

THE STEPS TO PRIESTHOOD

 Aspirant	A man makes known to the bishop his awareness of a calling to the priesthood. An aspirant enters college during this stage if he does not have a baccalaureate degree or if his college degree did not include philosophy coursework. Aspirants undergo background checks and psychological testing and are assigned a spiritual director. This step may take from one to four years.
 Candidate	Once approved, the successful aspirant then is given the Rite of Candidacy, and embarks upon graduate theological studies at a seminary chosen by the bishop. (The Seminarian Endowment of the Catholic Foundation of Eastern Montana assists the diocese in funding these studies.)
 Lector	After the second year of seminary, the successful candidate is then installed as a Lector. This ministry is more than simply reading the scriptures at Mass. The Lector promises to be a servant of the Living Word of God.
 Acolyte	After the third year of seminary, the ministry of Acolyte is conferred upon the priestly candidate. Acolytes assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, including the distribution of communion as an ordinary. (In many parishes, lay persons serve as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. An acolyte, deacon or priest is the ordinary minister of Holy Communion.)
 Deacon	After the third year of theological studies, the candidate applies for ordination to the transitional diaconate. This includes the promise of celibacy, a promise of obedience to the bishop of the diocese, and a third promise to pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily. A deacon can confer the sacrament of baptism and witness marriages, and can read the Gospel and deliver the homily within the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.
 Priest	Generally, after the completion of the seminary degree, the deacon is ordained a priest and may do post-graduate studies, such as canon law, theology, scripture, or other area needed by the diocese. Otherwise, he is assigned to a parish where there is an experienced pastor to assist him.