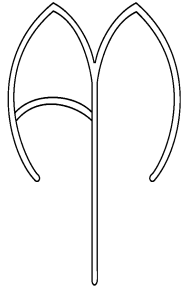


AVE MARIA CATHOLIC CHURCH PARISH VOCATIONS COMMITTEE



Frequently Asked Questions:

- *Who would make a good priest?*
- *Signs of a Possible Call to the Priesthood, Diaconate, or Religious Life.*
- *Thinking Of Priesthood, Diaconate or Religious Life? Questions that may help!*
- *A 5-step discernment process towards priesthood, diaconate, or religious life.*
- *Simple creative exercises to charge your idealism about diocesan priesthood or the permanent diaconate program.*
- *How do I apply to become a priest or deacon in the Diocese of Colorado Springs?*
- *Qualities of a potential priest or deacon.*

Who would make a good priest or deacon?

The priesthood, diaconate or being a member of a religious community is obviously more than just a job or career - it is a way of life. When considering yourself as a candidate for the priesthood, diaconate or religious life, what has been observed and tested over time about those who become successful candidates is that they encompass the following characteristics:

- Someone who has a deep relationship with Our Lord through prayer and action.
- Someone who is caring, compassionate, and understands what it means to be of service to another.
- Someone who has leadership qualities and potential.
- Someone who is self-assured, yet does have a sense of arrogance (not think they know it all).
- Someone who desires to love and care for people of every race, language and walk of life.
- Someone who can and will respect other ministries and empower others to use their gifts within the Church.
- Someone who is of an age where they can give mature and extended service to the Church.
- Someone who has a servant's heart and the desire to seek to help others, while also taking care of oneself.

- Someone who is available and welcoming. We need priests, deacons, and religious who will welcome others to the Lord's Table!

If you think you have these qualities, then you may wish to talk further with one of your parish priests, a priest friend or the Diocesan Vocation Director (Fr. Jim Williams, (719) 636-2345, Vocations@diocs.org)

Signs of a Possible Call

A vocation self-test

Does the thought of you becoming a religious sister, brother, deacon or priest keep coming back time and again?

- Do you hide vocation literature under your bed or tuck it away in a closet or backpack?
- Do you yearn for a closer relationship with Jesus?
- Do you feel called to give more ... to be more?
- Does your relationship with God sustain you, enliven you, and invigorate you in such a way that you want to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others?
- Do you find the parish ministries you are involved in (e.g., altar serving, proclaiming; etc) have become more life-giving and energizing for you?
- Do you have a gut-feeling that you are on the brink of a major life decision?
- Are you afraid to tell family and friends that you are thinking about a religious vocation?
- Does the idea of becoming a priest, deacon, or religious excite you and at the same time frighten you because you feel unworthy?

If you answered yes to two or more of the above, please ... please contact one of your parish priests, a priest friend, the parish's Vocations Committee (vocations@avemariaonline.org) or the Diocesan Vocation Director (Fr. Jim Williams, (719) 636-2345, Vocations@diocs.org)

Thinking Of Priesthood? Diaconate? Religious Life? Questions That May Help!

- What is the main motivation behind your thought about becoming a priest, deacon, or member of a religious community?
- What excites you at the prospect of ministering to others?
- What in your view is the number one "Mission" of the Church?
- What is the difference in serving God as a priest, deacon, religious brother or sister and serving God as a lay member of a parish?
- What does a "personal relationship" with Jesus mean to you?

- What events, positive or negative, have influenced your life and may have triggered or heightened your sense of vocation?
- Do you see yourself as flexible and open to the differing views of others on theology, practice, piety, and devotions?
- Who has been a mentor or someone you would like to imitate in your ministry and why?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the Church today and what has given you this impression? How do think becoming a priest, deacon, or member of a religious community would help to resolve these challenge(s).
- What does "collaborative ministry" entail?
- We face obstacles and resistance with any major decision in our lives. What obstacles at present might hinder you from making an informed and confident decision about ministry in the Church?
- How have you been addressing these obstacles or areas of resistance?
- Do you prefer to spend time with others or do you consider yourself a 'private' person?
- What is the difference between being alone and being lonely?
- What do celibacy and a celibate life mean to you?

