ASPIRANCY

I. Description:

- Period following the completion of the initial inquiry/discernment process & admission and selection process
- Inquirers are accepted into the aspirancy period by the [arch]bishop
- Corresponds to the propaedeutic period required by the Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons of the Congregation for Catholic Education
- It is a time to discern the capability and readiness for eventual selection into the candidate period of formation
- Will provide the opportunity for a thorough discernment of a diaconal vocation and include the following components:
  - Initiation into diaconal spirituality
  - Supervised pastoral experiences especially among the poor and marginalized
  - Adequate assessment of the aspirant’s potential to be promoted to candidate formation, and ultimately ordination.
  - Be creative of an environment in which a wife can be appropriately prepared to give her consent, and more essentially to ascertain her compatibility with her husband’s diaconal vocation and eventual ministry

II. Supporting framework for the Aspirancy Period:

- The aspirant handbook which:
  - Details the components of the program
  - Provides a rationale and guidance for assessment
  - Delineates the expectations/responsibilities of the aspirant and those regarding the wife of a married aspirant
- The aspirant path of formation will last one year
- The Director of Formation will provide the bishop with declaration of readiness for each aspirant that:
  - Profiles the aspirant’s personality
  - Provides a judgment of suitability for candidate formation and ultimately ordination

III. Components include:

- Introduction to the study of theology
- Deeper knowledge of the spirituality and ministry of the deacon
- More attentive discernment of aspirant’s call
- Time to form an aspirant community (with its own cycle of meeting and prayer)
- Establishes and ensures the aspirant’s regular participation in spiritual direction
- Introduces the aspirant to the pastoral ministries of the [arch]diocesan Church
- Assists the aspirant’s family in their support of his formation
IV. Dimensions:

**HUMAN** [Goal: to help the deacon develop “his human personality in such a way that it becomes a bridge and not an obstacle for others in their meeting with Jesus Christ.”]
- Time for a married aspirant and his wife to assess the quality of their relationship and consider the ramifications of his possible ordination to the diaconate for their married life
- For the single aspirant, it is a time to discern his capacity and receptivity for celibacy

**SPIRITUAL** [Goal: “putting on the mind of Christ,” thereby establishing and nurturing attitudes, habits, and practices that provide a foundation for the development of an authentic and ongoing spiritual life.]
- Aspirant path must:
  - Create an environment in which the individual is encouraged to grow in his personal relationship with Christ and in his commitment to the Church and its mission in the world.
  - Includes:
    - Regular celebration of Eucharist, Liturgy of the Hours, and Reconciliation
    - Scheduled time for private prayer, meditation, *lectio divina*
    - Devotions to Mary and the saints
    - Conferences and workshops on the meaning of authentic obedience; celibacy; simplicity of life, and on Christian witness in both matrimonial and celibate life to the Church and the world
    - An understanding and appreciation of the diaconal vocation, with an ability to articulate this call through the primary ministries of word, liturgy, and charity
    - An introduction and experience of the spiritual writings of our Catholic tradition
- Spiritual direction: a spiritual director approved by the bishop, well-trained and knowledgeable about the diaconate is critical to the formation process
- Parish and Pastor: are collaborators in discerning the readiness of the aspirant to move into candidate formation. Accompany the aspirant and his family through prayers, support and presence
  - Parish: primary place to observe the aspirant’s relational skills and his practice in pastoral service
  - Pastor: is to provide an assessment of the aspirant and his family
  - Formators: utilizing these assessments are to support and challenge the aspirant’s discernment of his readiness to move into candidate formation

**INTELLECTUAL** [Objective: to communicate a deeper knowledge of the faith and church tradition than the aspirant has already attained.]
- To promote an in-depth and systematic study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
• Introduce the tradition of Catholic philosophy, spirituality, and doctrine (especially doctrinal understanding of the diaconate, and the threefold ministry of the deacon)
• Taught how to participate in Theological Reflection.
• How to develop his ability to apply the Church’s teaching on moral matters, including her social teaching, to the pressing moral questions that emerge in pastoral ministry
• Taught to understand diakonia as the prescriptive word for the mission of the Church in the world
• Workshops on family issues, personal health, time management, care giving skills, and married and celibate spirituality – will all contribute to the aspirant’s human, spiritual, and intellectual formation

PASTORAL [Focus: is ultimately the discernment of the aspirant’s gifts for the threefold ministry of word, liturgy, and charity, and of his capacity to make a lifelong commitment to these ministries. It also enables the assessment of the wife and family in their readiness to give consent and support to his vocation and ministry.]
• Should introduce the aspirant to the practical services provided by the diocesan Church
• Allow an exploration of core issues regarding charity and the social dimension of the Gospel as confronted by the Church (through pastoral placements)
• Mentors (exemplary deacons) should invite the aspirants to accompany, observe, co-minister, and reflect upon the specific diaconal ministries experienced
• Appropriate ecumenical pastoral experiences should be considered and implemented as opportunities emerge. Opportunities for involvement with the Jewish community and with representatives of other religions should also be provided

V. Assessment:
• Conclusion of the aspirancy path is determined through a formal assessment conducted by the Committee on Admission and Scrutiny
• Occurs when the aspirant with consent of his spouse (if married) and the expressed permission of his formators makes a written petition to the bishop for admission to candidacy
• At the time of petitioning the following documents are prepared:
  o Personal, handwritten, signed letter requesting admission to the candidacy path of formation, and to receive the Rite of Admission to Candidacy by the aspirant is written
  o A personal, handwritten, and signed letter of consent prepared by the married aspirant’s wife
  o Each petitioner will be interviewed by the Committee on Admission and Scrutiny to appraise his and her (the wife, if married - her level of consent and support) readiness for nomination into the candidacy path of formation
A review of all pertinent data on the aspirant will be conducted by the committee.

A vote of each member and the rationale for the vote is to be recorded.

The Director of Formation will prepare “a declaration which outlines the profile of the [aspirant’s personality]… and a judgment of suitability.” Accompanied by the votes and rationale, the declaration is submitted to the bishop for his selection of those to be admitted into candidate formation.

A copy of both the “declaration” and the bishop’s letter to the aspirant regarding his acceptance into candidacy is to be placed in the petitioner’s personal file.

VI. Rite of Admission to Candidacy:

- Celebrated after admission to candidacy formation
- Does not constitute any right necessarily to receive diaconal ordination
- Public in character and ecclesial significant it is celebrated with special consideration to inclusion of spouses and children, and cultural traditions represented
- Candidates and spouses should prepare themselves for the reception of the rite through a spiritual retreat
- Appropriate documentation (a certificate) should be prepared and archived that the rite was celebrated.