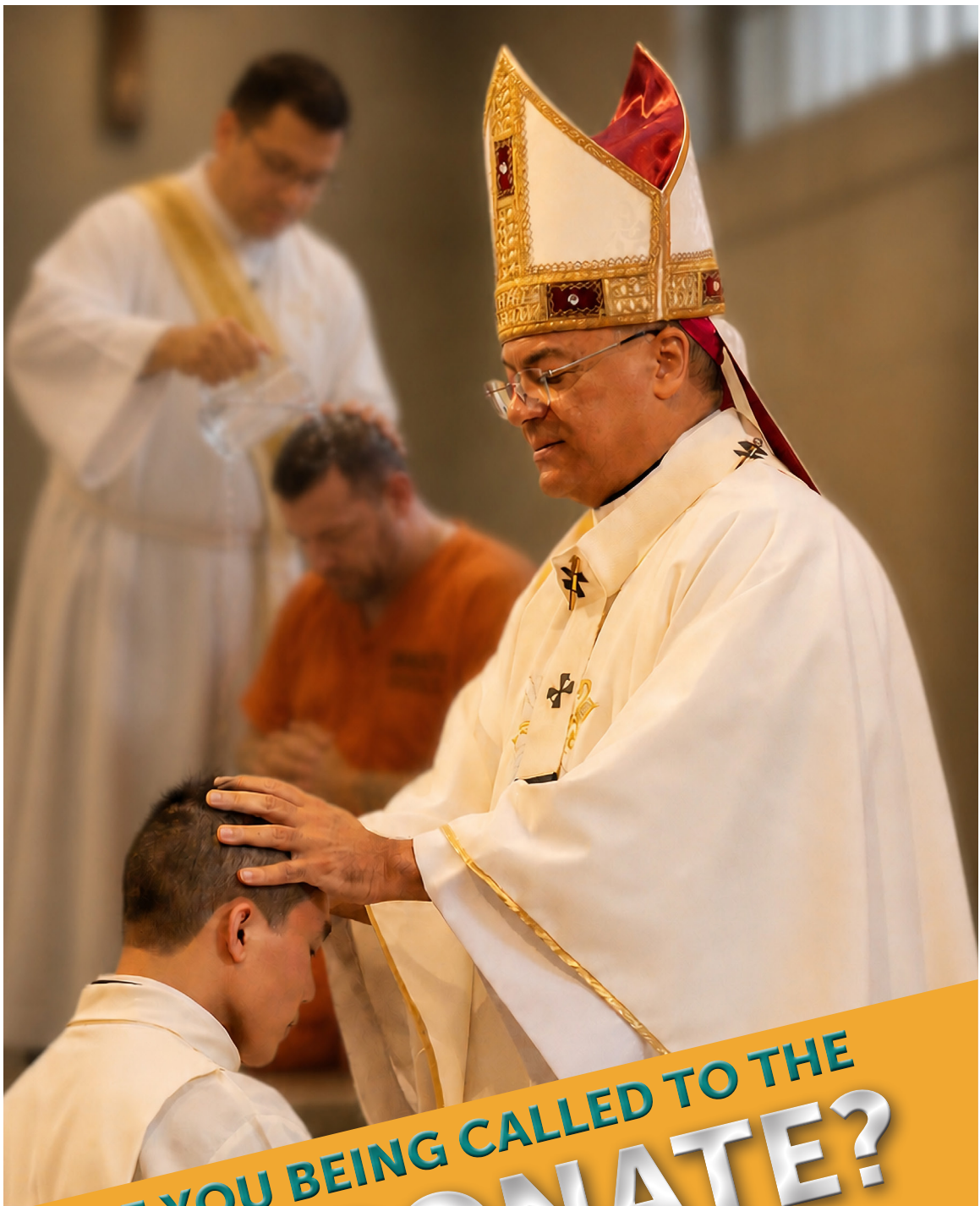
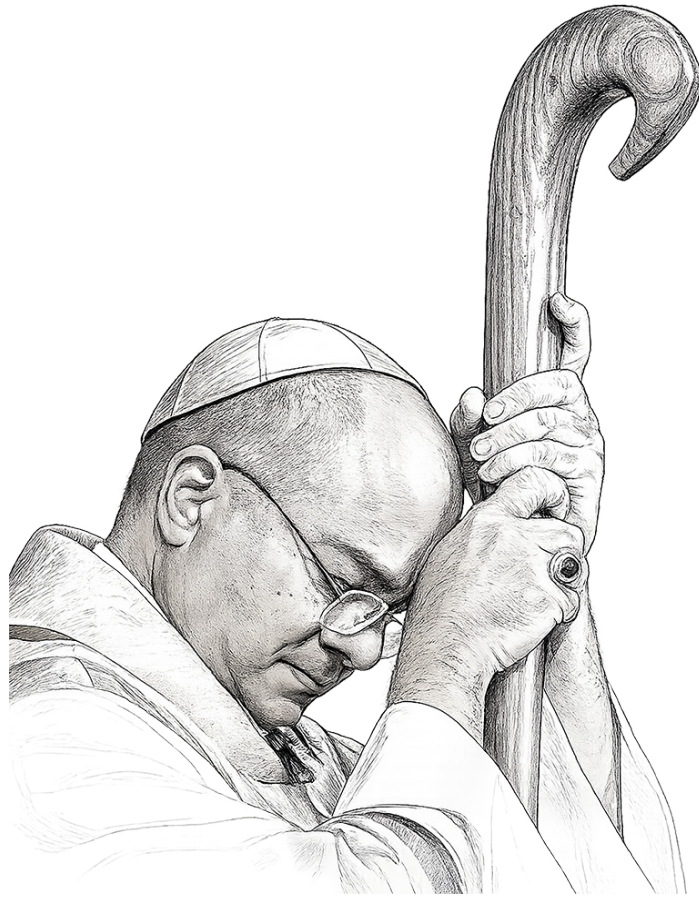