How to inquire about / apply to become a candidate for the priesthood or diaconate in the Diocese of Colorado Springs?

The overall process of application often varies according to the needs of each person, but will include a time of supported inquiry, discernment, and aspirancy. For some this may occur over just a few months. For most, the pre-seminary support process runs for approximately 6-10 months. For some, it is available for longer. It all depends on one's readiness to take the step towards priestly or diaconate formation in the diocese and is not dependent solely on age. Sometimes a 20-year-old may be more ready for a variety of reasons than a 30-year-old. This doesn't mean one is better than the other however. More years and experience can increase readiness for a new step in some circumstances. In other circumstances, the complexity and depth of one's experience deserves extra care, time, and consideration.

The goal of the Diocese of Colorado Springs' priestly and diaconate vocation ministry is to assist men to come to a peace and clarity about their appropriate life direction for God and his people. The Vocation Director or Director of the Permanent Diaconate, as appropriate, take time to know and care for those inquiring about the priesthood or diaconate, in order to offer good support and to come to the most appropriate decisions in terms of recommendations to the Bishop about acceptance into priestly or diaconate formation programs. There are a few steps (identified below) along the initial path in order to come to this point of beginning formation.

First Contact: Some people who are thinking about the priesthood or diaconate contact the Diocesan Vocation Director directly with their inquiries, whereas others prefer to share first with the parish priest, confessor, or Spiritual Director, who can then refer them to the Vocation Director for an office visit. This is a really important step forward and many have talked about how free they felt once they shared their thoughts, desires, and aspirations with a trusted person.

Inquiry phase: The Vocation Director or Director of the Permanent Diaconate Program keep contact with those considering a vocation and has some inquiry meetings with each person. These meetings are a combination of one-on-one and gatherings with an inquiry group. After some quality time has been spent in this initial period, some individuals will be invited into a discernment time and for others it will already have become clear that another step would be more helpful at that stage.

For example, the Diocese of Colorado Springs actively supports men and women who might be more inclined towards discerning a vocation into the Consecrated Religious Life, those more suited to other commitments, and those for whom the gaining of other experiences would be beneficial on a continuing path of considering the priesthood or diaconate.

Discernment phase: For those who move beyond the inquiry phase, the discernment time is an enjoyable process of taking their reflection much further. Through group gatherings, personal accompaniment, spiritual direction, some reflection days and a retreat, the participants gain further insight and depth into their personal and spiritual lives, and strengthen their understanding of their suitability for priesthood, diaconate, or other life choices. Again, in partnership with each person, an invitation to apply to be an aspirant is then extended to those for whom this is appropriate.

Aspirancy phase: To become an aspirant requires that the Diocesan Vocation Director or Director of the Permanent Diaconate Program make a formal recommendation to the Bishop that a person's desire to apply be accepted and that they be included in the next intake to the seminary or into the diocese's 4-year diaconate formation program.

During this time, the aspirant lives very consciously with the seminary or diaconate program in mind and focuses his life with priorities towards this goal. He typically develops a strong sense of fraternal brotherhood with others in the process and comes to know quite a number of priests and deacon of the diocese.

It's a great day when aspirants meet with their Bishop and are formally accepted. But it's not a case of those who moved in another direction during the process as having less faith, ability, or integrity. Each phase of the pre-seminary formation and selection process is about faith and integrity and sometimes, especially so when someone moves in another direction. While the universal and particular church are indeed in need of more priest and deacons, it is important to remember it's not a numbers game. The Church seeks quality over quantity. We need priests and deacons who are motivated, positive, peaceful, and suited in their choice, just as Christ's Church needs people in every vocation to be likewise suited.

