Frequently Asked Questions About Deacons

Who is a deacon?

A deacon is an ordained minister in the Catholic Church. There are three groups, or “orders,” of ordained ministers in the Church: bishops, priests, and deacons. Deacons are ordained as sacramental signs to the Church and to the world of Christ, who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Therefore, they are not ordained for ministerial priesthood, but for a ministry of service (Greek: diakonia) that they carry out under the pastoral authority of the Archbishop.

Is a deacon a member of the clergy?

Yes. Everyone who has received the Sacrament of Holy Orders is a member of the clergy. One enters the “clerical state” upon ordination as a deacon. Therefore, bishops, priests, and deacons are all members of the clergy, which is distinct from the laity. It follows that there can be no such thing as a “lay deacon.”

What are the ministries of the deacon?

All ordained ministers in the Church are consecrated for ministries of Word, liturgy, and charity, but bishops, priests, and deacons exercise these ministries in different ways. As ministers of the Word, deacons proclaim the Gospel, preach, and teach in the name of the Church. As ministers of the sacred liturgy, deacons baptize, lead the faithful in prayer, witness marriages, and conduct wake and funeral services. As ministers of charity, deacons are leaders in identifying the needs of others, then marshaling the Church's resources to meet those needs. All that the deacon does flows from his sacramental identity.

Why do some deacons become priests?

For many years ordained ministers "ascended" from one office to another, culminating in ordination to the presbyterate, or priesthood. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65), however, authorized the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent order of ministry. So, while students for the priesthood are still ordained deacons prior to their ordination as priests, there are now thousands of deacons in the United States alone who minister in this order permanently. There is no difference in the sacramental sign or the functions between the so-called “transitional” and “permanent” deacons.

Why did Vatican II restore the permanent diaconate?

In 1998, two Vatican offices (Congregation for Clergy and Congregation for Catholic Education) issued a joint statement on the diaconate that provided the following explanation:
“Three reasons lay behind [the decision to restore the permanent diaconate]: (i) a desire to enrich the Church with the functions of the diaconate, which otherwise, in many regions, could only be exercised with great difficulty; (ii) the intention of strengthening with the grace of diaconal ordination those who already exercised many of the functions of the Diaconate; (iii) a concern to provide regions, where there was a shortage of clergy, with sacred ministers. Such reasons make clear that the restoration of the permanent Diaconate was in no manner intended to prejudice the meaning, role or flourishing of the ministerial priesthood, which must always be fostered because of its indispensability.”

**May married men be ordained deacons?**

Yes. The Second Vatican Council decreed that the diaconate, when it was restored as a permanent order in the hierarchy, could be opened to “mature married men,” later clarified to mean men over the age of 35. This is in keeping with the ancient tradition of the Church, in which married men were ordained into this ministry. It should also be noted that if his wife should die first, the deacon may not remarry without special permission.

“Celibacy Affects Every Deacon: In one way or another, celibacy affects every deacon, married or unmarried. Understanding the nature of celibacy—its value and its practice—is essential for the married deacon. Not only does this understanding strengthen and nurture his own commitment to marital chastity, but it also helps to prepare him for the possibility of living celibate chastity should his wife predecease him. This concern is particularly unique within the diaconate. Tragically, some deacons who were married at the time of Ordination only begin to face the issues involved with celibacy upon the death of their wives. As difficult as this process is, all deacons need to appreciate the impact celibacy can have on their lives and ministry.”


**Given family and work responsibilities, wouldn’t it be better to wait until retirement to become a deacon?**

Not necessarily! It is true that some men may not be in a position to consider the diaconate at this time because of their demanding family and/or work situations. However, one of the driving forces behind the renewal of the diaconate was to have the presence of ordained ministers in families, workplaces, and the public square. Here it is important to recall that the diaconate is above all a vocation from God. If someone believes he may be called to the diaconate, he should begin the discernment process now, rather than postpone the consideration of the diaconate until retirement or the children are grown.
Can women be ordained as deacons?

No. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 1577), quoting the Code of Canon Law and other Church documents, affirms that only baptized men may validly receive sacred ordination. For more on the theological and historical reasons for this teaching, see [http://catholicdefense.blogspot.com/2011/09/can-catholic-church-ordain-female.html](http://catholicdefense.blogspot.com/2011/09/can-catholic-church-ordain-female.html)

Is a deacon ordained for the parish or the Archdiocese?

Whenever a person is ordained, he is to serve the archdiocesan Church under the authority of the Archbishop. Deacons are no different in this regard: They are assigned by the Archbishop to ministries for which the Archbishop perceives a great need, and for which the deacon may have special gifts or talents. Most often, this will be within a parish setting, just as most priests serve in a parish. Once assigned to the parish, the deacon and any other clergy assigned to the parish are subject to the immediate supervision of the pastor. However, this assignment may be changed at the request of the deacon or the initiative of the Archbishop.

Does that mean that a deacon will not be asked to serve in his home parish?

More often than not, a deacon will be called to assist in his home parish as part of his assignment, but such assignment is subject to the Archbishop’s discretion and cannot be assumed. By the same token, the Archbishop fully takes into account where the deacon resides, as well as the needs and preferences of the deacon and his family and work responsibilities when making the assignment.

How long does it take to become a deacon?

In the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, those admitted to the diaconate program go through a one-year aspirancy period followed by a four-year candidacy period, for a total of five years. The next cohort of deacons will begin aspirancy in September 2015, with ordination in 2020.

What does diaconate training entail?

Diaconate training, more typically called “formation,” has four dimensions: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. Each month--except for July and August--the deacon candidates will spend one weekend (Friday night to noon on Sunday) at Savior Pastoral Center, where they will receive specialized formation. To the extent the formation includes coursework, there will also be reading assignments and papers to be completed in between these weekend sessions. In addition, the candidates will periodically attend workshops and retreats, and they will also receive pastoral assignments to give them hands-on training and experience.
How do I find out more about becoming a deacon in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas?

Visit [www.archkck.org/deacons](http://www.archkck.org/deacons) or contact the Office of the Permanent Diaconate via email at diaconate@archkck.org or call (913) 721-1570. The Archdiocese will be sponsoring information nights, evenings of recollection, and other opportunities to learn more about the diaconate and discern the Lord’s will for you in that regard.