



Diocese of Davenport

# Handbook for Mentors

Deacon Formation Program

Agnoli, Deacon Frank  
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## Welcome

Our thanks to you (and your wife) for your willingness to serve as a mentor in our Deacon Formation Program. As the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, notes, you are an integral part of helping to form this class of deacons for our diocese. This small handbook is intended to be a help to you in exercising this most important ministry. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please feel free to contact the Deacon Formation office.

## Responsibilities

In the Diocese of Davenport, Mentoring is a process by which the deacon mentor and spouse, observe, reflect, suggest, encourage and challenge the aspirant (or candidate) and wife in their discernment. The mentor couple actively listens to the events in the aspirant or candidate's and wife's life, challenges their theological assumptions, encourages their prayer life and family life, and encourages their growth as a minister of justice and love in their family, workplace, and parish community. The mentor couple also provides an opportunity to discuss freely and frankly difficulties in ministry and the ups and downs of formation. As the *Directory* notes:

The community of deacons can be a "precious support in the discernment of a vocation, in human growth, in the initiation to the spiritual life, in theological study and pastoral experience." Scheduled opportunities for conversation and shared pastoral experiences between a candidate and deacon, as well as meetings between the wife of a candidate and the wife of a deacon, can mutually sustain their enthusiasm and realism about the diaconate. Some exemplary deacons in addition to priests should be appointed by the diocesan bishop to serve as mentors to individual candidates or a small group of candidates. (#210)

The process and guidelines above are described for married candidates. The same process and guidelines apply for unmarried candidates. The *Directory* gives this description of the mentor's responsibilities:

The mentor is charged with following the formation of those committed to his care, offering support and encouragement. Depending upon the size of the formation community, a mentor will be responsible for one aspirant or candidate, or he may be invited to minister to a small group of aspirants or candidates. Mentors receive their orientation and supervision from the director of formation. They also help the director for pastoral formation facilitate theological reflection among those aspirants or candidates assigned to them. Mentors are members of the formation team and are invited "to collaborate with the director of formation in the programming of the different formational activities and in the preparation of the judgment of suitability." (#280)

## *Assignment*

Mentors are paired with aspirants at the beginning of the formation process. Ideally, they would remain paired for the entire five years of formation. However, that is not always possible. At any time, a mentor or aspirant/candidate may request to be reassigned.

### *Meeting*

Mentors (and their wives) and aspirant/candidate couples are to meet a minimum of three times a semester, though monthly meetings are encouraged. Meetings are expected to be 1-2 hrs in length, and should be casual, but not just casual social conversation. There should be a focus on the aspirant's or candidate's formation experience for discussion and reflection. The sessions are not to be for mutual commiseration. The mentor couple is not to be a "counselor" or "spiritual director". The role is that of a fellow traveler, and a provider of suggestions for making the formation journey a more meaningful experience. Praying together, especially the Liturgy of the Hours, is an important part of the mentoring relationship.

Mentors are encouraged to be as flexible as possible when it comes to scheduling the times and locations of these meetings. Formation can be demanding, and every accommodation to the aspirant's or candidate's schedule needs to be made. While it may be appropriate to meet at a restaurant from time to time, most meeting ought to take place in a private and quiet location that is conducive to conversation and prayer.

### *Ministry*

The mentor is a key participant in the pastoral formation of future deacons. "Exemplary deacons, approved by the bishop, should serve as mentors inviting the aspirant to accompany, observe, co-minister, and reflect upon the specific diaconal ministries experienced" (*Directory*, #197). Therefore, aspirants and candidates are encouraged to "shadow" their mentor as he ministers in the parish, participates in the liturgical celebrations of the Church and as he prepares himself and others for these different liturgical celebrations. Mentors are encouraged to invite aspirants and candidates along on their pastoral visits and other ministerial activities. Especially when visiting the homebound, courtesy would demand that those being visited would be informed of the presence of the aspirant or candidate ahead of time.

### *Theological Reflection*

As noted above, one of the tasks of the mentor is to help the aspirant/candidate integrate his theological formation and pastoral experiences. To that end, he should engage the aspirant or candidate in reflecting theologically on his pastoral experiences. Resources to assist with this aspect of mentoring are listed below.

### *Evaluation/Recommendation*

As noted above, mentors are an important voice in the assessment of the aspirant or candidate for continuing formation and ultimately for ordination. Therefore, each year, mentors are asked to submit their recommendation, in writing, to the Director of Formation. The form will be given to the mentor by the aspirant or candidate, and should be returned directly to the Director of Formation. A copy of the form is reproduced below (not for actual use); forms for use are available on our website. The form is due back by April 15 to:

Director of Deacon Formation  
Diocese of Davenport  
780 West Central Park Avenue  
Davenport, IA 52804

This aspect of mentoring should not be taken lightly, as these paragraphs from the *Directory* make clear:

It is essential, therefore, that those who are responsible for selection and initial formation, including pastoral placement, discern whether the participant has integrated the various dimensions in formation that are needed for an effective diaconal ministry. Further, consultation with the participant's pastor, the faculty, other pastoral assignment supervisors, **mentors**, those whom the participant serves, and, if married, his wife is crucial to the discernment process. The surest indicator, however, is the participant's previous and present effectiveness in Church service. (#162)

Interviews should be scheduled regularly with the candidates and their families, their pastors and pastoral supervisors, members of the faculty, and **mentors**. The director of formation and those who collaborate with him should gather at regularly scheduled times to stay informed about a candidate's progress. They should address concerns and become collectively aware of their common collaborative role in assisting, counseling, and assessing the candidate. ***This responsibility should be regarded as their most important task.*** Due care must be taken, however, to preserve the confidentiality of spiritual direction in these proceedings. (#235)

Rather than personal interviews, we rely on your written evaluations. If at any time you feel that a face-to-face meeting is necessary with the Director of Formation, that will be arranged.

Your comments are not directly shared with the aspirant or candidate. Rather, all of the individual's evaluations are collected and a summary written. Any concerns raised by the various evaluators are brought to the attention of the aspirant or candidate without the specific source(s) of the concerns being identified.

True discernment requires radical honesty by all involved. Just as mentors are asked to make us aware of any areas of concern, we, too, will inform the mentor if there are any specific concerns on our part that he can assist us in addressing. If there are areas of formation that are in need of being addressed, mentors are encouraged to make those observations known to the Director of Formation as well.

### Resources

*National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

The Deacon Formation Program has produced a handbook used to teach Theological Reflection to those in formation. A copy is available from the Director.

Garrido, Ann M. *A Concise Guide to Supervising a Ministry Student*. The Concise Guide Series, ed. Kevin McKenna. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008.

Killen, Patricia O'Connell and John deBeer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York: Crossroads, 1994.

Whitehead, James D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995.

**Mentor Recommendation Form**

*Instructions:*

*Please give this to your mentor and ask him to fill it out and return it to the Director of Formation by April 15.*

**Name of Aspirant/Candidate:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Mentor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number of meetings over the past year:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Based on my knowledge of the aspirant and his wife (if applicable) my recommendation regarding [admission to the X year of Aspirancy/Candidacy; Ordination to the Diaconate] is as follows:**

**Recommend**       **Recommend with Reservations**       **Not Recommended**

**Reasons for the above choice:**

**Suggestions you might have for this aspirant:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**