

IV.3.A: FORMATION DURING INQUIRY

Although, during the Inquiry Phase, formal formation has not yet begun, there is still much preparatory work that should begin.

Most importantly, the Inquirer should seek to deepen his spiritual life, by recourse to the sacraments and to prayer. The Inquirer should of course attend Mass and be well disposed to receive Eucharist each Sunday and holy day of obligation; he should, if his schedule permits, also seek to attend at least one daily Mass during the week. He should have frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Confession, at least four or five times per year, and more often if possible. He should develop a greater love for the Eucharist by attending Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament with some frequency.

He should begin acquiring the habit of daily prayer. Some form of prayer to begin and end the day, and at meals, is especially helpful. Some form of meditative or silent prayer, such as the Rosary or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, is also highly recommended. These prayers should at least occasionally be shared with other members of the family.

These efforts at human and spiritual pre-formation lay a strong foundation for the more demanding formation of Aspirancy and Candidacy. By cultivating *interior conversion*, one accepts more deeply and more consciously the sacramental graces already present in one's life, especially from Baptism, Reconciliation, Marriage, and the most holy Eucharist. One begins the process of *conformation to Christ*, in ways suitable for every member of His Body, the Church.

Already in the Inquiry Phase, the involvement of the wife is crucial to the success of formation and to the happy integration of diaconal with married vocation. Good communication between spouses about what is happening in the formation process, especially as regards interior life, is paramount. Shared prayer will certainly foster and strengthen this, but other more tangible practices can also help. Shared duties in the home, and shared ministry in the parish, may be good vehicles to help both spouses raise their level of discernment and openness to baptismal conformity to Christ.

IV.3.B: FORMATION DURING ASPIRANCY

Once the application has been processed by the Office of Deacons, inquirers who are accepted into the Aspirancy program will be notified. Aspirancy normally lasts two years, and is primarily a time for discernment of the diaconal vocation. This discernment will take place through personal reflection, through the group interaction of the classes, through possible days of reflection and retreats, and through the evaluations of teachers, mentors, pastors, and the Deacon Formation Review Board (DFRB).

It is expected that aspirants will be involved in parish or community service of some kind during this process, for their personal growth as well as for the sake of the discernment process.

Aspirants are encouraged to begin spiritual direction with one of the approved directors available in the diocese. If an aspirant has a priest-spiritual director of long standing, he may request approval of this relationship from the Office of Deacons.

Formation happens formally through the Saturday formation forums offered at Sacred Heart Parish Center in Early, IA, coordinated through the Diocesan Formation Center. These forums meet approximately 15 times per year, roughly every other week from September through May. The forums are meant to provide

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a solid formation in all four areas, and to assist both Aspirancy discernment and further diaconal development in the Candidacy phase.

Each aspirant will be evaluated annually by the DFRB, based on personal interviews, a written self-evaluation, and written evaluations from the course instructors, the aspirant's pastor, and the Director of Formation. Aspirants showing evidence of a diaconal vocation and progress in formation will be invited to continue. During the second year of Aspirancy, aspirants will attend a separate retreat, and undergo detailed psychological evaluation. This will normally be scheduled during the fall or winter, with a psychologist indicated by the Diocese. It will be paid for by the Diocese. Second-year aspirants showing clear evidence of diaconal vocation, progress in formation, and the intention to seek Holy Orders will be invited to petition for Candidacy.

IV.3.C: FORMATION DURING CANDIDACY

After satisfactory completion of the Aspirancy Phase, Aspirants who have been invited to petition for admission to Candidacy may do so. Only the Bishop of Sioux City can grant admission to Candidacy, which will take place according to the proper Rite. Candidacy means that the candidate, his family, and those responsible for his formation all agree that there is both a reasonably clear vocation to the permanent diaconate, and a reasonably strong commitment on the part of the candidate to pursue that vocation for the Diocese of Sioux City.

Candidacy lasts for at least three years. It continues as a period of deeper discernment, but it also begins the formation proper to the diaconal ministry.

Each year, Candidates will attend the Candidacy formation forums offered on Saturdays in Early, perform a different supervised ministry experience (pastoral and liturgical practica; see below), attend any days of reflection or retreats for candidates organized by the Office of Deacons, and submit to a DFRB evaluation. Candidates are **required to have a spiritual director**. If they are choosing a new or a first spiritual director, they must choose from the list approved by the Diocese of Sioux City; if they have an existing spiritual direction relationship with a priest not on the approved list, they may petition the Office of Deacons for approval of that spiritual director.

The supervised experiences of pastoral ministry are intended to expand the horizons of the Candidate. Candidates must choose different ministries each year (e.g. hospital ministry, prison ministry, soup kitchen, RCIA, etc). The goal is that Candidates will try new things, not only things they are already familiar with, and that over the three years, will have a much clearer idea of what kinds of ministry they are being called to for this Diocese. Mentors and plans of ministry must be approved by the Office of Deacons.

First-year Candidates who receive positive end-of-year evaluation will be invited to petition for Installation in the Ministry of Lector, and to continue in the program. Second-year Candidates who receive positive end-of-year evaluation will be invited to petition for Installation in the Ministry of Acolyte, and to continue in the program.

