



THE EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE OF
NEW YORK

***Information Regarding the Sponsor's Letter to the Bishop
Recommending an Aspirant for Postulancy for Ordination to the Diaconate***

The diaconate was a ministry of great importance in the earliest years of the Christian Church. Recently it is being revived in the Episcopal Church and other denominations as an ordained ministry which expresses aspects of service, outreach, concern for human needs and advocacy for social justice within the Christian community.

Ideally, a parish community first discerns the characteristics of a “deacon in our midst” and calls forth that person to be recommended for ordination. Sometimes a parishioner perceives a vocation in himself or herself and asks to be recommended. For a parish to identify and raise up suitable persons for this ministry requires a time of discernment with the parishioner and affirmation by the gathered community. The rector, vicar or priest-in-charge initiates the application process for Holy Orders. (During the time an interim is serving in the parish, parishioners should not be recommended for Holy Orders.) A priest recommends a parishioner to the Bishop only after a focused period of inquiry, service and exploration, which results in the priest’s conviction that the parishioner possesses apt gifts and character for ordained ministry. Members of the congregation become involved in the discernment through a parish committee on ministry which meets with the parishioner over a period of time and makes a recommendation to the sponsoring priest. The term used in the Canons for a person who has been recommended for Postulancy is “nominee.”

A nominee for the diaconate must have been confirmed in (or formally received into) the Episcopal Church and a communicant in good standing in the sponsoring parish for at least one year prior to being recommended to the Bishop for Postulancy.

When the priest and aspirant agree that it is appropriate to begin the application process, the priest must send a formal letter sponsoring the aspirant for Postulancy for ordination to the diaconate to The Bishop.

This letter should be sent by both email and hard copy to:

The Rt. Rev. Andrew ML Dietsche
The Episcopal Diocese of New York
1047 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10025
Email: bpdietsche@diocesenyny.org

Also send a copy of letter to the Rev. Canon Charles W. Simmons, Canon for Ministry.

The letter should address fully each of the categories listed in this document, giving any additional pertinent information. A letter of support will not serve the nominee well unless it is specific and addresses these areas and any others that are relevant. It is the Bishop's expectation that the letter of recommendation will be kept confidential and not shared with the person being recommended.

While the Commission on Ministry recognizes that there are times when, for a variety of reasons, a sponsor may feel obligated to recommend a parishioner about whom s/he feels major doubts, it strongly urges that those doubts be spelled out clearly, either in the letter of recommendation itself, or less formally with the Chair of the Commission on Ministry or with the Canon for Ministry. Even for a "probably qualified" nominee, any questions, reservations, or doubts should be raised at the beginning so that they may be resolved as early as possible during the time of Diocesan discernment.

Please include with your letter a description of your parish Committee on Ministry or Discernment Committee. Discuss the membership and the way the work of the committee is organized as it meets with persons seeking the parish's nomination to the Bishop as applicants for Holy Orders. Include such information as the number and frequency of meetings with a prospective nominee; a description of the content of the program used over a period of time which allows for reasonable observation, involvement, and discernment. If you have received a written report or recommendation from the committee regarding the person you are nominating, please include a copy.

Priest's letter recommending an aspirant for the diaconate

At the beginning of your letter, please indicate that this is a recommendation for the diaconate and include the following information:

NAME, ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER(S), EMAIL ADDRESS(S)

The Rev. Canon Charles W. Simmons
Canon for Ministry
Email: csimmons@diocesenyny.org
Phone: 212-316-7416

In the letter, please address the following categories:

1. Background Information

Describe the nominee's involvement in the life of the parish, community, and Church. How long have you known the nominee? How long has s/he been a member of the parish? Do you know the nominee well? In what activities has s/he been involved and

for what period of time? How would the parishioners describe this person's ministry in the parish or community? What is your sense of the nominee's level of commitment and faithfulness in connection with parish or Church work taken on? Please give examples.

