

Thinking of the Diaconate

... a check-list for consideration. We rely heavily on the support of parish priests in assessing people who seek the Diaconate. Please be very honest in your recommendation: remember that we do not know your parishioner. You may find some of the headings below helpful.

1. Commitment and Realism The Course is demanding and takes a lot of determination. Ten hours of personal study per week is the minimum asked; this may be thought of as two hours per day in the working week. (Aspiring students might be asked to identify in advance which two hours they would like to devote, Monday to Friday!)

On the last Saturday of every month except August there is a full day of study at a central location. This is indispensable, as it represents the only formal input for the very technical material in Theology, Biblical Studies, Liturgy, Church History, and Canon Law which the Church requires them to study.

Each month the student will be asked to produce one or two pieces of written work; assistance will be offered in the form of a local priest who will act as study supervisor; we ask students to meet this supervisor as often as possible, so that difficulties may be ironed out as quickly as possible.

From time to time there will be days of spiritual input, and each student will be entrusted to the care of a spiritual director, whose impression of the student's seriousness and spiritual integrity will be sought (respecting always the seal of confidentiality)..

2. Freedom Given these demands, is the student free enough of other responsibilities to take on this Course? We would like younger students: but the demands of young children, for instance, can be extreme on a family man, and it is not fair to load all of them onto his wife for three years. If he has a very onerous job, with long hours of travelling, this is also a source of doubt. (*Oddly enough, some shift workers have found it easier than others to find time, because their hours sometimes give them space when others are asleep!*)

3. Mindset We don't demand brilliance of intellect (although it would help!), but the Course is hardly going to be possible for anyone who has no capacity or taste for mental operations and intellectual work. Dealing with big concepts and arcane subjects like Scripture study is fascinating for some, and a closed book for others. Some taste for systematic thinking, and an ability in self-expression are vital necessities.

4. Religious Understanding The ability of a student to assume the rôle of a Deacon depends on an understanding of the Church which respects the sacramental system and Holy Orders. Can he operate within the Liturgy? How experienced is he in the dimension of pastoral work? Is he a man of prayer who could lead others to pray? Is there flexibility in his religious outlook, or is he in any sense rigid and closed in his thinking?

5. In The Eyes Of Others How is he perceived by other parishioners in ordinary human terms? Is he a well-known figure in the community? Is he widely acceptable and friendly? Can he work with others, can he lead? Can he communicate at many levels?

6. Psychology Is he stable and balanced in temper? Is he experienced in meeting people who are odd or unusual? He may have to work with difficult or uncongenial people (some of them ordained) at various points. Will he be elastic and commonsensical? Will he willingly accept formation as a student, including a degree of criticism and challenge?

7. Morality It is important that he be not suffering from unbearable difficulties in living a Christian life that will edify people. Everyone struggles with some part of their personality or situation. But it is a cruelty to ask a man to accept leadership in a Christian community if his own life notoriously cannot bear the scrutiny of others.