

Permanent Deacon Formation Program.
Information pages. (Revised 11/14/06)

The development of a formation program for the Holy Order of Deacons is a response by Bishop David Ricken to a perceived need for additional permanent deacons in the Diocese of Cheyenne. It is also a specific response to the requests from men living throughout the diocese who have been unable to overcome the difficulties inherent in traveling the long round-trip distances between their homes and Denver, Colorado. In the past, each candidate made this trip twice each month, from September through June, for four years so that they could participate in formation.

Where will the program be located?

The formation program will be housed in the Catholic Ministries building located at 623 South Wolcott Street in Casper, Wyoming. This a central location in Wyoming and will greatly reduce the travel times and distances for many men who would feel that they are being called to enter formal discernment and formation.

When will the program begin?

There are essentially two parts to the program. The first part is called "Aspirancy." Aspirancy begins when a man first recognizes the possibility that God may be calling him to a life of ordained ministry as a permanent deacon. It is common at this stage, that the man will ask his pastor about the diaconate and seek information from Fr. Ray Rodriguez, the vocations director. If he chooses to continue on the path of discernment, he will be directed to complete an application and screening process. Should he be recommended to enter into formal aspirancy, he will have the opportunity to enter the first phase of the program; the Aspirancy path.

This path consists of one year of formal preparation in which the discernment of his potential vocation is aided by his family, his pastor, a spiritual director, and the formation team. The "Aspirancy year" will begin in February of 2007. During Aspirancy, the participants will meet one Saturday each month to explore various topics of personal and spiritual development as well as engaging in spiritual direction and other practices designed to promote awareness of, and enhance, the discernment process.

Tentative Calendar for Aspirancy: The Aspirancy class will meet on the dates listed below. Changes, if deemed necessary, will be announced beforehand to all participants. All meeting dates are Saturdays.

February 3, 2007

March 3, 2007

March 31, 2007

April 28, 2007

June 16, 2007

July and August - no meetings. Summer break.

September 8, 2007

October 6, 2007

November 3, 2007

December 8, 2007

January 2008 (To be announced)

At or before the end of the "Aspirancy year," a decision will be made as to whether or not the aspirant will be recommended to enter into formal formation. Formal formation is the second part of formation. The formal formation phase will begin in February of 2008 and cover a four year period of time (2008 - 2011). Formal formation basically borrows its structure from seminary and college academic semesters but it will follow an annual calendar. For example, in the first year, Spring semester will run from February through June. Candidates will have the summer off and then return for Fall Semester from September through December. June and January will be set aside for workshops on a variety of subjects, both practical and academic. This structure is not "written in stone" and will remain flexible so as to allow minor modifications if need arises. Of course, as we draw closer to the formal formation phase, the schedule will become set.

What will be included in the formation program?

The development of the program for the formation of permanent deacons has been guided by the norms published in three documents. These documents include *The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States* (USCCB), *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* (Congregation for Catholic Education), and the *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (Congregation for the Clergy).

The over-arching goal of this formation program is to promote the development of the whole person by providing a program that integrates four aspects or dimensions of formation. The dimensions of formation include the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral.

The Human Dimension

The human dimension of formation builds on the qualities, capabilities, and character already present in the candidate, shaping and forming him into an effective instrument at the service of the Gospel. In formation, the candidate is challenged to become molded into the image of Christ so that he becomes “a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ” (*National Directory*, p.53)

The deacon lives and works in the modern world. His ministry represents a call to carry the Gospel into everyday circumstances and situations in order to bring “light” to bear on whatever personal and social problems he encounters.

Consequently, human formation nurtures the development of the virtues, enhances the participant’s ability to relate to and work with others, promotes maturity, and molds the development of the candidate’s moral reasoning and conscience.

The Spiritual Dimension

The spiritual dimension recognizes that it is the Holy Spirit who brings to fruition the graces received in Baptism. Each candidate’s path to full life in the Spirit is unique, however, to assist in the work of the Holy Spirit, the formation program seeks to establish practices and habits that will build the foundation of a lifetime of spiritual discipline.

To be molded in the image of Christ the Servant, the candidate must encounter and incorporate the attitudes of Christ into his own nature. A partial list of these attitudes and dispositions includes “simplicity of heart, total giving of self ..., humble and helpful love for the brothers and sisters, especially the poorest, the suffering and the most needy ...” (*National Directory*, p. 53).

To assist the candidate in developing these attributes, the formation program promotes and includes opportunities for regular participation in Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, spiritual direction, a deepening prayer life, spiritual reading and reflection, and practical experiences of service to God and his people.

The Intellectual Dimension

The intellectual dimension of formation is geared toward forming a “knowledgeable and reliable witness to the faith” (*National Directory*, p.55). To accomplish this, the Diocese of Cheyenne has developed a partnership with the St. Meinrad School of Theology, in St. Meinrad, Indiana. St. Meinrad will assist us by providing formal classroom instruction in a wide range of academic classes.

Who will teach the classes?

The classes will be taught by seminary faculty and qualified adjunct instructors selected by the administrative personnel at St. Meinrad. Workshops and seminars are also being developed to explore special topics that are important to the ministry of the deacon within the setting of the diocese of Cheyenne.

Deacons are called upon at times to be a spokesman for the faith or to provide sound answers to questions about Catholic doctrine, discipline, and traditions. Because he lives within a culture that is increasingly educated, the deacon must be able to effectively communicate with the people with whom he lives and works. One of the critical elements in effective communication is to possess a firmly grounded base of knowledge.