IV.3.D: BRIEF OUTLINE OF TOPICS BY YEAR**1. First Year of Aspirancy**

- a. **Spiritual Formation:**
 - i. How to pray contemplatively
 - ii. Lectio Divina
 - iii. Personal devotions
 - iv. Discernment
 - v. Major charisms in the Church
 - vi. Diaconal spirituality

- b. **Human and Social Formation:**
 - i. Mentoring
 - ii. Marriage (how formation affects it, how it should help formation)
 - iii. Celibacy and Chastity
 - iv. Exterior and Interior conversion
 - v. Setting and achieving formation goals
 - vi. The individual “personal plan” for formation

- c. **Intellectual Formation:**
 - i. New Testament
 - ii. Catechism of the Catholic Church
 - iii. The Holy Mass

- d. **Pastoral and Liturgical Formation:**
 - i. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours
 - ii. Introduction to Liturgical Theology
 - iii. Introduction to the GIRM
 - iv. Types of parish-based ministry

- e. **Other elements of formation:**
 - i. Continuing parish and/or community service
 - ii. Spiritual Direction (strongly encouraged for Aspirants; required for Candidates)
 - iii. Virtus training (if not already)
 - iv. Mentoring by deacon couple
 - v. Aspirants’ retreat/day of reflection
 - vi. First-year evaluation by DFRB

2. Second Year of Aspirancy

- a. **Spiritual Formation:**
 - i. Deepening contemplative and devotional prayer
 - ii. Devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist
 - iii. Diaconal and foundational virtues

- b. **Human and Social Formation:**
 - i. Christian anthropology
 - ii. Servant Leadership: serving, and leading

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- iii. Vocations of catechesis, *kerygma*, and *diakonia*; deepening discernment
 - iv. The individual “personal plan” for formation – following up
- c. **Intellectual Formation:**
- i. Old Testament
 - ii. Catechism of the Catholic Church
 - iii. The Seven Sacraments
- d. **Pastoral and Liturgical Formation:**
- i. Small faith communities
 - ii. Parish catechesis
 - iii. Ecumenism and evangelization
- e. **Other elements of formation:**
- i. Continuing parish and/or community service
 - ii. Spiritual Direction (strongly encouraged for Aspirants; required for Candidates)
 - iii. Virtus training (if not already)
 - iv. Mentoring by deacon couple
 - v. Aspirants’ retreat/day of reflection
 - vi. Psychological interview
 - vii. Second-year evaluation by DFRB
 - viii. Consideration for promotion to Candidacy

3. First Year of Candidacy

- a. **Spiritual Formation:**
- i. Ecclesiology
 - ii. Holy Orders
 - iii. *Diakonia*
- b. **Human and Social Formation:**
- i. Moral Theology
 - ii. Obedience
 - iii. Vocations of Baptism and Deacon
 - iv. Review “personal plan” of formation
- c. **Intellectual Formation:**
- i. Philosophy
 - ii. Second Vatican Council
 - iii. Social Teaching
- d. **Pastoral and Liturgical Formation:**
- i. Presiding and Preaching at the Liturgy of the Hours
 - ii. Pastoral Practicum I
 - iii. Canon Law
 - iv. Collaborative Ministry
- e. **Other elements of formation:**
- i. Required Spiritual Direction
 - ii. Practice as a Reader, if no previous experience

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- iii. Mentoring by deacon couple
- iv. Candidates' retreat (summer, with deacon community)
 - v. Possible workshops or days of reflection, TBA
- vi. Third-year evaluation by DFRB
- vii. Consideration for Rite of Lector

4. Second Year of Candidacy

- a. **Spiritual Formation:**
 - i. Spiritual models
 - ii. Dangers and errors to avoid
 - iii. *Diakonia*
- b. **Human and Social Formation:**
 - i. Evangelizaion
 - ii. Deacon as Martyr/Confessor; sacrifice
 - iii. Review "personal plan" of formation
- c. **Intellectual Formation:**
 - i. Church History
 - ii. Review of the Catechism
 - iii. Christology
- d. **Pastoral and Liturgical Formation:**
 - i. Liturgical presidency
 - ii. Liturgical practicum (in formation community)
 - iii. Pastoral Practicum II
- e. **Other elements of formation:**
 - i. Required Spiritual Direction
 - ii. Serve as Lector
 - iii. Practice as an altar server and/or sacristan if no previous experience
 - iv. Possible workshops or days of reflection, TBA
 - v. Mentoring by deacon couple
 - vi. Candidates' retreat (summer, with deacon community)
 - vii. Fourth-year evaluation by DFRB
 - viii. Consideration for Rite of Acolyte

5. Third Year of Candidacy

- a. **Spiritual Formation:**
 - i. Systematic review of diaconal spirituality
- b. **Human and Social Formation:**
 - i. Systematic review of diaconal virtues and marriage
 - ii. Review "personal plan" of formation
- c. **Intellectual Formation:**
 - i. Homiletics

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- d. **Pastoral and Liturgical Formation:**
 - i. Liturgical Practicum (formally, in the parish)
 - ii. Pastoral Practicum III

- e. **Other elements of formation:**
 - i. Required Spiritual Direction
 - ii. Function as Lector and/or Acolyte
 - iii. Possible workshops or days of reflection, TBA
 - iv. Mentoring by deacon couple
 - v. Candidates' retreat (summer, with deacon community)
 - vi. Fourth-year evaluation by DFRB
 - vii. Consideration for Holy Orders