



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF WORCESTER

RESPONDING JOYFULLY TO CHRIST'S CALL TO BECOME PEOPLE OF GOD



**SAINT STEPHEN
DEACON & MARTYR**

**HANDBOOK FOR DEACON MENTORS
JANUARY 2017**

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Bishop of Worcester**

Date

Purpose of this Handbook for Deacon Mentors

The purpose of this handbook is to provide Deacon mentors with a general guide to successful mentoring. This handbook is intended to help you through the mentoring process; what it means to be a mentor, the roles and responsibilities during your tutelage, and the different styles that you can adopt to meet the unique demands of a mentoring relationship.

This document is provided as a resource to those Deacons who have graciously agreed to serve as a mentor to a candidate for the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Worcester. It is intended to acquaint them with information and skills that will help them effectively guide and support the candidates whom they will be assisting.

Why Mentoring?

Mentoring has been used successfully in business, the sports world and even with young people. Mentoring has a valid place in Diaconate Formation Programs. It is our belief that Mentoring is a win – win situation for both the Mentor and the Candidate. It is a situation where the Mentor can learn more about himself, his values and his ministry, and candidates can also learn how to navigate the questions and problems they will face during formation and beyond. Mentoring will hopefully produce candidates who are fully formed at the time of their Ordination. Over time, mentoring should improve the selection process of new candidates by identifying problem areas encountered during formation.

Who is Eligible to Mentor?

To qualify as a deacon mentor, the deacon must:

- Not be a member of the Diaconate staff
- Be ordained at least three years
- Be able to commit to a minimum of three years as a mentor
- Be in active ministry and in good standing with the Diocese
- As a prerequisite, read and be familiar with certain sections of the National Directory, as indicated by the Diaconate Staff.

Deacon candidates will be mentored for the full period of formation plus at least one year after ordination.

Introduction – What is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a powerful personal development and empowerment process. It is a highly effective way of helping people to progress in their skills, relationships and vocations. When it is most effective, it is viewed as a partnership between two people (mentor and candidate) working and exploring together the meaning of a diaconal vocation. Above all, mentoring is a helpful and growing relationship which is founded upon mutual trust and respect.

A mentor is a guide who can help a candidate find the right direction and who can help him develop solutions to issues, problems and human interactions. Mentors rely upon having

had similar experiences to gain an empathy with the candidate and an understanding of their issues. Mentoring provides the candidate with an opportunity to actively engage with someone possessing greater experience – someone who has faced many of the very same challenges, opportunities and interactions that the candidate is facing now and will face in the future.

A mentor should ask questions probing the candidate's "call" to ministry, as well as determine if there are any potential problems with the candidate's formation. Mentors are called to challenge candidates when appropriate.

Mentoring allows the candidate to explore new ideas in confidence. It is a chance for the candidate to look more closely at himself, his issues, his opportunities, what he wants in life and who God may be calling him to be.

The primary objective of mentoring is to assist in developing the candidate through discernment, formation, and beyond.

Mentoring in Diaconate Formation

Mentoring is a Ministry of Service

The deacon mentor must assume a role fully characteristic of his vocation as a deacon: he must be a servant. Mentoring from the mentor's perspective is *not about him at all*, it must be entirely directed toward and for the candidate. In a very real way, the deacon mentor is truly at the service of the candidate; interacting, sharing, coaching and praying for and with the man in ways that genuinely meet the developmental needs of the candidate, rather than the needs of the mentor. It is safe to state that mentoring in many ways mimics the diaconal vocation since it must always be "other" directed as opposed to self directed.

It is common when providing service to others, that the person providing the service is challenged and changed as well. Deacons who serve as deacon mentors will most likely find this to be quite true. Mentors will find themselves challenged if they discover that in some areas, their candidates may have greater knowledge than they perhaps do. This comes about as a result of the candidate being exposed to experiences, texts, courses and assignments that the deacon mentor may not have had in his own formation. The underlying challenge to the deacon mentor is that he too must be willing to grow within the mentoring relationship.

The deacon mentor may discover that he needs to increase his own reading and study so that he can really assist the candidate. While this won't necessarily mean that the deacon mentor has to "go back to class", he might find the needs of his candidate help define his own reading selections and continuing education needs.

