

ORDINATION PROCESS IN THE DIOCESE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

The canonical process and requirements for ordination are covered in detail in Title III of the Canons of the Episcopal Church, but each diocese designs structures and systems to implement them. As aspirants enter the diocesan process, they must have their own sense of call to ordination discerned and confirmed by the church. The process may feel arduous, time-consuming, and stressful, but it is meant to be stretching, affirming and graceful.

Minimum Initial Requirements

1. Aspirants should have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university.
2. Aspirants must be a part of the diocese for a minimum of two years.
3. On a case by case basis, to establish their capacities to successfully pursue graduate seminary work, aspirants may be required to take the Miller Analogies Test. The diocese cannot accept, as postulants, those persons whose seminary admission applications could be denied or made probational.
4. Pursuant to Title III, Canon 6, aspirants must be communicants in good standing and in residence in a congregation of this diocese.

The Parish Priest

Individuals may arrive at their sense of call in a variety of ways and they can be unsure whether that sense of call is validated by others who know them well. Therefore, the ordination discernment process is first engaged on the local level with the parish priest. Clergy recognize the difficulty many may have in initially putting themselves forward for ordination. They too have struggled with issues of worthiness, presumption, adequacy, humility and qualifications. Aspirants (and their spouses or intended spouses) are therefore encouraged to enter into dialogue with a priest over a period of time, months or years, to examine such issues and to be confronted with the realities of ordained ministry. Clergy are to look for people who appear to possess the gifts needed for ordained ministry and to redirect to lay ministry persons whose gifts are otherwise.

The Parish Discernment Process

When the parish priest feels positively about a possible call to ordination and after the potential aspirant has met with the bishop and received his approval, the rector should form a "parish discernment committee" of eight persons from the congregation known for their maturity of judgment. One should be from the vestry. The committee will expect the aspirant to be performing ministries in the congregation (such as teaching, lay reading, leadership roles, etc.) and in the community in such a way that potential can be closely observed. They should work with the aspirant over a period of months, as the priest previously has done, to consider whether the aspirant possesses necessary gifts for ordained ministry or whether the aspirant should be redirected to lay ministry. The committee could ask themselves such questions as: Is this a person we would affirm and welcome if he or she were to be ordained and come to us then as a parish priest? Is this a person who could be a distinct asset in the ordained ministry and in our diocese? Is this a person whom we could candidly and whole-heartedly recommend to others for ordained deployment?

The committee should prepare a final, written report of their findings. This report should accompany an aspirant's formal application to the diocese for postulancy. Additionally, the findings of the committee should be shared and discussed with the vestry since the vestry must give formal endorsements to postulancy applications.

The office of the bishop can furnish a discernment model, illustrating how a parish discernment committee should proceed and the diocesan clergy are encouraged to request it.

It must be stressed that postulancy applications cannot be considered unless a thorough discernment process has been first engaged by the local priest and congregation. No aspirant should be passed along to the diocese to avoid or evade "saying no."

Initial Diocesan Contacts

At any time an aspirant or potential aspirant is encouraged to contact the Bishop's Office for information and/or clarification concerning the mechanics, time frames, etc. regarding the postulancy application and to begin identifying and introducing himself/herself.

Initial Formal Application for Postulancy

The aspirant will need to submit or have submitted the following forms and documents obtained from and returned to the bishop's office:

1. The Social History Form, portions of which are completed by the aspirant and by the parish priest. This document will contain necessary biographical and spiritual information along with identification of personal references.
2. Spiritual biography
3. Full transcripts from college and/or universities as identified in the Social History Form.
4. Medical Examination Form, completed and forwarded by the aspirant's physician of choice and at the aspirant's expense.
5. The Behavior Screening Questionnaire and related documents to enable a thorough background check conducted by the diocese in the area of sexual misconduct and other issues.
6. The personal Application for Postulancy Form.
7. The endorsement form to be completed by the aspirant's vestry and priest.
8. The Life History Questionnaire, to be sent directly to the diocesan psychological examiner. Instructions will be given for this mailing and for making an appointment with the examiner for a battery of standard psychological inventories and a personal interview. This testing is paid for by the aspirant and the results of the examination are forwarded to the Bishop's Office.
9. Discernment report

Time Frames for Formal Application

Receipt by the diocese of application documents, itemized above, should be completed by December 1st of the year preceding the date of proposed seminary enrollment or by the same November date if the aspirant is already enrolled in seminary and is seeking postulancy to be granted the following January.

Again, it is emphasized that positive evaluation by the diocese of all supporting documents and of tests must be completed before an invitation to the Commission on Ministry's Pre-Postulancy Conference can be considered.

Commission on Ministry Pre-Postulancy Conference

In order to receive further assessment of an aspirant's application for postulancy by the Commission on Ministry, the Diocesan Bishop may invite applicants and their spouses/fiancées to the annual pre-postulancy conference, usually held in mid-January for up to 48 hours duration. The gathered group will engage in group discussion, meals, worship and personal interviews to further the discernment process. Applicants should know that there is no set number of persons who will be approved, and they are not competing with one another.

At the end of the conference, the Commission on Ministry will meet in closed session to share impressions and in an advisory capacity to prepare their recommendation to the bishop. Added to other data, this forms the basis upon which the bishop makes his decision about postulancy.

Before they leave the conference, all applicants will again meet individually with the Commission on Ministry to receive and discuss the decisions made and what will then be presented to the bishop. Whatever the decisions are, the intent is to be affirming, caring and supportive.