Formalities: During the pre-seminary or pre-diaconate program support process, a number of written reflections may be asked by participants; such as “Why do you want to become a priest (or deacon)”. As well, there is an obligation by the Diocese to complete a pre-employment candidate check (to include seeking character and previous employment references; high school and college official transcripts; law enforcement background checks; and other documentation regarding the suitability of the candidate). There is also the need to provide any relevant medical information or records concerning previous religious or other professional training/experience. All of this is completed with the dignity and confidentiality of each person being given the highest possible priority.

Acceptance by the Bishop: At this point, having received written notice of the Bishop’s acceptance and sponsorship of the individual as candidate for the priesthood or diaconate, some will obviously need to give notice in their work places or landlords (concerning house leases etc.) Some will only then begin to tell more friends and family about their direction. It’s a very exciting point to reach and can also be accompanied by some emotion, which certainly indicates that one is doing something significant. But by this stage, it’s envisioned that each aspirant will have developed the beginnings of a great sense of brotherhood and bond with other aspirants and with others who will sustain them in anticipation, belonging, purpose, and confidence as they begin the formation process.

Finally: If you are reading this and have had thoughts of the priesthood, diaconate, or entering a religious community, please pick up the telephone and speak with your parish priest or the diocesan Vocation Director.

The concept of a vocation inquiry is not about pressure or a decision ... but rather, about being supported to explore God’s call in your life. We wish you every blessing as you discern and act on God’s personal call to you: Come ... follow me!

And if you’re reading this not as someone personally thinking about or able to look at a vocation to priesthood, diaconate, or religious life, then you’re reading it for some reason. The fact that you’ve arrived at this parish website, no doubt indicates you are a person of Christ and are answering His call.

So, what about an idea for you? Would you consider joining in a ministry of encouragement by telling someone that you think he’d make a great priest, deacon, brother or sister for Christ and his people? Pray about it!

How to inquire about / apply to become a candidate for a Religious Community?

Please contact the parish’s Vocations Committee (vocations@avemariaonline.org) or the Diocesan Vocation Director (Fr. Jim Williams, (719) 636-2345, vocations@diocs.org) for more information and contact information for individual religious communities (e.g., the Society of Jesus (Jesuits); Dominicans; Franciscans; etc).

Recommended qualities of a potential candidate for the priesthood or diaconate

Spiritual

- Is committed to and passionate about the Catholic faith.
- Cultivates a strong sense of the sacred - the place of Christ in his life.
- Has an eye, devotion, and a love for the Word of God and seeks to live out the Gospel in their daily life.
- Participates in the celebration of the Eucharist - actively and regularly.
- Has a growing commitment to personal private prayer.

Ministry

- Is developing an openness to what's new, what's different, what lies out of their "comfort zone" - even while being grounded in the familiar and the routine.
- Has an eagerness for the prophetic, a genuine sympathy and compassion for the marginalized, a challenging voice for the excluded, and a hunger for social justice in the world today.
- Is focused on the Kingdom of God - stretching from this life to the next.

Academic

- Has completed secondary school or the equivalent of Senior.
- Has maintained good academic grades and appropriate learning behavior.
- Is intelligent and exhibits/displays an eagerness to learn.

Personal

- Maintains a strong sense of individuality, demonstrates a generosity of spirit and private integrity - balanced with a commitment to collaborative relationship building in the community, family, and Church.
- Enjoys a healthy capacity to live and value life - with an equally healthy capacity for asceticism, selflessness, prayer, and discipline.
- Has a deep appreciation for sexuality and is able to defend its goodness - coupled with an equally understanding and embrace of purity and chastity.
- Is conscious of the world-community - considering other nationalities, traditions, and cultures.

Diocese Vocations Inquiries Web Email Point of Contact:

Vocations@diocs.org