



THE EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE OF
WASHINGTON

The Steps to Ordination to the Diaconate



Leading and Equipping Others for Ministry in the World

The Steps to Ordination to the Diaconate

To those members of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington who are seeking to discern if God is calling you, to serve Christ in the Church, in the ministry of the Diaconate, Welcome! All of us in the diocese are grateful for your willingness to discern this call to ministry. The process of discerning a call to ordination involves both your personal sense of vocation as well as the affirmation of the Church that you are called to such a ministry. The Bishop, the Commission on Ministry (COM), the Standing Committee and the Working Group on the Diaconate are grateful for your willingness to share your sense of vocation with us. We are committed to making this process one that is marked by in-depth dialog and faithful, spiritual discernment.

The Canons of The Episcopal Church govern the process of those seeking ordination into the ministry of Deacon and the following guidelines reflect how the Diocese of Washington uses those Canons in the process to ordination.

Before beginning the process of ordination to the diaconate, an aspirant (someone aspiring to ordination) must meet the following criteria:

- Be a confirmed member in Good Standing in the Episcopal Church.
- Have stable and good health both physically and mentally.
- Know that your community of faith must affirm your call and be willing to commit itself to your preparation and contributing financially to that preparation.

What is the process I must follow as both the diocese and I discern a call for me as a deacon in the church?

Your process will begin with your “Aspirancy.” The term Aspirancy or Aspirant, as it is referred to in the Canons, suggests that a person is aspiring to discern, or to know more deeply the vocation to which God is calling them. It is during this time that you will enter into conversations with your priest to discuss a possible call to the diaconate. You will also be required to attend, along with your priest and at least one lay representative from your Episcopal Community, one of the **Diaconal Workshop Days**. These workshop days are open to anyone exploring a call to ministry and serve as a time to explore your call to the diaconate and *possibly* begin the formal discernment process. Many things will happen during the Diaconal Workshop Day, such as:

- You will be welcomed into the discernment process.
- The Working Group on Diaconal Ministry will discuss the role of a deacon and will explain what characteristics the diocese expects from a nominee for diaconal ministry.
- Your priest will meet with a representative from the diocese to discuss their role as a sponsoring priest.
- The lay representative(s) from your Episcopal community will meet with a representative from the COM (Commission on Ministry) or the Working Group on Diaconal Ministry to talk about the process in general and the role of the Local Discernment Committee.

You will also be given the opportunity to meet with a Deacon to further discuss the diaconate as you begin to enter into a personal exploration of your call to ministry. As a group, gathered in the name of Christ, we will work together on a servant ministry experience framed in the Eucharist. You may have the opportunity to participate in the leadership of our worship together. At the end of the Diaconal Workshop Day, all of the necessary forms to enter the Discernment Process will be distributed for you to take home as you begin *prayerful* consideration about formally entering into the Process for Diaconal Ordination.

I've prayerfully considered my calling and want to move forward, what's next?

After you have prayerfully considered your call to the diaconal ministry and feel that you wish to become a nominee for diaconal ordination; you will complete the **Nomination Form**, which was handed out at the Workshop Day and submit it to the diocese. Once it is received, you will be known as a **Nominee for Ordination**. For a minimum of the next six months, you will meet with your priest who will aid in the formation of a **Local Discernment Committee (LDC)** who will help you discern your call. The LDC must be comprised of no fewer than three (3) and no more than six (6) members of your Episcopal Community.

During this time, you will want to *engage a spiritual director*, whom you feel comfortable with, to help guide you throughout the ordination process, and perhaps beyond. You will also *attend a minimum of four (4) services in a church that has a deacon* so that you may observe the liturgical role of the deacon. In order to continue to learn about and explore the role a deacon in the church and the world, you will be required to meet with a deacon in our diocese. This is an opportunity for you to ask questions to help you understand not only the role of a deacon, but also how you may be called to this ministry. Some questions that may help you in your own discernment could be:

- How did you experience your call to diaconal ministry and has that call evolved over time?
- What is the real difference between diaconal ministry and that of the laity, or even the priest?
- What helped you clarify your call to ministry?
- During the process, what helped you the most to discern and grow in your call?
- Since being ordained a deacon, what has helped you grow as a Christian and better experience your vocation as a deacon?
- What has been the most joyful part of being a deacon for you? The hardest part? The most surprising part?
- How has being a deacon affected your family? Your job? What kind of sacrifices have you had to make to respond to and live out your call?

During this period, once the LDC has been formed, you will be meeting with the LDC who will help you in your discernment.

What happens at the end of this period?

After meeting with your priest and your Local Discernment Committee and completing the other requirements mentioned above, *your priest, the LDC and the Vestry of your Episcopal Community must concur that they would support you in becoming a **Postulant*** for ordination to the diaconate. Your priest will write a letter of recommendation to the COM, and following the canons of the Episcopal Church, your Vestry would also write a letter of support. The person serving as the Chair of your Local Discernment Committee will also be required to write a letter addressed to the Canon for Clergy Deployment. This letter must be signed by all the members of your LDC and will offer the LDC's recommendation of your call to the ministry of the diaconate. You will be given the opportunity to review the LDC's letter and must sign off on it. If you disagree with the recommendation of the LDC, you may take it back to your priest.