Preparing for Seminary

Prior to this point, applicants have probably been examining seminaries, perhaps even sending for application materials and attending inquirers' weekends. Upon being granted postulancy, the new postulant enters a more active phase of exploration and application. The Diocesan Bishop will work with each postulant to identify the best choice of seminary for the individual, depending on personal history, strengths, needs, etc., and for the diocese.

Financial aid is an important consideration. It is virtually impossible to work part-time or summers while in seminary. ***Financial aid is not always available from the diocese. Much depends upon diocesan income and the number of applicants.*** Postulants will need to be active in seeking other sources of help.

Ember Day Letters and Other Communication

Upon being granted postulancy, postulants are added to the clergy list for diocesan mailing so that they can have direct access to news and information concerning the life of the diocese.

From the time of being granted postulancy through ordination to the diaconate, postulants and candidates for Holy Orders are required in mid-September, mid-

December, Late-February and late-May to send “Ember Day” letters to the Diocesan Bishop. These letters will keep him closely informed about their spiritual and seminary progress. Matters of a confidential nature should be identified, in which case they will not be generally circulated.

Seminary and Clinical Pastoral Education

Other than the normal seminary curriculum during the first year, the postulant should make plans to spend the following summer in C.P.E. (Clinical Pastoral Education) – a full-time 10-14 week chaplaincy in an institutional setting. Programs vary, but normally consist of three components:

1. Visitation of patients and staff for a full range of pastoral care.
2. An inter-denominational group of seminarians engaged in the program, meeting daily for seminars and feedback interaction.
3. Individual sessions with the supervising chaplain to examine and evaluate one’s growth.

At the conclusion of C.P.E., a written evaluation of the seminarian by the supervisor is forwarded to the seminary and to the diocese.

Any variation of this requirement must be approved by the bishop and the seminary.

Candidacy for Holy Orders

As postulants begin the Middler year in seminary, they begin the process of applying for the next canonical status – Candidacy for Holy Orders. Postulants must submit several forms provided by the Bishop’s Office, including personal applications, re-endorsements by their priests and vestries, and endorsements from their seminaries. Usually in late December, applicants are jointly interviewed by the Standing Committee and the Commission on Ministry for endorsement to the bishop for his decision and action. Guided by evidence of the postulant’s progress and by the recommendations, the bishop is free to grant, deny or postpone candidacy.

Summer Internship

Having been made candidates, seminarians are expected to spend the summer following their Middler year, in parish internships to work with experienced priests in a full range of parish experiences. As far as possible and practicable, the preference is for this summer experience to be in a congregation within the diocese. The priest will be expected to provide regular supervision, assessment, and a final progress report to the diocese, as in the case of seminary field work evaluations.

Senior Year: Diocesan Examining Chaplains

Seniors meet with the Diocesan Examining Chaplains for independent, diocesan assessments of academic progress and accomplishment. The chaplains will make preliminary judgments based upon the interviews usually late March or April. They then certify their findings to the bishop and to the Standing Committee, with positive certifications required for ordination as deacons.

Ordination to the Diaconate

In the spring of the senior year, several forms must be submitted to the diocese:

1. The Applicant's personal application
2. Endorsement by the priest and vestry of the applicant's congregation
3. The bishop's recommendation
4. Certification from the seminary
5. Certification of the Examining Chaplains

The applicant meets jointly with the Standing Committee and the Commission on Ministry, usually in the third or fourth week of May, for their canonically required advice and consent for the Diocesan Bishop to take order for ordination. The ordinations are usually scheduled during the first two weeks of June.

Clergy Deployment

Though the support given by the diocese to seminarians implies every concern and desire for clergy deployment within the diocese, ***no one can be guaranteed such placement since the number and suitability of openings vary from year to year.***

At some point in the third year of seminary, conversations about possible openings will be held. The preference is for new deacons to serve as assistants to senior, experienced clergy. If such a position is unavailable, particularly mature deacons might be placed in churches on their own. If there are no possible placements, an individual may be released to seek placement in another diocese. ***The Diocesan Bishop makes all appointments concerning deacons, and they do not contract for deployment otherwise.***

Ordination to the Priesthood

Four or five months after ordination to the diaconate, deacons may make application for ordination to the priesthood, usually shortly after six months from the time of their ordination as deacons.

The applicant then meets with the Standing Committee for their canonically required advice and consent for the bishop to take order for ordinations scheduled not less than six months from the time of diaconal ordinations.

CONCERNING ORDINATION TO THE VOCATIONAL DIACONATE

All canonical and procedural steps apply in both cases.

1. The early process of personal and congregation discernment, prior to formal application for postulancy, is intended to be as rigorous as that for persons contemplating seminary and ordination to the priesthood.

Aspirants are expected first to be thoroughly familiar with and to understand this ordained ministry, as described in the diocesan manual titled "*The Vocational Diaconate*" published in December, 1993.

Aspirants must embody, in their lives and in their demonstrated ministries, qualities and accomplishments congruent with the diaconal model of permanent servant hood.

Persuasive cases must be made that ordination to the vocational diaconate will make positive, substantive and critical differences in living out this servant ministry.

2. Ordination to the vocational diaconate can occur no sooner than the expiration of one year of postulancy and of one year of candidacy.
3. Formal training will be conducted on the diocesan level, equivalent in time and curriculum to nine academic quarters (roughly two years and three months). ***No one may begin this training until first accorded postulancy.***
4. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is required for ordination to the Vocational Diaconate. This may be done during the first year of study or the second. The program must be approved by Canon Malone or the bishop.
5. Selection of postulants for training is considered every other year, depending on the number of applicants.