

Handbook for Diaconal Formation

Episcopal Diocese of Chicago



April 2018

My sister, every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, serving God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God now calls you to a special ministry of servanthood directly under your bishop. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick, and the lonely.

As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures, to seek nourishment from them, and to model your life upon them. You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. You are to assist the bishop and priests in public worship and in the ministration of God's Word and Sacraments, and you are to carry out other duties assigned to you from time to time. At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.

Ordination of a Deacon, Book of Common Prayer

A deacon is a baptized person called and empowered by God and the Church to be a model of Christ's servant ministry for all people. As agents of God's compassion and reconciling grace, deacons are missionaries to the world and messengers to the Church of the world's needs, hopes, and concerns. In the Church, deacons call forth, empower, and inspire the baptized to respond to these needs. The role of the deacon in liturgy mirrors this role of the deacon in Church and world. Deacons are living symbols of Christ's presence as they embody Christ's servant ministry and point to the presence of Christ in those they serve.

Association for Episcopal Deacons

Deacons Formation Team

The Deacons Formation Team is comprised of a Team Leader and several advisors/readers. Contact information for the Formation Team Leader may be found online at on the [Deacon Leadership webpage](#).

Throughout this document you will see blue hyperlinks to important information available on the Internet. You should be able access this information by clicking on the link. Please contact the Administrator for the Commission on Ministry if you have issues with the links and the Formation Team Leader if you have questions about the content.

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Formation Authority and Guidance

Formation Requirements

Formation develops the gifts that Deacons bring to their ordained ministry.

Formation requirements are defined by Episcopal Church Canons (III.6.5) and are authoritative.

CANON III.6.5

- (c) Formation shall take into account the local culture and each Postulant or Candidate's background, age, occupation, and ministry.
- (d) Prior education and learning from life experience may be considered as part of the formation required for ordination.
- (e) Wherever possible, formation for the Diaconate shall take place in community, including other persons in preparation for the Diaconate, or others preparing for ministry.
- (f) Before ordination each Candidate shall be prepared in and demonstrate basic competence in five general areas:
 - 1) Academic studies including, The Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the Church.
 - 2) Diakonia and the diaconate.
 - 3) Human awareness and understanding.
 - 4) Spiritual development and discipline.
 - 5) Practical training and experience.

Guidance

The [Deacon Leadership Team](#) supports and guides formation within the full holistic context of the ministry of deacons. The team consists of leaders for Discernment, Formation, Deployment, Relationships, Mission, Growth, and Continuing Education.

The **Formation Leadership Team** is composed of the Deacons Leadership Team member responsible for formation, and members of the Commission on Ministry responsible for formation.

Formation Covenant

Members of the formation team covenant that we are accountable to God, the Church, Postulants and the Bishop to provide formation leading to ordained Deacons who are fulfilled in God, the Church, the World, themselves and their ministry.

Learners in turn covenant that they are accountable to God, the Church, the formation team and the Bishop to apply themselves, heart, soul, and mind to formation leading to ordained ministry that is fulfilling in God, the Church, the World and themselves.

Milestone Steps from Postulancy to Ordination

Please refer to: [Navigation Tool for Ordination Process and Canons](#) for current and detailed information, which is only in outline here.

Milestone: Admission to Postulancy

- Development and monitoring of preparation (formation)
- Ember letters

Milestone: Application for Candidacy

- Recommendation of Formation Leadership Team in consultation with other significant members of Postulant's formation network; e.g., the team of the laity and clergy where the postulant's field formation takes place.
- Postulant's Written Application
- Letter of Endorsement from Faith Community
- Commission on Ministry Report on Progress in Formation
- Meetings with the Commission on Ministry and the Standing Committee
- Interview with the Bishop
- Written approval of the Standing Committee
- Ember letters

Milestone: Admission to Candidacy

Milestone: Application for Ordination to the Diaconate

- Candidate's Written Application
- Letter of Endorsement from Faith Community
- Certification of Academic Preparation
- Commission on Ministry Certificate of Readiness and Recommendation
- Standing Committee Consent

Formation Plan

Postulants for the diaconate come to formation with prior life experience and learning. Deacons Formation builds upon that experience and knowledge to prepare learners for ministry as ordained deacons.

Formation is based upon acquiring and demonstrating competencies within the five general areas defined by the Canons. The [Association for Episcopal Deacons](#) has detailed the canonical competencies in [Competencies for Deacons 2017](#). The Diocese of Chicago has adapted this document and added resources that postulants will use to acquire and demonstrate competencies.