ARE YOU BEING CALLED TO THE
DIACONATE?
GOD MAY BE CALLING YOU TO SERVE HIS PEOPLE





“Ordination to the permanent diaconate,
as well as to the priesthood and the episcopacy,
is not something any of us deserves.
It is not something any of us can claim a right to receive.
Holy orders is a gift from God.
It is recognized and conferred by the Church.
And it is accepted by the men who are called.”

— Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre of Louisville

Dear Brothers in Christ,



Dr. F. DeKarlos
Blackmon, OblSB

Thank you for expressing interest in the Diaconal Ministry, particularly within the Archdiocese of Louisville. We trust that this resource will support you as you discern a diaconal call on your life.

Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre reminds us that “deacons, as a sign of humility and embodying Christ the Servant, are called to pour themselves out in humble service to their wives, families, the pastors, and the faithful they serve.” Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the diaconal call is not away from the world, but rather into it—meaning active involvement in community life, serving those in need, and engaging in the challenges and realities of society.

A deacon holds a distinct ministry and vocation, and a man’s acceptance of this state in life reflects recognition of a purposeful design within his life.



Deacons, as a sign of humility and embodying Christ the Servant, are called to pour themselves out in humble service to their wives, families, the pastors, and the faithful they serve.

For married men serving as husbands and fathers, careful discernment of a diaconal ministry and the corresponding response is particularly significant for the well-being of their families – as the primary vocation is that of husband and father.

This discernment process requires thoughtful reflection, as the responsibilities of diaconal service are integrated with commitment to one’s spouse and children. The decision to respond to a call to ministry must take into account the needs of the family, ensuring that diaconal ministry supports and strengthens the primary vocation within the home. Balancing the duties of husband and father with those of diaconal service is essential, as both vocations are interconnected and influence the spiritual and emotional health of the family.

The deacon, as a symbol of service, impacts the community through his dedication and the way he publicly responds in ministry. He is willing to take risks and transform his priorities to focus on serving others, especially those who share with him the daily challenges and joys faced by the community. As a man of God, the deacon must also be a man of prayer and reflection, allowing his spiritual practices to guide his decisions and help him support others during challenging times. Through prayer and reflection, he is able to discern how best to respond to the needs of those around him, offering both practical help and spiritual comfort.

Please peruse the pertinent information in this resource booklet and reach out to the staff of the Office of Diaconal Ministry, diaconate@archlou.org, for more information. ✠

LIVING ONE VOCATION TOGETHER

For Inquirers, Aspirants, Candidates, and Wives

Formation for the permanent diaconate is a shared vocational journey.

For married men, God's call is lived through two sacraments in harmony.



