



Episcopal Diocese of Washington

The Steps to Ordination to the Diaconate

Leading and Equipping Others for Ministry in the World

Revised Fall 2021

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 thankful for your openness to discerning 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 Archdeacon 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 dialogue and faithful, spiritual discernment.

The Canons of The Episcopal Church govern the process of those seeking ordination into the ministry of Deacons 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.
- Confirm that your community of faith affirms your call and is 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 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, a ***Workshop Day on the Diaconate***. These workshop days are open to anyone exploring a call to diaconal 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 Archdeacon will discuss the role of a deacon and 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 designated by the COM (Commission on 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 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 the necessary forms to enter the Discernment Process will be distributed for you to take home as you begin prayerful consideration about formally entering 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 diaconal ministry and feel that you wish to become a nominee for diaconal ordination; you will complete the ***Application to the Discernment Process***, an online form, and the ***Nomination Form*** (distributed at the Workshop Day on the Diaconate) and submit them to the diocese. Once the forms are received, you will be known as a ***Nominee for Ordination***. For a minimum of the next six months, you will meet with a ***Local Discernment Committee (LDC)*** who will help you discern your call. Your priest will assist you in forming this committee. The LDC must comprise 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 three (3) services in a church that has a deacon so that you may observe the liturgical role of the deacon. As you continue to learn about and explore the role of 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. 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 priesthood?
- What helped you clarify your call to ministry?
- During the discernment/formation/ordination 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?

You will also be required to submit a number of documents that share information about your education (formal and informal), and statements about your life, call, and spiritual journey. The forms and written materials that you are required to submit will be shared with you while you are engaged in conversations with the LDC. All of this is to help you in your continuing discernment and to assist those outside your Episcopal community to understand your call to the diaconate.

What happens at the end of this period?

After meeting with your priest and your Local Discernment Committee over the course of six months 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. It is recommended that the chair of your LDC and you meet with the vestry prior to submitting their support of your postulancy. Your priest will write a letter of recommendation to the COM and your vestry a letter of support. These are sent to the Archdeacon. The person serving as the Chair of your Local Discernment Committee will also be required to write a letter addressed to the Archdeacon. 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. The LDC chair will also submit a summary of the work of the committee outlining the dates and times of your meetings and the general information discussed in those meetings.

A sub-committee of the Commission on Ministry will do a full review of all the materials from you and those who are recommending you for postulancy. If the sub-committee believes that you have the potential for the diaconate ministry, you will be invited to a ***Postulancy Discernment Retreat for the Diaconate***. 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 Archdeacon will also be available for further discussion if the nominee chooses. Should the Archdeacon deem it necessary, the Canon with oversight for Ordination may be called to participate in the conversation. If you are invited to the retreat, you will be interviewed by designees of the COM and by the Bishop regarding your call to the diaconal ministry, your educational qualifications, your psychological readiness (both for the process and for ministry), and your personal support system for a vocation as deacon. 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 Archdeacon 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 ***Formation Mentor*** from the COM. You must 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 are called 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 the ***Diaconal Formation Process*** as outlined by the diocese. The formation process includes online classes and the Deacons School, which meets in-person. Included in this formation process are classes on various topics, two internships, and practicums in liturgics and preaching. The two nine-month internships take place in 1) a social service agency, which has been vetted and approved, and 2) a parish, with an ordained deacon as your supervisor.

What happens after Postulancy?

When you have completed a minimum of 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:

- Submit an application that includes 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.
- Seek attestation from the COM about your continuing formation.
- Meet with and receive the approval of the Standing Committee of the diocese.

The other requirements for Candidacy in the diocese and included in The Canons of the Episcopal Church are:

- Completion of the *Safeguarding God's Children* training.
- Completion of Civil Requirements for reporting and pastoral opportunities for responding to evidence of abuse training.
- Completion of the *Seeing the Face of God* training.

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 completed within the 36 months prior to ordination.

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 Archdeacon, on behalf of 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 Archdeacon 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. The canonical requirement of training in The Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, and particularly Title IV will be included in this time of formation. 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.

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 the Archdeacon and/or designees of the COM. You will also need to have the Archdeacon 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 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.
- An application that includes the date of your admission to both Postulancy and Candidacy.
- A report from the Archdeacon regarding your 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.
- An attestation from the COM recommending ordination.

Once all parts of your application are received, the Archdeacon 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 declare you an ***Ordinand*** awaiting ordination to the

diaconate. At your ordination you will be required to subscribe publicly 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. Thereafter, you will be referred to as a ***Deacon***.

How long does the ordination process take to complete?

Attending Deacons School is only one part of the full ordination process for deacons. From the Workshop Day on the Diaconate to Ordination typically takes about 4 years. The Formation Process takes roughly 30 months. The Deacons School comprises 18 months of that time.