The Formation Leadership Team has identified a number of ways to acquire and demonstrate competencies. These resources are listed and detailed by competency area in *Diocese of Chicago Deacons Formation Competencies and Resources*. We welcome suggestions of other resources, particularly additional online courses.

The Diocese of Chicago is committed to make diaconal formation accessible and learner friendly to a diversity of God's people. It is competency rather than classroom based. Formation plans are individualized, self-paced and designed for the learner's schedule.

Formation Areas

Academic Coursework

- Online courses are available, e.g., at ChurchNext and Divinity School of the Pacific Center for Anglican Learning and Leadership and other sources.
- Local courses at Bexley Seabury Seminary and other seminaries.

Formation Reader

- Each postulant is assigned a reader. The role of the Formation Reader is to provide support and feedback on reading and reflections by postulants on their reading material. The reader is similar to an Oxford tutor. As postulants do much of their work online in relative isolation, it is valuable to have one-on-one interactive contact. The reader and postulant will meet in person to discuss books they read as part of formation. The postulant will write reflection papers that the reader will read and discuss with the postulant.
- An initial set of books will be read by all postulants. Then readers and postulants will mutually agree on additional books.
- It is the postulant's and reader's mutual responsibility to establish contact, meet on a regular basis, and keep the formation leadership team informed of progress.

Field Experience – Congregational and in the World.

- Postulants and candidates will be assigned parishes other than their nominating congregation to serve a 9-to-12-month internship in the practice of ministry with the guidance of priests, deacons, and laity of those parishes. They will learn liturgy, homiletics, congregational dynamics, and leadership as a deacon as well as competencies. While they are in field experience, they should usually not be connected with members of their nominating parish, especially not in programs or worship, so that their time and energy are focused on their field experience.
- Postulants and candidates are expected to preach. Other postulants as well as support network want to be supportive. Please inform the formation leadership team in advance of preaching dates, and so we may publish a preaching calendar.
- Postulants are highly encouraged to seek out an internship with a community organization or social justice organization in consultation with the leadership team.

Pastoral Ministry Experience

- A significant part of formation is acquiring and demonstrating competencies in pastoral ministries. CPE (Clinical Pastoral Experience) is currently required. However, the requirement for CPE is under review as of March 2018. Even if decision is made not to require CPE for everyone, CPE or an equivalent experience will be required of all postulants. See [ACPE](#) (Association for Clinical Pastoral Education) for more information on CPE.

Retreats

- Deacons Formation Retreats are held twice during the year specifically for postulants and candidates. Retreats are a wonderful opportunity to build community for all in formation as well as to acquire and demonstrate competencies for ordained ministry. Much of our learning is solitary or virtual, so face-to-face learning is energizing.
- Participation of all postulants and candidates is expected at Retreats. These shared experiences are a way to meet the requirement for community formation.
- Retreats may be a weekend from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon or a full day. Costs are shared by participants.
- Deacon Gatherings of ordained deacons are held twice during the year, usually for a Saturday morning. Participation of postulants and candidates is expected. Usually one gathering is a retreat and the other is continuing education on a specific topic. Postulants and candidates may continue with lunch and an afternoon gathering.
- Postulants and Candidates are encouraged to meet informally with one another. Partners and spouses are encouraged to be part of informal gatherings.

Individualized Formation Plan

Soon after postulancy is granted, the new postulant will receive information and materials to begin building their individualized plan to demonstrate the canonical competencies.

Credit is awarded for previous learning and experience, so postulants are asked to review the competencies matrix and gather evidence of previous learning and life experience that will be recorded in the plan. Together the postulant and formation leadership team will determine what competencies are yet to be acquired and demonstrated and what learning resources are needed.

The plan will be recorded in *Individual Demonstrated Competencies Formation Plan*.

The plan will be reviewed at regular intervals as completion of work and demonstrations of competencies progress. Changes may be made by mutual agreement between postulants and the formation leadership team.

As competencies are demonstrated—e.g., courses are completed, and books are read and discussed with the reader—documentation should be sent to the administrator for the Commission on Ministry with a copy to the Formation Team Leader.