PRAYER COMES FIRST. Diaconal ministry must flow from intimacy with Christ, nourished by prayer and the Word of God. Whenever possible, prayer is meant to include the wife and family, strengthening both marriage and ministry.

ONE DIAKONIA, ONE MISSION. The deacon serves through a single, integrated diakonia of word, liturgy, and charity—not competing roles, but a living unity. Within this unity, charity is especially characteristic, shaping how service is carried into life.

MARRIAGE IS PART OF THE WITNESS. Family life is not incidental to formation or ministry. Husband and wife together give public witness to the holiness and fidelity of Christian marriage, living both sacraments in balance.

SHARED JOURNEY, DISTINCT ROLES. Wives are true partners in the vocational journey, while the ordained ministry retains its proper identity and independence.

Every married man must ask himself:

How does this serve our marriage, our children, and other families?

...because your family life is not merely adjusted around ministry—it is part of the vocation itself.

Answering God's Call to Serve

What does Diaconal Formation entail?

Our Diaconate Formation program follows the guidelines of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and fully conforms to the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*.

Through careful guidance and accompaniment, the program helps

candidates grow along the path of human and Christian development to which God has called them. A central focus of the formation process is vocational discernment.

Through conferences, spiritual direction, days of recollection, and retreats, we support men as they seek clarity about their call to serve through

the four integrated dimensions of diaconal life: the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral pillars.

Is God Calling You to Serve?

If you are discerning a call to serve Christ and the Church as a permanent deacon, we invite you to prayerfully consider this journey of formation, service, and faith.

A SHARED SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Marriage: The Dynamics of Diaconal Formation



VALUE OF DIACONAL FORMATION.

Diaconal formation enables men and their wives to grow in faith together, strengthening their spiritual lives while keeping marriage and family central. This process integrates discernment and renewal into their shared journey, without diminishing commitments. Both holy orders and matrimony help sanctify their union and guide them in serving Christ.

WIFE'S ROLE IN FORMATION.

Diaconal formation uniquely involves the wife, recognizing that a married man's call to the diaconate is deeply connected to his marriage. The wife's consent is vital, and her active participation helps both spouses understand and prepare for changes ordination may bring. Wives are encouraged to use resources, pursue spiritual growth, and reflect on their role, while formators ensure family life and ministry remain clearly distinct.



Shared discernment strengthens the vocation of marriage, allowing each person to respond more freely and faithfully to God's call.

SHARED SPIRITUAL PRACTICE. When approached thoughtfully, diaconal formation becomes a shared spiritual practice for husband and wife. Together, they engage in honest reflection about the realities of diaconal life, offer mutual encouragement, and clarify how their marriage and family can serve the Church. This shared discernment strengthens, rather than diminishes, the vocation of marriage, allowing each person to respond more freely and faithfully to God's call as it unfolds within their life together.

Discerning the Diaconal Call

Listening for God's Voice while Serving His People

Discerning a call to the diaconate is a journey that requires prayerful reflection, spiritual guidance, and active involvement in a stable faith community. Central to this discernment is a commitment to selfless service, both within parish ministries and through outreach to the broader community. Understanding

God's call unfolds over time through ongoing prayer, faithful participation in the life of the Church, and a willingness to serve others. The insights of family members, clergy, and the faith community can be invaluable in clarifying how one's gifts, talents, and experiences may be used to advance the Church's mission.



PROJECT STEPHEN

Fostering Vocations to the Permanent Diaconate



The Church has always relied on faithful men who are willing to listen for God's call and respond with generous hearts. Throughout Sacred Scripture, God calls ordinary people — Moses, Samuel, David, Mary, Joseph, Peter, and Paul — to extraordinary service. Their response was not rooted in knowing every detail of what lay ahead, but in trusting the Lord and entering into a deeper relationship with Him. The same invitation continues today through the vocation of the permanent diaconate.

What is Project Stephen?

Project Stephen is a discernment program sponsored by the Office of Diaconal Ministry that invites Catholic men between the ages of 30 and 59, along with their wives, to prayerfully explore whether God may be calling them to serve as permanent deacons. Over the course of eight sessions, participants journey with other men and couples who are discerning God's will for their lives. The program provides a welcoming environment to learn about:

- The identity and mission of the deacon
- The deacon's ministries of Word, Liturgy, and Charity
- The history and development of the permanent diaconate
- The process of vocational discernment
- The four pillars of diaconal formation: spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral formation

Most importantly, Project Stephen helps participants deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer, reflection, and openness to the Holy Spirit.