In addition, in order to provide effective and meaningful service to the candidate under his tutelage, the deacon mentor must have or develop the ability to listen *effectively*. Effective listening extends beyond the confines of simple conversation and involves looking beneath the words that are heard to understand meaning, emotions and feelings.

It is essential to effective listening to refrain from expressing judgment in terms of words, tone, and attitude. The mentor needs to accept the candidate as a person with certain ways of seeing things and with certain feelings about situations, no matter how different those ideas and feelings may be from his own.

It is likewise important to trust the candidate's capacity to handle situations and work through problems. In this regard, praise can be as much a problematic judgment as is criticism. Excess praise can in fact increase stress, undermine motivation, and decrease initiative to try new things. This does not mean:

- That the mentor refrains from providing appropriate, positive comments;
- That the mentor refrains from sharing his own experiences and reactions to the joys and challenges of diaconal ministry, or
- That the mentor refrains from giving positive reinforcement to the candidate's successes.

It does mean, however, that the best support is for the candidate to have his questions, ideas and feelings heard in a supportive manner. If the deacon mentor doesn't know the answer to a question he should acknowledge that and tell the candidate that he will get the answer promptly.

By adopting an attitude of service and servant leadership the deacon mentor can make significant contributions to the formation of the candidate. In effect, the deacon mentor should have at the forefront of his mind, that *Mentoring is Ministry*.

The Mentoring Relationship Benefits Both Parties

During his time in formation, the candidate is being educated, trained and formed, but the reality is that the candidate does not necessarily enter the process with a vast amount of liturgical, ministerial or public experience. In many professions, the challenges of the job increase as experience increases. Likewise, in many professions, the beginner assumes responsibility gradually after gaining experience rather than all at once. However, just the reverse is true in diaconal ministry. The new deacon assumes full responsibility (i.e. his faculties) from day one, and challenges are often greatest – or at least seem to be, in one's first few years.

These phenomena make mentoring an invaluable gift to the candidate. Because a deacon mentor is so important in helping a candidate successfully understand and to some degree confront ministerial challenges during his formation, the *National Directory* strongly recommends working with a mentor.

Without question, a deacon mentor is positioned to provide a service to the candidate that will impact his formation and in most cases will impact the way that he views, conducts and enjoys his ministry after ordination. It almost goes without saying that the candidate derives tremendous benefit from the relationship.

Ultimately, the goal of mentoring is multi-faceted. One clear objective is for the candidate to have an experienced deacon to assist him in his formation journey; another is to provide guidance in both the practical and subtle aspects of diaconal ministry; and a third is for the mentor to gain enough knowledge of the candidate to provide assistance to the Diaconate Staff in assessing the candidate's readiness for ordination.

Deacon Mentor Role and Responsibilities

Reporting versus Confidentiality in the Relationship

It is essential to the mentoring relationship that the candidate understands that the mentor's role is to guide and support the candidate in his life as well as his formation. To be effective in guiding and supporting the candidate, the deacon mentor will need to appreciate and respect the viewpoints of the candidate, recognize the candidate's strengths, and help the candidate identify his own formation needs.

In this regard, it is essential to provide a *safe and confidential* climate in the relationship so that the candidate will be able to express needs, concerns, and deficiencies openly with his mentor. It is here where the deacon mentor must exercise a great deal of balance. The deacon mentor is obligated to provide input into the candidate's evaluation process; a process that results in recommendations that are submitted to the Diaconate Staff for review when the candidate is being considered for admission to candidacy, institution of reader, institution of acolyte and ordination to the diaconate.

On the other hand, deacon mentors must respect the candidate's privacy and ensure that the specifics of their conversations will be held in the strictest of confidence. The candidate should come to understand, with his deacon mentor's assistance, his ability to truly examine himself, consider his strengths and weaknesses, to see himself for who he is, and identify areas for further development opportunities. A candidate who is capable of self-reflection, critique and improvement is a candidate that is capable of being formed and moving on in formation.

