



Diocese of Davenport

Handbook for Spiritual Directors

Deacon Formation Program

Agnoli, Deacon Frank
7/1/2022

Welcome

Our thanks to you for your willingness to serve as a spiritual director in our Deacon Formation Program. As the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*, 2nd 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.

The staff person responsible for working with spiritual directors is called the Director of Spiritual Formation. The *Directory* describes his role thus:

The director of spiritual formation assists the director of formation by coordinating the entire spiritual formation program, giving it unity and direction. He provides for the individual spiritual direction of each aspirant and candidate. He also may serve as a spiritual director for an aspirant and/or candidate. He provides an orientation to the spiritual dimension in aspirant and candidate formation to other spiritual directors, who have been chosen by the aspirants or candidates with the approval of the bishop. The director of spiritual formation provides for the liturgical life and prayer of the aspirant and candidate communities, making appropriate provision for the celebration of the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and opportunities to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance in formation gatherings. He is also responsible for retreats and days of recollection, assuring that they are well planned and carefully executed. The director of spiritual formation, who must be a priest, is nominated by the director of formation and is approved and appointed by the diocesan bishop. (#286)

Any questions or concerns regarding spiritual direction should be addressed with him.

Responsibilities

In the Diocese of Davenport, those in formation for the diaconate are required to enter into spiritual direction. According to the *Directory*:

The role of the spiritual director, who must always be a priest, is critical to the initial formation process, particularly in assisting the participant to discern and affirm the signs of his vocation. An individual's spiritual director may be chosen directly by the participant, with the approval of the diocesan bishop, or from a list of spiritual directors similarly approved. The distinction between internal and external forums must always be clearly maintained. (#125)

Spiritual direction continues through both aspirancy and candidacy, with direction in each phase of formation having its own particular focus. As noted in the *Directory*, during aspirancy, the

...spiritual director is critical to the formation process. Therefore, this priest, who is to be approved by the diocesan bishop, must be well trained and knowledgeable about the diaconate. The spiritual director accompanies, supports, and challenges the aspirant in his ongoing conversion. The spiritual director assists the aspirant in his relationship with

God and promotes his understanding that it is Christ who calls, the Church that affirms his diaconal vocation, and the diocesan bishop who responds to that affirmation by the imposition of hands. (#202)

The *Directory* offers this guidance for spiritual direction during candidacy:

One of the primary objectives of the spiritual dimension of the candidate stage of formation is “to assist the candidate in achieving a spiritual integration” of his life, family, work, and apostolic service.... Throughout his formation, the candidate is “to secure the assistance of a . . . [spiritual director], to cultivate regular patterns of prayer and sacramental participation, and . . . to reflect spiritually on [his] ministry.” (#225)

Specific Topics

In addition, the *Directory* specifically mentions that the issues of obedience and celibacy should be explored during spiritual direction:

Each person in formation is called to a mature relationship with those in authority, a relationship that includes a spirit of trust, mutual respect, and obedience. Accountability in formation is an invitation to a deeper conversion. A spirit of service to others is finally an imitation of Christ himself, who came not to do his own will but the will of his Father (Jn 5:30). Formation personnel, especially the spiritual director, should give instructions on the meaning of authentic obedience and help each participant to appreciate and practice it in his life. (#124)

Further, throughout the formation process, it is expedient that the candidate’s spiritual director and those responsible for his formation ascertain the candidate’s understanding, willingness, and capacity to accept the Church’s discipline regarding perpetual celibacy not merely among those who are not married, but also among married men who will be required to embrace this ecclesiastical discipline in widowhood or divorce (even with a subsequent declaration of nullity). Dispensations from the requirement of celibacy cannot be presumed. (#225)

Assignment

Spiritual director assignments are coordinated by the Director of Spiritual Formation. Ideally, assignments would be maintained for the entire five years of formation. However, that is not always possible. At any time, a spiritual director or aspirant/candidate may request to be reassigned.

Meeting

It is expected that spiritual direction would take place at least monthly throughout formation, more frequently if necessary.

Certification

Each year, the spiritual director is asked to attest to the aspirant's or candidate's attendance for spiritual direction. The form to be completed will be given to the spiritual director by the one in formation to be completed and mailed directly to the Director of Deacon Formation by April 15 of each year at:

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

The form is also available on-line on the deacon formation website; a copy is included at the end of this document.

While the Director of Formation and/or the Director of Spiritual Formation will communicate any concerns regarding the aspirant or candidate to the spiritual director (see below), so the matters may be discussed as part of ongoing discernment, the conversation between the spiritual director and the aspirant or candidate is confidential. The content of any conversation between the spiritual director and aspirant will not be reported from the spiritual director back to the formation team.

Communication from the Deacon Formation Program

As noted above, while spiritual directors are members of the formation team, “[d]ue care must be taken, however, to preserve the confidentiality of spiritual direction...” (#235).

At the end of each year, the Director of Formation completes a report that is presented to the Bishop, providing “a synthesis of the candidate’s achievements and limitations, particularly in reference to his human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral readiness for continuation in the formation process and, ultimately, for nomination to ordination” (#236). This report will “be made available to the candidate’s spiritual director, whose ‘task is that of discerning the workings of the Spirit in the soul of those called and, at that same time, of accompanying and supporting their ongoing conversion’” (#237). While the issues raised in the report should be brought to spiritual direction, the source(s) of the comments or concerns included in the report **must be kept confidential** and not shared with the aspirant or candidate.

A synopsis of the strengths and concerns identified through the yearly evaluation process will also be communicated directly to the aspirant/candidate and to his pastor by the Director of Formation. The content used to prepare the report is also reviewed by the committee on admission (#237).

Resource:

National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States, 2nd edition.

Spiritual Direction Statement

Name of Aspirant/Candidate: _____

Name of Director: _____

Dear Reverend Father:

Your assistance in helping to form men for diaconal ministry in our diocese is deeply appreciated. Without violating the confidentiality of spiritual direction, would you please complete this form and return it to the Director of Deacon Formation by April 15? Thank you very much.

By my signature, I attest that over the past year I have met with the above-named aspirant/candidate on a regular basis and with sufficient frequency to meet his needs and spiritual growth. The Deacon Formation Program presumes that "sufficient frequency" would be about once per month.

Signature: _____

Please return to:

Director of Deacon Formation
Diocese of Davenport
780 W. Central Park Avenue
Davenport, IA 52804-1901