

Introduction to the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese of St. Augustine

Revised October 3, 2019

Application to the Diocese of St. Augustine 2022 Class has closed. No date has been set for the next ordination class. Information about a new ordination class will appear here.

Note that the first part of our two-part Diaconate Formation Program is DOSA's Ministry Formation Program (MFP). MFP must be successfully completed for a man to be considered for second part, the three-year Permanent Diaconate Formation Program. MFP classes convene each fall. (See below.) The inquiry into MFP and the Permanent Diaconate must be preceded by an ongoing discussion with your pastor about discerning a possible call to ordained ministry.

The Diocese of St. Augustine has many men who have answered the call to serve the people of God as Permanent Deacons. This is intended to give those who are now interested in the Permanent Diaconate a brief overview of the Diaconate in general and an outline of the process of becoming a Permanent Deacon in the Diocese of St. Augustine. It is not exhaustive. For more information contact the Office of Diaconate Formation at the Catholic Center. (904) 262-3200.

Holy Orders consist of three degrees, the diaconate (deacons), presbyterate (priests) and, the episcopate (bishops). Through this sacrament “the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time; (CCC 1536). A deacon is ordained “not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service.”(CCC1569), and once ordained to the diaconate, he becomes a cleric (clergy), i.e., he is no longer a layperson (c 266 §1). Transitional deacons are ordained as part of their pathway to the presbyterate. Permanent deacons are ordained permanently to the diaconate.

Quoting from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1570:

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.

This succinct summary illustrates the underlying gift that the deacon brings to all his ministries, and indeed everything he does.

What sort of person pursues this vocation?

The following are some of the requirements; the list is not exhaustive:

- A male who has received all the sacraments of initiation
- A strong prayer life
- A sincere desire to be of service to the poor and marginalized that is carried out in action
- Has a long term and stable record of ministry in his parish. (Five years is the normal length asked for by the Ministry Formation Program. See below.)
- Can be married if that marriage is in accord with the laws of the Catholic Church. His wife must formally support his decision to enter formation and his ordination. Moreover, a wife must not only consent, but also have the Christian moral character and attributes which will neither hinder their husbands' ministry nor be out of keeping with it. He agrees to remain celibate should he lose his wife
- If single, he takes a vow of celibacy and so may not marry
- Must not have been divorced more than once, and if divorced, must have had the first marriage annulled
- Have the support of his wife and family
- Be between 35 and 60 years of age at ordination
- Be employed or otherwise self-supporting. The church does not pay deacons for diaconal ministry. (A parish or ministry may hire and pay a deacon for some specific position. Most deacons, however, have secular jobs and earn no salary from the Church.)
- Have successfully completed the Diocese of St. Augustine's three-year Ministry Formation Program
- Have the strong endorsement of his pastor
- Be capable of graduate-level academic work—minimum of two years of college is preferred
- Be able to attend absolutely all required classes, retreats, and functions
- Have a sincere sense that God is calling him to this permanent and stable ministry of service

What are the steps that lead to the diaconate?

The formation process is comprised of two parts, Module A and Module B. Module A is the diocesan Ministry Formation Program (MFP). This program, accredited by the USCCB, provides a comprehensive curriculum of spiritual, human, academic and pastoral formation to train lay ecclesial ministers for the diocese. Module B is the Diaconate Formation Program itself. Both programs are three years in length. Module A convenes each fall; Module B convenes when the Bishop determines there is a need.

It is imperative that you discuss your interest in the permanent diaconate with you pastor before inquiring into the Permanent Diaconate and continue on-going discussions with him about discerning your vocation throughout the selection and formation process.

- After discussions with your pastor, the first step is completion of the diocese's three-year Ministry Formation Program (MFP). Contact Erin McGeever the Director of the Office of Christian Formation for information: emcgeever@dosaf1.com, 904-262-3200 x118
- Be established in a ministerial leadership role in his parish
- Towards the end of or after completing MFP and with his pastor's strong endorsement, attend inquiry sessions for the Diaconate Formation Program (Module B) with his wife. (No inquiry sessions are scheduled at this time.)
- Following the inquiry period, the Department of the Permanent Diaconate sends applications to those men who appear to meet all program requirements. Those invited then begin the application process
- Complete the application. This includes the submission of various documents and writings by the inquirer, including his pastor's strong endorsement. The completed applications are screened.
- Those who will go forward will then undergo a psychological evaluation, be required to comply with DOSA Safe Environment requirements, and if married, be interviewed by a deacon couple in the inquirer's home.
- Following this, the inquirer, and his wife, if married, appear before the Diaconate Review Board. This board makes its recommendation to the Bishop, and it is the Bishop who has the final word on an individual's acceptance or non-acceptance into the three-year Diaconate Formation Program.
- The Aspirancy Year of the Permanent Diaconate Formation Program begins the three-year process of discernment and formation of the man in the human, spiritual and intellectual dimensions. This three-year journey of discernment and formation is not reducible to an academic process such as one might experience when pursuing an advanced university degree. Class members who continue will be accepted to the rite of Candidacy for Holy Orders at the end of the first year. Note that the inquirer/candidate and his wife will appear before the Vocations Board each of the three years of Module B.
- Discernment and formation in the three dimensions begun in the first year continue in the second. Early in the second year, the candidate will be instituted as a Lector. Towards the end of this second year, class members are instituted to the Ministry of Acolyte.
- The third year of the program—continues academic, spiritual formation and discernment. Ordination occurs at the end of the third year.
- Once ordained, the bishop will assign the deacon to a parish or diocesan ministry according to diocesan needs. It should not be assumed that this will be his home parish.
- *The diocese reserves the right to make changes to its formation programs at any time.*

For More Information:

USCCB: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/diaconate/index.cfm>

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