Biblical Foundation

The diaconate traces its origins to Acts 6, where the apostles chose seven men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, to serve the needs of the growing Church. Through prayer and the laying on of hands, these men became the first deacons, enabling the Church's mission to flourish.



The diaconate continues through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, configuring the deacon to Christ the Servant. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, the deacon receives a permanent spiritual character that conforms him to Christ, "who made himself the 'deacon' or servant of all" (CCC 1570).

Why Project Stephen Matters

Project Stephen is important because the diaconal call does not flourish by accident. Men often need encouragement, prayer, and guidance to recognize God's call. Like many deacons who first heard another person say, "You would make a good deacon," participants are given an opportunity to listen more attentively to the voice of the Lord.

Project Stephen emphasizes that discernment is not primarily about choosing a ministry; it is about growing in intimacy with God. Through prayer, silence, and reflection, men learn to recognize how God communicates His presence and calls them to greater service. Project Stephen also recognizes that discernment is a family journey. Because the diaconal call of a married man impacts his spouse and family, wives are strongly encouraged to participate. Together, couples explore whether God is inviting them to embrace the sacrifices and blessings of diaconal service.

Four Pillars of Formation

Project Stephen introduces participants to the comprehensive formation required of future deacons:

Spiritual Formation

Men cultivate a spirituality centered on Christ the Servant through personal prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, contemplation, Lectio Divina, the Rosary, daily Mass when possible, the Liturgy of the Hours, and spiritual direction.

Intellectual Formation

Men receive theological and academic formation in Scripture, philosophy, theology, Church history, canon law, sacraments, liturgy, and preaching so that they may faithfully proclaim and teach the Gospel.

Human Formation

Candidates develop the maturity necessary to be effective ministers. Particular attention is given to strengthening marriages, family life, character, leadership, and self-awareness.

Pastoral Formation

Candidates gain practical experience serving the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the homeless, and parish communities while learning the pastoral responsibilities of a deacon.

A First Step Toward Discernment

While attendance at Project Stephen is not required to apply for diaconal formation, it is strongly encouraged because it provides an invaluable foundation for discernment. It allows men to explore the vocation in a prayerful and informed way before making any commitment to formal formation. For some, Project Stephen may confirm God's call to pursue the diaconate. For others, it may lead to a deeper appreciation of their baptismal vocation and service within the Church. Either way, participants are invited into a richer relationship with Christ and a greater understanding of how God may be calling them to serve. Project Stephen helps ensure that the Church continues to foster and nurture vocations to the diaconate so that faithful men may answer God's call and continue the apostolic ministry of service in Word, Liturgy, and Charity for generations to come.

Initial Eligibility Criteria

An applicant for diaconal formation must be:

- A male in full communion with the Catholic Church
- A legal resident and canonical domicile in the archdiocese
- Between the ages of 35 and 65 at ordination
- In adequate physical and psychological health
- In a canonically valid marriage for a minimum of five years with a stable family life; if single, in a stable, settled life
- Committed to upholding a commitment to celibacy if single (or widowed)
- Active in his parish and ministry for at least 5 years
- An active participant in parish life and ministry for a reasonable number of years
- Able to obtain a written recommendation from the proper pastor
- Able to learn and meet academic standards for a Certificate in Theology, with a minimum of a high school diploma or GED

An Invitation to Discern the Diaconate

The Path of Prayer, Service, and Discernment



If you know a Catholic man between the ages of 30 and 59 who has ever wondered whether God might be calling him to serve as a deacon, Project Stephen provides the perfect opportunity to listen, learn, and discern. Through prayer, fellowship, and formation, participants discover that the heart of the diaconate is not simply performing a ministry, but becoming

more fully conformed to Jesus Christ, who came "not to be served but to serve" (cf. Mark 10:45).

Project Stephen helps ensure that the Church continues to foster and nurture vocations to the diaconate so that faithful men may answer God's call and continue the apostolic ministry of service in Word, Liturgy, and Charity for generations to come.



Get In Touch With Us



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Archdiocese of Louisville

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O God, we, the Deacons
of your Church,
give you thanks
for entrusting us
to serve your people
as did Jesus, your Son,
who came not to be Served
but to Serve, and
to give his Life as a
ransom for many. Amen.