



Diocese of Fall River
Office for the Permanent Diaconate
Deacon Mentor Program

“Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word They presented these men to the Apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.” Acts 6:3-4

Introduction

To develop a Mentor Program for the Diocese of Fall River, a review of what the bishops envisioned in the National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States was necessary.

The entire description of the role of the deacon mentor is covered in a single paragraph in the National Directory (#280). In that one paragraph, the National Directory calls for the director of formation, with the approval and appointment of the bishop, to designate mentors from among deacons or priests who can assist in the assessment of the potential and qualifications of men in formation. They go on to state that mentors: (1) should serve as the “tutor” as described in the Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons; (2) are to support and encourage the aspirants and candidates under their charge; and (3) should receive their orientation and supervision from the Director of Formation, who will be in communication with the Diocesan Director and Associate Director.

What is implied is an expectation that each mentor is aware of his responsibilities, qualified, and willing to fulfill the role as a mentor. In the Diocese of Fall River the mentor is expected to accompany the candidate on his journey, encourage him and exemplify by his life and instruction the life of a deacon.

Overview

The community of Deacons may be of support in the discernment of vocations, in the initiation of spiritual life, in theological study and pastoral experience. Scheduled opportunities for conversation and shared experiences in ministry between the Candidate and Deacon, as well as between the wife of the Candidate and the wife of the Deacon can mutually sustain their enthusiasm and realism about the diaconate program

In this day and age when the Holy Spirit brings to our Church new challenges and new opportunities the role of the deacon finds itself in an ever evolving environment. The duties and mission of the deacon to be messengers of the Gospel and providers of charity to all God’s children require excellent preparation spiritually, academically, emotionally and pastorally.

Upon acceptance, they are “Called to Candidacy” by the bishop and enter even more deeply into their formation and preparation for ordained ministry. That formation is a team effort and it is very important to the candidate. That formation team is made up of the director(s), academic professors, pastor, spiritual director and a deacon-mentor.

Mentoring is a process by which the Deacon Mentor, and spouse, observe, reflect, suggest, encourage and challenge the Candidate and wife in their discernment. The Mentor actively listens to the events in the candidate’s life, challenges their theological assumptions, encourages their prayer life, and family life, and encourages their growth as a minister of justice and love in their family, workplace and parish community. The Mentor also provides an opportunity to discuss freely and frankly difficulties in ministry and the ups and downs of formation.

The mentor’s wife plays an serious and important role in the journey of the candidate’s wife in the discernment process. Any concerns raised by the wife of the deacon mentor would hopefully be reported in his evaluation report.

Criteria for the Deacon-Mentor

To qualify, a deacon-mentor must be ordained at least three years, and be, at their very core, men of prayer. They must be faithful to the Liturgy of Hours and other acts of devotion and prayer each day.

A deacon-mentor must be an able role model for the candidate. He should be one who has demonstrated his ability to excel in ministry and knowledgeable in the application of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and adheres to approved liturgical conduct. He must be willing to share his experience with the candidate and to enter into a relationship of both model for and assistant in the individual candidate’s formation.

The Role of the Deacon-Mentor

During the three-year period of candidacy, the deacon-mentor and candidate are required to meet face to face at least once every three months. The responsibility for arranging these meetings rests with the candidate. If the candidate is negligent in this, it is incumbent upon the deacon-mentor to notify the Director immediately. Telephone conversations are not sufficient but most certainly are encouraged in addition to the face to face meetings.

Criteria for selection of a deacon-mentor for a particular candidate:

- 1) The Mentor must be incardinated in the Diocese of Fall River , or working in the diocese, and must possess faculties, be in active ministry and hold an active or retired status in the Diocese.
- 2) The mentor must have been ordained for at least three years
- 3) The mentor should be an active participant and engaged in the pastoral life of the diaconal community.
- 4) A Mentor may not mentor more than two Candidates

- 5) The Candidate must observe or participate in some aspect of the Mentor's active ministry on a quarterly basis (i.e. Baptisms, Baptismal prep, adult faith formation, SVDP, food pantry, visits to hospitals, communion service, etc.)
- 6) Meetings are expected to last at least an hour.
- 7) Sessions should be casual, but not just casual social conversation. There should be a focus on the Candidate's formation experience for discussion and reflection. The sessions are not to be for mutual commiseration.
- 8) The Mentor is not to be a 'counselor' or "spiritual director." The role is fellow traveler, and a provider of suggestions for making the formation journey a more meaningful experience.
- 9) Mentors will assist the Diocesan Director, Associate Director and Formation Director in assessing the readiness for continuing formation and ultimately ordination of the Candidate.

An evaluation report will be prepared by the deacon-mentor and submitted to the Director of Formation with recommendations and assessments regarding the candidate's progress prior to the beginning of the quarter. Items of concern, however, should be transmitted to the Director immediately. This information will be shared with the Diocesan Director and the Associate Director.

All deacon-mentors will come together at least yearly to pray and share their experiences and make any recommendations to improve the program that they believe would be helpful.

