

IV.5: POST-ORDINATION FORMATION

“The post-ordination path [of formation] should provide the deacon with ample opportunities to continue to develop and integrate the dimensions of formation into his life and ministry” (*National Directory* #241).

“Just as the role of the wife and children needed to be carefully discerned throughout the aspirant and candidate paths in formation, this discernment is equally important in the post-ordination path. It is appropriate to recognize the importance of the ongoing formation of wives and families of deacons and to provide formation resources and opportunities for them” (*National Directory* #243).

“Even after ordination to the priesthood, clerics are to pursue sacred studies and are to strive after that solid doctrine founded in sacred scripture, handed on by their predecessors, and commonly accepted by the Church, as set out especially in the documents of councils and of the Roman Pontiffs” (CIC, can. 279 §1).

Post-ordination formation, also called “continuing formation” or “continuing education,” is both a spiritual necessity and a formal obligation of all clerics, including deacons in the Diocese of Sioux City. The goals of post-ordination are to deepen and strengthen the deacon’s love for our Lord Jesus Christ, especially in Scripture and in the Sacraments; to deepen and strengthen his commitment to live integrally as the “icon of Christ the Servant;” and to extend his desire and abilities to love and serve the poor in the world. Post-ordination formation for the family of the deacon also strives to increase their love and knowledge of Christ in Scripture and in the Sacraments, to foster their ability to answer the universal call to holiness, and to strengthen their ability to support the deacon in his ministry, especially by their commitment to prayer.

Post-ordination formation happens through two main avenues or sets of activities: formally, in specific programs or moments of formation; and integrally, in the living out of the vocation, and in the continuous prayer and reflection which both precedes and follows ministering.

IV.5.a: Formal requirements of continuing formation: All active deacons are required to participate in these commitments. All retired deacons, and all other members of the wider deacon community, are encouraged to participate, but are not formally required to do so.

- **The annual deacon retreat.** The Office of Deacons arranges an Annual Retreat each June, for the whole deacon community. By preference, all active deacons are expected to participate in this retreat. Each parish to which an active deacon is canonically assigned will budget a certain amount each year to help support this obligation; the Office of Deacons also directly supports this with its budget. If a deacon chooses not to attend this retreat, he must be excused by the Director of Deacon Personnel, and he must make his own arrangements to satisfy this obligation with some other retreat. The parish support may then be applied to the alternative retreat instead.
- **Days of Reflection.** The Office of Deacons organizes at least two Days of Reflection each year, for the whole deacon community, typically a Fall and a Spring Saturday in Early. These are excellent opportunities to focus on particular aspects of one of the four dimensions of formation.
- **Self-study and/or formal class study.** Each deacon should set for himself a suitable goal for formal doctrinal study each year. This might include an individual reading list, a small study group, an undergraduate or graduate level class (increasingly available via distance learning, especially in programs tailored for deacons), etc. This commitment to self-study should be indicated on the Ministry Agreement Form, and approved also by the deacon’s wife (if married), pastor (if appropriate), spiritual director, and the Director of Deacon Formation. The Director of

Formation Handbook for Permanent Deacons

Deacon Formation may require or encourage particular areas, themes, or resources be employed at particular times for this commitment. In general, the following specific areas can always be strengthened:

- More liturgical training, both in theology and in practical considerations (Bishop Nickless wants to emphasize this strongly);
- Additional or Advanced training in Homiletics;
- Doctrinal formation, especially in the Catechism, catechetical methods, Apologetics, Evangelization, and papal and conciliar documents;
- NFP, including preparation to train others in its use;
- Canon Law.

While specific programs and classes will have varying levels of expectation of time commitment, which those participants should of course observe, the more independent forms of self-study need not impose an extensive obligation: commitment on the order of one to two hours per week, average, is quite adequate.

IV.5.b: Integral requirements of post-ordination formation: In addition to these formal commitments, most of the daily spiritual discipline of the deacon also applies to post-ordination formation. The deacon's ability to serve Christ and the poor is always increased by a fuller, stronger, more integral commitment to live his vocations fully (baptism, marriage, diaconate). Strengthening the deacon's spiritual life, therefore, also strengthens his pastoral readiness. *If the deacon is assiduous in his spiritual practices, most of the benefit of post-ordination formation is already being gained; conversely, when the deacon is lax in his spiritual practices, no amount of formal post-ordination formation can transform him in the depths of his heart.* The following required and encouraged diaconal disciplines contribute to this continuing formation:

- Daily recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, especially when done in a contemplative way;
- Strong Eucharistic devotion, including:
 - daily Mass as far as possible,
 - participating in and also leading the faithful in Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction,
 - service as an ordinary Minister of Holy Communion (for the sick, the elderly, the imprisoned, etc.);
- Spiritual Direction;
- Frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Penance (even as often as weekly);
- Silent, contemplative prayer, especially *Lectio Divina*;
- Personal devotions of different kinds, such as the Rosary, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, the Litany of the Saints or of St. Joseph, etc.;
- Continual **theological reflection**, both private and shared, on the actual ministry undertaken. The importance and value of theological reflection as a *primary and continuous means of post-ordination formation* cannot be stressed too much.

All of these formal and integral means of post-ordination formation are also available to the wife and family of deacons, and are strongly encouraged, both for her and their post-baptismal formation, and for the strengthening of the bonds of Holy Matrimony when such spiritual benefits are reaped together.