Expectations of Learners

- **Learners are expected to take an active and collaborative role** in planning and fulfilling their formation journey.
- **Formation is intended to be a transformative journey** in community with other postulants.
- As specified in the canons, **each postulant for ordination to the diaconate shall communicate with the Bishop in person or by letter, four times a year**, in the Ember Weeks, reflecting on the postulant's academic, diaconal, human, spiritual, and practical development.
- **Total cost** for someone starting with no prior learning or life experience **could be as much as \$4,500**. Because all postulants come with learning and life experiences that serve as demonstrated competencies, actual cost may be significantly less. Nominating parishes are expected to participate in the costs.
- **Total time investment is significant**. The total duration may be three years or more; however, with prior learning and life experience, the duration may be reduced to about two years. Progressing at a reasonable rate means perhaps 50 to 100 hours a month spent taking courses, reading, and writing, in addition to time invested in field formation and retreats.
- Upon successful completion of formation each postulant shall:
 - Be able to satisfy the requirements for the diaconate as described in the canons of the Episcopal Church.
 - Be able to articulate a clear understanding of the diaconate and diaconal ministry within context of baptized ministers and the presbyterate.

- Articulate particular diaconal ministries they are called to in beginning their ministry.
- Be prepared to lead their assigned congregation in embracing and enabling the diaconal ministries of the laity.
- Be equipped with the necessary skills and abilities for their particular ministries.
- Be committed to continuing their formation in the Christian faith and mission.
- Be knowledgeable about deacons and their ministries in the Diocese of Chicago.

Postulant and Candidate Support

Hebrews 12: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, . . . let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Postulants and candidates are guided and supported throughout formation by a network of individual relationships.

- **Each postulant is assigned a member of the Diocesan Commission on Ministry as a companion** to help the postulant understand and navigate the process from postulancy to ordination.
- **Each postulant must have a spiritual director.** The role of the spiritual director is spiritual exploration, reflection, and development on the journey to ordination. The formation leadership team will assist postulants in finding spiritual directors if needed. Clergy continue a relationship with a spiritual director after ordination.
- **Mentors are assigned to each postulant** soon after postulancy is granted. Mentors may be deacons, priests, or lay baptized ministers. All mentors have significant experience with deacons. The relationship between mentors and postulants is completely private. The mentor plays no role in evaluating formation progress. It is the postulant's and mentor's mutual responsibility to establish contact and to meet regularly. Mentors and postulants should meet at least once every other month.
- **Readers** as described above are very important to acquiring and demonstrating competencies in The Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the Church. Readers and postulants should meet at least every two or three months in person, based on the course load.
- **Field experience clergy and laity are committed to supporting their postulant** during the field internship and ensuring they have opportunities to acquire and demonstrate relevant competencies (liturgy, homiletics, congregational dynamics, congregational outreach) as well as to reflect on the ministry of a deacon.

- **The nominating congregation** will continue to provide spiritual and financial support throughout postulancy and candidacy, though contact should be minimal during field experience. Postulants and candidates should remain in close connection with their rector. The nominating congregation will also provide a Letter of Endorsement for Candidacy and Ordination applications.

Deacons Formation Key Resources

- 1.1 AED Deacons Competences (note Chicago Diocese Competencies include some additional Demonstrated Competencies) <https://www.episcopaldeacons.org/deacon-competencies.html>
- 1.2 Diocese of Chicago Deacons Formation Competencies and Resources
- 1.3 Diocese of Chicago Individual Demonstrated Competencies Formation Plan
- 1.4 Diocese of Chicago Field Experience Competencies
- 1.5 Diocese of Chicago Readers Responsibilities in Demonstrating Competencies
- 1.6 Example Formation Timelines

Additional Diocesan Informational Resources

- 2.1 [Deacon Leadership Team](https://www.episcopalchicago.org/our-diocese/for-clergy/deacons-leadership-team/deacon-leadership-team) <https://www.episcopalchicago.org/our-diocese/for-clergy/deacons-leadership-team/deacon-leadership-team>
- 2.2 [Navigation Tool for Ordination Process and Canons](https://www.episcopalchicago.org/at-work-in-the-church/commission-on-ministry/ministry-of-a-deacon/navigation-tool-for-ordination-process-and-canons) <https://www.episcopalchicago.org/at-work-in-the-church/commission-on-ministry/ministry-of-a-deacon/navigation-tool-for-ordination-process-and-canons>
- 2.3 [Association for Episcopal Deacons](https://www.episcopaldeacons.org/) <https://www.episcopaldeacons.org/>
- 2.4 Association Clinical Pastoral Education <https://www.acpe.edu>
- 2.5 Handbook for Deacons
[https://www.episcopalchicago.org/files/6114/7889/5103/Handbook for Deacons Nov. 2016.pdf](https://www.episcopalchicago.org/files/6114/7889/5103/Handbook%20for%20Deacons%20Nov.%202016.pdf)
- 2.6 Ministry of a Deacon <https://www.episcopalchicago.org/at-work-in-the-church/commission-on-ministry/ministry-of-a-deacon/>