After receiving all of the recommendations they will be reviewed by the Commission on Ministry. If the COM believes that you have the potential for the diaconate ministry, you will be invited to a **COM Discernment Retreat**. If it is the finding of the COM that you are not to be recommended for Postulancy at this time, you will receive a letter indicating the reasons. The Canon for Clergy Development will also be available for further discussion if the nominee chooses. If you are invited to move forward, you will be interviewed by designees of the COM and by the Bishop regarding your call to the diaconal ministry, your educational qualifications, psychological readiness (for both the process and for ministry), and your personal support system for vocation as a deacon. These discussions may include your spouse or partner, if applicable. *Through these interviews you may receive a decision from the Bishop and the COM that you be granted Postulancy.* If you are not granted Postulancy at this time, the Canon for Clergy Development will contact you.

What must I do if I am made a postulant?

If you are granted Postulancy for ordination to the diaconate, you will be assigned a mentor from the COM. You should meet with your mentor at least once a quarter until your ordination so that your mentor can follow your progress. You will also be required to communicate with the Bishop, by letter, four (4) times a year during what is called the Ember Weeks. These communications serve as a way for you to reflect on your academic, diaconal, human, spiritual, and practical development. You will also enter into the Diaconal Formation process as outlined by the diocese.

What happens after Postulancy?

When you have completed a minimum of at least half of the Diaconal Formation process, you may submit an application to the Bishop for **Candidacy**. These steps are governed by the Canons of the Episcopal Church and as part of the application you must fulfill the following requirements:

- Make sure your application contains your date of admission as a Postulant.
- Submit a letter of support from your sponsoring Episcopal Community signed by at least two-thirds (2/3) of the Vestry or comparable body and by the clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the community.
- Request the COM to attest to your continuing formation.
- Meet with and receive the approval of the Standing Committee of the diocese.

Once your application for Candidacy is submitted, with all the required components, the Bishop will review it *and may* admit you as a Candidate for Holy Orders for the diaconate. If you are admitted as a Candidate, the Bishop will notify, you, your Episcopal Community, the COM, the Standing Committee, and the director of your diaconal formation process of the date you were admitted as a Candidate. If you are not admitted at this time, the Bishop will notify you and be available to meet with you, if you choose.

Once I am made a Candidate, then what?

If you are admitted as a Candidate you must then complete the process of formation for a deacon as established by the diocese. At the end of your formation process you must be able to demonstrate basic competency in the areas of your academic study, including The Holy Scriptures, theology, and the tradition of the Church and competency in an understanding of the Diakonia and the diaconate. You must also demonstrate human awareness and understanding, spiritual development and discipline and have completed a period of practical training and experience. *You will be required to have a six-month parish internship with an ordained deacon as your mentor.* The Canons of the Episcopal Church also require you to have training in the following areas:

- Safeguarding God's Children
- Seeing the Face of God
- Civil Requirements for reporting and pastoral opportunities for responding to evidence of abuse.
- The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, particularly Title IV.

As you complete your formation as a deacon you will be expected to maintain regular meetings with your spiritual director and will be evaluated by designees of the COM. Following the Canons you will also be required to pass a background check and have medical and psychological evaluations by professionals approved by the Bishop using forms prepared by the Church Pension Fund, and, if necessary or desired, a psychiatric referral. The costs for these are to be paid for by you and become a permanent part of your diocesan record. These must be done three (3) to six (6) months prior to your formal application for ordination to the diaconate. You will also need to have the director of diaconal formation certify that you have completed your preparation and are ready for ordination and be recommended by the COM. You must be at least 24 years of age and a minimum of 18 months must have passed since your acceptance as a nominee.

Submitting your application for Ordination to the Diaconate

Once the above is done (three to six months prior to your formal application) you may submit your application for Ordination. Along with your application you must make sure to submit the following:

- A letter of support from your sponsoring Episcopal Community signed by at least two-thirds (2/3) of the Vestry or comparable body and by the clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the community.
- Written Evidence of your date of admission to both Postulancy and Candidacy.
- Certificate from Diaconal Formation process showing scholastic records in the subjects required by the Canons along with an evaluation and recommendation as to your personal qualifications for ordination to the diaconate.
- Certificate from the COM recommending ordination.

Once all parts of your application are received the Bishop will provide them to the Standing Committee. It is the job of the Standing Committee to certify that the canonical requirements for ordination have been met. The Standing Committee will also certify that there are no objections to your ordination on medical, psychological, moral, or spiritual grounds. The Standing Committee *may recommend you for ordination* using the form of testimonial found in Canon III.6.c. and will present it to the Bishop who may then ordain you to the diaconate. At your ordination you will be required to subscribe publically and to declare in the presence of the Bishop and the gathered community those things that are required by Article VIII of the Constitution of The Episcopal Church.