



## DIOCESE OF OGDENSBURG

### *Deacon Formation*

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Dear Father:

With the grace of God, thirteen men will complete their studies for the Permanent Diaconate in June of this year. Their ordination retreat will be held at the end of July with Ordination scheduled for September 19 at 11 am at St. Mary's Cathedral.

We are now beginning the process of looking for candidates for the next group. As in the past, we are looking to you to surface the names of candidates whom you believe could become permanent deacons. Directly involved in pastoral ministry, you are in the best position to suggest the names of candidates for the permanent diaconate formation program.

The *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States* gives an excellent resume of the desirable characteristics of the deacon candidate.

166. From the experience of the restored diaconate in the United States, certain behavioral patterns have been discerned among exemplary deacons: a "natural inclination of service to the . . . Christian community," and to all in need; psychological integrity; a capacity for dialogue, which implies a sense of docility and openness; the ability to share one's faith yet listen respectfully to other points of view; the capacity to listen carefully and without prejudices—respecting people in the context of their religion, race, gender, ethnicity, and culture; good communication skills; a sense of responsibility that includes the fulfilling of one's word and completing one's work; self-directed and collaborative accountability; balanced and prudent judgment; generosity in service; and the ability to lead, motivate, facilitate, and animate others into appropriate action and service.
167. The profile is completed with certain spiritual and evangelical qualities. Among these are a sound faith; good Christian reputation; active involvement in the Church's apostolate; personal integrity, maturity, and holiness; regular participation in the Church's sacramental life; evidence of recognized, ongoing commitment to the Church's life and service; participation in faith enrichment opportunities (e.g., retreats, days of recollection, adult education programming); a positive and stable marriage, if married, or a mature celibate state of life, if single; active membership in a Christian community; capacity for obedience and fraternal communion; and a deep spirituality and prayer life. The presence of these qualities, experienced in kindness and humility, may demonstrate a call to the Order of Deacons.
168. Additional considerations that need to be stressed are the element of readiness and the timeliness of one's response to a vocation. Since inquirers to the diaconate have many commitments to family, career, employment, community, and church service, it is a matter of prudential judgment to explore not only whether the call to the diaconate is from the Holy Spirit, but also whether the inquirer is ready and able to respond to that call at the present time.

After reading these paragraphs, you may think that you are without any possible candidates in your parish. No one candidate would possess all these qualities that are indicators of special graces alive within the person.

May I ask that you review these qualities and see if there are men in your pastoral setting who would match some of these criteria? After identifying them, I encourage you to approach them

and ask if they have ever considered becoming a permanent deacon. As you know, the “ask” is often the first step in the vocation discernment process.

Undoubtedly, you will be asked what the formation program entails. I will briefly outline it here. However, if the person has further questions or if you do, I would encourage a phone call to me at 518-324-6665.

The first year of the program is the “aspirant” phase during which the person is introduced to the process. During that first year, there will be six meetings at Wadhams Hall, all held on weekends with a schedule published well in advance. At least one of these meetings will be a Friday to Sunday weekend with a retreat included. Aspirants will be introduced to the four aspects of formation: academic, spiritual, human, and pastoral. One course will be taught over these meetings. Candidates will also participate in a psychological screening. Also, during this first year, the aspirant will complete three on-line courses with our partner, the Satellite Theological Education Program (STEP) of Notre Dame University. Of course, during this initial year, I, the aspirant’s formation advisor, and his sponsoring pastor will meet about his suitability for the program.

The second, third, and fourth years of the program consist of 10 weekends each year at Wadhams Hall (Friday evening to Saturday evening), STEP courses, and ongoing spiritual and pastoral formation. We will look to you the pastors to assist greatly in this pastoral formation. If the aspirant perseveres, the rite of candidacy will take place in the second year, marking the official transition from being an aspirant to that of being a candidate. Over those years, also, will be the ministries of lector and acolyte. In addition there will be a weekend retreat each year.

For those men who are married, their wives will also be able to participate in this process. During the Wadhams Hall sessions there will be opportunities for the wives to join in a parallel program that will enrich their spiritual life and assist them in understanding the future role of their husbands in the Church. The wives are encouraged to participate in this optional program. However, we will have several sessions, e.g. psychological screening, that require the participation of the wives.

I am sure that you as well as the men you contact will have many questions. Please understand, too, that deciding to enter the program is a decision to discern, both for the aspirant as well as for the staff of the Deacon Formation Program. If a man is reluctant or unsure, you should encourage him and his wife to at least come to the initial session to find out what it is all about.

It would be best to have the names of all possible aspirants by June 1, 2009. You may wish to make a general bulletin announcement about the program and/or contact individuals yourself. If I receive an inquiry from an individual, I will always speak with the man’s pastor before interviewing the candidate. I have included attachments that explain what needs to happen at this initial stage. These should be completed and returned to me by you before June 1, 2009.

Thank you very much for your cooperation and assistance in this work of discernment. May God continue to bless you and your ministry.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Msgr. Robert H. Aucoin  
Director  
Deacon Formation