The deacon-mentor (and spouse, if possible) should try to attend those occasions at classes when their candidate will be actively participating as a minister at evening prayer and when the candidate is called upon to share a reflection.

The deacon-mentor (and spouse) is invited to attend and participate in the liturgy of Institutions of Reader and Acolyte.

If the deacon-mentor is married, the deacon-mentor's wife might enter into an informal relationship with the candidate's wife through gatherings and phone calls.

Candidate Responsibilities

In a mentoring relationship the role of a person being mentored is often described as a trainee, student or learner. This is a correct description of the role the candidate plays in the mentoring relationship with his deacon mentor. The candidate contributes to his own formation by fulfilling his role, being a good student and in meeting his responsibilities within the relationship.

The Diaconate office will provide a list of deacon mentors. If possible, the candidate will choose his mentor from the approved list.

A candidate has certain responsibilities that must be fulfilled. Those responsibilities include:

- Regularly praying for and with the Deacon Mentor;
- Developing respect for the deacon mentor's experience and views;
- Being open to learning through discussion and experiences;
- Asking questions when uncertain or in need of clarification;
- Actively listening to the deacon mentor;
- Being respectful of the deacon mentor's time and using him as an effective resource;
- Being willing to engage and challenge the deacon mentor;
- Scheduling all regular meetings with the deacon mentor – the candidate should ask for the meetings (one tactic is to schedule the next meeting at the conclusion of each meeting.)
- Avoiding last minute cancellations or postponements of the meetings;
- Remaining available to meet with the deacon mentor and participate in his ministries when opportunities arise on short notice;
- Arriving at all meetings prepared and be fully engaged during the meeting;
- Sincerely attempting to put into practice, the suggestion and recommendations made by the deacon mentor;

Meeting Guidelines

QUARTERLY GUIDELINES General Norms:

1. Meetings should be scheduled in advance and last approximately 60 minutes.
2. Periodically, the deacon-mentor and his wife should also meet separately with the spouse of the candidate to ascertain if there are any problems or concerns she might have.

The Stages of Mentoring:

1. First Meeting: Clarification of expectations and responsibilities
 - a) Review meeting dates and places
 - b) Determination of periodic inclusion of the candidate's wife should be made

2. First Stage: "Collaborative" emphasis
 - a) It is recommended that the initial sessions be times for listening, clarifying issues and encouraging the candidates in their studies and ministries.

 - b) In this stage, it is important to allow the candidate to get to know and to gain confidence in the deacon-mentor. The emphasis should be about learning more about the candidate, what he's like, what his strong points are and what he perceives as his weaknesses. Those things which are of concern to him can also be made known and discussed.

 - c) As time goes by the relationship between the candidate and the deacon-mentor will be such as to allow the deacon-mentor to enter into a more collaborative and directive stance. The deacon-mentor will be encouraged to

present new ideas, interact with the candidate more directly in ministry and make concrete suggestions for new ministerial experiences.

3. Second Stage: Directive emphasis

a) In this stage the deacon-mentor will be asked to become more directive in the ministerial work of the candidate.

b) The candidate should be introduced, with supervision, to the rich variety of ministries that exist in the parish. Exposure to ethnic and cultural diversity is also very much encouraged.

ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

It is very important for the deacon-mentor to fully understand and appreciate the importance of their role in the overall formation process. Their recommendations are taken very seriously by the Directors and form an integral part of the decision making process as to whether a candidate will be recommended to the bishop for institution to the Offices of Reader and Acolyte and for ordination to the Office of Deacon. To that end, the deacon-mentor, while encouraged to form a cordial and friendly relationship with the candidate, must remain objective in his evaluation and comments about him. No candidate should be recommended for advancement to ordination solely on the basis that "he's a nice guy." No one is entitled to ordination, it is a calling from the Lord and the candidate must be capable of and prepared to assume the responsibilities of ordained ministry.

It is important, therefore, that the deacon-mentor make known to the Director of Formation such information that will enable the directors to make a knowledgeable decision as to the preparedness of the candidate. Progress reports are employed to assist the deacon-mentor in that task.

Deacon-mentors are required to meet face to face with their candidates at least once a quarter. At the end of each quarter, the deacon-mentor will complete and provide to the Director of Formation the Quarterly Progress Report (see Exhibit I). These forms must be received by the office at least one week prior to the end of each quarter; these reports are used for summary reports and given to the Director(s). Their prompt return is imperative. Deacon-mentors are encouraged to share what they have written with the candidate.

Conclusion

At the very beginning of this guide, we read the words from the Acts of the Apostles. It calls upon the Church to select from among us men filled with the Spirit and wisdom. It is our collaborative responsibility to make that selection. The nature and role of the diaconate in the modern Church is ever changing, ever expanding. A deacon's ministry is not limited to the parish from which he came but, rather, to the whole Church. As such, he must be prepared and formed to the best of ability in every way possible.

The role of the deacon-mentor adds a personal dynamic to the formation process and allows a candidate to gain from the experiences of those already in ministry. The service

rendered by a deacon-mentor today will have a lasting effect on the diaconate and the whole church for many years to come.