive and stable marriage, if married; or a mature celibate state of life, if single
- Active membership in a Christian community
- Capacity for obedience and fraternal communion
- Deep spirituality and prayer life

### **Parish Discernment Tips**

1. Share with the deanery and parish pastoral councils the behavioral and spiritual attributes desirable in candidates for the deacon formation program. The pastoral councils may want to identify men who demonstrate abilities of service and leadership inviting them to consider a vocation to the permanent diaconate.
2. Study pastoral needs in the parish, cluster or deanery that could benefit from diaconal ministry including ministries associated with Word, Sacrament, and Charity/Justice.
3. Add a petition to the general intercessions at Sunday Mass praying for those men who might consider a vocation to the diaconate.
4. Extract information from the various tools enclosed in the priest packet to include in the parish bulletin as a way to offer catechesis to the faithful.
5. Encourage men to attend one of the diocesan-wide listening sessions to be hosted in March of 2009.

## Sample Letter of Inquiry

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If you are interested in looking at the Diaconate, or you know someone who would be a good candidate, please use the sample letter and summary below to contact me. I am happy to help you in any way.

Father Wayne Morris  
Director of Diaconate Ministry

Diocese of Steubenville  
422 Washington Street  
P. O. Box 969  
Steubenville, OH 43952-5969

Dear Father Morris,

This letter is in response to the Bishop's call for men to consider whether or not they would like to pursue discernment regarding a possible vocation to the ministry of the permanent Diaconate.

I have had some conversations with Father [name] at [parish name]. He provided some basic orientation about the life and ministry of a Permanent Deacon. After our conversations and those with [e.g., wife, family, close friends, a Permanent Deacon], I met again with Father [name]. He has encouraged me to contact you and to request information about the formal process of application. He also encouraged me to provide an initial summary of my service experience to date. Please see the attachment.

Please accept my thanks in advance for considering this letter and my interest in initiating a formal discernment process concerning a possible vocation to the ministry of the permanent Diaconate.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

*Name*  
*Address*  
*Phone*  
*Email*

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### SUMMARY OF CHURCH AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

NAME  
DATE

Required Information:

Name  
Years Catholic  
Primary focus of service

Marital status  
Years in current parish  
Kinds of service

*Please, no more than two pages. Thank you.*