Ministerial Experiences

During his time in formation the candidate may be engaged in limited ministry and, as part of his formation, will have practicum classes that expose him to liturgical and ministerial functions that are performed by deacons. ***The deacon mentor may include the candidate in the deacon's ministry as is possible given the schedules of both.***

The pairing of deacon mentor and candidate creates a safe and comfortable environment for the candidate to have real "on the job" experiences, such as assisting at baptismal preparation and visiting the sick. Many experiences may take place at the parish where the candidate is assigned as an intern and, when possible, the mentor could be present to observe. Please note that if the mentor has more opportunities at his parish for on-the-job experiences, he may freely invite the candidate to participate in some form there. By getting involved in hands-on ministries, the candidate will gain knowledge, experience and confidence that will benefit him when he begins his ministry after ordination.

Following each "ministerial experience" the candidate and deacon mentor should discuss what the candidate has just observed, allowing adequate time for questions to be asked. When the candidate assists the deacon mentor, the deacon mentor should critique the candidate's performance; providing praise, suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

The deacon mentor should take care to ensure the candidate observes (or participates to the degree permitted) in liturgy, proclaiming, works of charity and teaching. As the mentoring relationship develops the candidate should take a more active role in the ministries but only under the close supervision of the deacon mentor.

It should also be stated that the candidate may not be asked to perform any tasks that are reserved to ordained clergy. That said, to the degree that a ministerial function may be performed by a layperson, the deacon mentor should encourage the candidate's full and active participation.

Inclusion of Candidate Wives

If the candidate is married, it would be beneficial to include the candidate's wife in the mentoring process. Her support is vital to the formation of the candidate and to his success as a Deacon. She should be aware of the demands of formation and Diaconal Ministry.

Candidate Role and Responsibilities

The candidate is the person primarily responsible for his formation. The deacon mentor provides the candidate with valuable guidance, advice and help to enable him to reflect on, and learn from, experiences, but it is up to the candidate to take initiative, demonstrate his capabilities, ask questions and engage in experiential opportunities.

Evaluating the Mentor Relationship

Due to the impact that a good mentoring relationship can have on the candidate's formation, it is crucial that both deacon mentor and candidate reflect on their relationship and attempt to determine "if it is working." The mentor relationship needs to be one that is enjoyable, productive, and comfortable for both parties. If it is not, then a new mentor should be located for the candidate in order that he may derive the intended benefits from the mentoring program.

By reflecting on their relationship the candidate and deacon mentor can assess its health. Some of the signs that the deacon mentor and candidate should look for in a healthy and growing mentor relationship are:

- The relationship is Christ centered and discussions begin and end in prayer;
- Both feel comfortable and at ease with the other;
- Neither man takes himself too seriously in the relationship;
- The discussions cover a range of emotions from seriousness to humor;
- Both grow to a level of trust in which just about anything can be discussed;
- The tone and mood of the meetings is positive;
- The men can disagree on things but not be disagreeable;
- Both men are happy to meet more frequently and do not look at their discussions and ministerial activities together as fulfilling a requirement;

When these characteristics are found, the mentor relationship will most likely flourish and grow, providing the candidate with the value and help mentoring can produce.

Reporting Requirements and Forms

Deacon mentors must provide clear and accurate assessment regarding his candidates to the Diaconate Staff.

On a quarterly basis, the Diaconate Staff will provide each deacon mentor with a *Candidate Evaluation Form* to complete along with a reasonable deadline for completing and returning the form to the Office of the Permanent Diaconate.

The completed *Candidate Evaluation Forms* are reviewed upon receipt and placed in the candidate's permanent file at the Chancery offices. This form will be one of several tools utilized to evaluate the candidate's readiness to move forward in the formation process.

Conclusion and Support

As previously stated, as a deacon mentor you will be making a powerful contribution to the formation of men to the permanent diaconate and the work you do with your candidate will bear fruit during his formation and well into his ministry as a deacon. Being a friend and guide to your candidate is only the beginning of what you will need to do to assist him.

Help is always available to you as you mentor your candidate. If the Office of the Diaconate can be of any assistance to you, in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us. You are serving your candidate and in doing so providing a service to the Bishop and the people of the Diocese of Worcester. If we can provide you with support or help, we are just a phone call away.

5. Please provide any other information that you would like to share regarding the candidate's formation.

Signature_____

Date_____

Please return this evaluation form to:

Office of the Permanent Diaconate
49 Elm Street
Worcester, MA 01609