Although developing a strong knowledge base is the main goal of intellectual formation, it is also critical for human, spiritual, and pastoral formation. The deacon must “understand and practice the essentials of Christian doctrine and life before [he] can communicate them to others in [his] ministry of word, liturgy, and charity” (*National Directory*, p. 56).

The Pastoral Dimension

The pastoral dimension of formation is designed to create an awareness of what it means to follow and imitate Jesus as a minister of charity and justice. Jesus “came to serve and not to be served” and so the candidate who is being molded into the image of Jesus is challenged to develop and enhance his sensitivity to the needs of others, especially the poor. Through pastoral field education, the candidate will have the opportunity to grow in leadership ability, awareness of his skills, abilities, and limitations so that he may confidently minister to others in charity and justice.

Have the dates for formal formation been set at this time?

Yes. A complete calendar of meeting dates and classes has been developed and it will be published during the aspirancy year as we move closer to the beginning of formal formation.

What are the classes that will be taught during formal formation?

The following list of academic classes represents the most recent list of classes proposed by St. Meinrad School of Theology. Some changes in the list may occur but it does give the prospective candidate a good overview of the types of classes that constitute the academic core of the formation program. For a more detailed description of each class, see “*Permanent Deacon Formation Program*” published by St. Meinrad.

Academic classes

Introduction to Scripture
Systematic Theology I & II
Church History
The Documents of Vatican II
Ecclesiology
Sacramental Theology I & II
Old Testament Scriptures
Introduction to Pastoral Care
Christology
Introduction to Liturgy
The American Church
Religious Education
Canon Law for Ministry
Moral Theology I & II

In addition to academic training, the candidate will also engage in workshops dealing with such topics as: Spirituality and Prayer, the Ministry of the Permanent Deacon, The Gospel of John, the Letters of Paul, and Homiletics. Additional elements of formation will include: practicum experiences in liturgy and supervised experiences in ministry, participation in theological reflection groups, and regular spiritual direction.

What type of time commitment will be needed for formal formation?

The time “on-site” will involve one weekend each month from January through June and from September through December. During the summer months of July and August, no classes will be held. Scheduling a yearly three-day retreat for aspirants and candidates may modify this schedule somewhat.

In the “typical weekend” experience, candidates will meet Friday evening from approximately 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., Saturday from 8:30 am to 9:30 p.m., and on Sunday from 8:15 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. It must be kept in mind that this is a tentative schedule and times are approximate. Minor changes can be made as needs arise but the total time spent on classroom instruction and formation activities will be about 14 hours per weekend..

Perhaps the most important unanswered question is something like, “How much time will a candidate have to spend studying?” This of course is something that is unique to each candidate. The courses are rigorous and will demand adequate time spent in reading textbooks and studying and preparing assignments. The demands of formation will entail more than just attending the scheduled weekend experiences. There is no doubt that for most men in formation, adjustments to their personal schedules (lives) will have to be made during the entire span of formation.

A candidate may ask: “I’ve been out of school for some time (or I have not attended college) will there be help available for me if I need help with a class? Yes. We will be seeking to find people who will act as mentors for the men in formation. The role of a mentor is to encourage and support the candidate in formation. We have not yet enlisted academic mentors but this is a priority and will be developed prior to the start of the intellectual formation.

What will formation cost the candidates?

During the “Aspirancy” year, the costs to the participants are minimal. There are no tuition and fee charges. The aspirants will be expected to cover the costs of their travel to and from Casper for the Saturday meetings plus all their meals and lodging (if needed). There may be some copy costs for materials, but this is not expected to be significant.

During the years of formal formation, the candidates will be responsible for books, notebooks, and all typical educational supplies. They will be responsible for their lodging, meals, and transportation costs. In addition, tuition costs of \$500 per semester and a nominal fee for copyrights and materials will be charged.

How does a man get started?

If you believe that you are being called to discernment for the permanent diaconate, you should contact Fr. Ray Rodriguez as soon as possible. Fr. Ray is the Director for Vocations and his mailing address is:

Vocations
P.O. Box 1468, Cheyenne, WY 82003

You may also call him at 307-638-1530 or 800-788-4606. If Fr. Ray is not in the office, please leave a message on the answering machine. If you wish to contact Fr. Ray via email, his address is: vocations@dioceseofcheyenne.org

Are there age requirements for applicants?

Yes. "It is the policy of the Diocese of Cheyenne that an applicant, regardless of marital status, must be at least 30 years of age. The Bishop may dispense from this by one year ...(*Deacon Policy Guidelines, Diocese of Cheyenne, revised May 24, 1994*). Is there an upper age limit? No. In cases where the applicant may qualify as a senior, the decision to recommend formation will be made on an individual basis.

What does the application process include?

* The application process includes, but is not limited to:

1. Written applications to the Vocation Office.
2. Certificates of baptism, confirmation, and marriage (if married).
3. Comprehensive health examination of candidate and his spouse (if married).
4. Written statement of consent from his wife (if married).
5. Letters of recommendation from the pastor and three parishioners from the applicants home parish, and from one other priest.
6. Letters of recommendation from colleagues and where appropriate, employers.
7. Screening for motivation and suitability which will include psychological evaluation.
8. Screening interviews with both the potential candidate and his wife.
9. Financial statement.

The Bishop, in consultation with the [appropriate] Diaconal Board either accepts or rejects the applicant's request to enter diaconal formation. (* *Deacon Policy Guide*)

When a potential applicant contacts Fr. Ray, he will receive a packet and cover sheet detailing the specific requirements for the completion of the application process.

Where does someone go for further information about the program or process?

Please feel free to contact Deacon Rolland "Rollie" Raboin, Director of Formation, Permanent Deacon Formation Program, Diocese of Cheyenne. He may be reached at:

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307-532-1571 , or
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