2. Spiritual Life

What are your impressions of the nominee's spirituality? Discuss her/his prayer life, worship, reception of the sacraments. Does s/he have knowledge of Scripture and the Church? Describe the nominee's articulation of his/her own faith? Is it enthusiastic, coherent and compelling? How does faith ground and center the nominee's work in and out of the Church? Does it direct the nominee's sense of social responsibility? Please be as descriptive as possible. Do the nominee's co-workers know that s/he is Christian? What image, story, or passage of scripture does the nominee use to describe her or his sense of call to ministry? What is your impression of the nominee's overall spiritual health?

3. Spiritual Maturity

Is this nominee a person of spiritual maturity? Does s/he show the ability to exercise a ministry characterized by a continually enlarging vision?

4. Prophetic Obedience

Among the particularities of the order of deacons is the call to prophetic obedience. How does this person speak prophetically to the Church about the needs of the world? Is s/he a person of courage and tenacity in raising issues the Church would prefer to ignore? And, at the same time, is s/he capable of being obedient (to parish authorities, to the rector, to the Bishop)? Can s/he be a self-starter in recognizing needs in the community and being creative in seeking out proposals to meet those needs?

5. Interpersonal Skills

What is your perception of the nominee's sensitivity to pastoral issues in people's lives, e.g., how does s/he respond to pain in others' lives? What is your sense of the nominee's ability to recognize his or her own fears and conflicts, and in what ways do those fears and conflicts impede or facilitate her or his sensitivity to others? Is the nominee a good active listener, i.e., able to hear out the other and be perceptive about what is both spoken and unspoken in the other? Is s/he open to new ideas and approaches arising from others? Is the nominee good at organizing others to meet needs for mission, and delegating authority to others? Is s/he capable of organizing an institutional response to an issue or need, not only a one-on-one response to an

individual need? Please provide examples of this critically important ability to organize and delegate.

6. Educational Background

While there is no educational prerequisite for ordination to the diaconate, please describe the nominee's academic background, i. e., high school? some college? More? Is s/he aware of general areas of study which will be necessary in preparation for the ministry of deacons... and that the program will offer appropriate flexibility for individual differences? Please give your sense of the nominee's facility with language, both spoken and written.

7. Liturgical Function

While the principal focus for the deacon is on servant ministry, the diaconal role as icon of servant ministry is reflected in the liturgy. Is the nominee aware that there are liturgical responsibilities connected to this ministry? That these responsibilities are important signs for the whole Church of the call of all baptized persons to servant ministry? N.B. Nominees who seem to be focused primarily on the liturgy probably are not well suited for this ministry.

8. Ministry in the Church and the World

Describe ways this nominee is motivated to reach out to people in need in the parish and beyond? Is s/he one who recognizes needs in the community and is capable of being a self-starter and creative in seeking out ways to help meet them? Has s/he participated in local or global opportunities for mission beyond the parish? Please give examples. What experience does this nominee have of the diversity of our Diocese, The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion? How does s/he view the role of the Church with regard to issues of social justice?

9. Character and Mental Health

What are your impressions of the nominee's character and mental health generally? What is your sense of the nominee's level of maturity and judgment? Intelligence? Warmth and humor? Ability to make long-term commitments to people or projects? What is your sense of the balance in this nominee's life, e.g., how and how well does the nominee balance her/his work or profession with parish and Church involvement? With family or social life? With vocational interests or hobbies? How strongly does the nominee's family support his/her sense of a vocation to Holy Orders?

10. Future Ministry

Have you discussed with the nominee and does s/he understand that, although it may not occur immediately after ordination, a deacon should expect to be assigned to a ministry in another place than the sponsoring congregation? Does s/he understand that at the time the priest leaves a parish and new priest is called, the deacon will be reassigned?

Should you request and the Bishop approve the assignment of this nominee as a deacon in the sponsoring parish, how do you envision his/her ministry with you and your congregation in the following areas:

Outreach ministries, Pastoral care, Christian Education, and Christian Education

A sponsor is encouraged to supplement the above categories with any additional information about the nominee which he or she believes would be helpful.