

Guidelines for Continuing Formation for Permanent Deacons

Diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts



1. **INTRODUCTION**

As Deacons of the diocese of Fall River, we recognize the need for continuing intellectual, personal, emotional and spiritual development. We also understand that no formation program can possibly teach or anticipate the needs of the deacon that might arise in an ever-changing world. However, we do know that growth is an integral part of our ministry, needed to develop a deeper understanding of self as well as the world around us.

Continuing formation requires daily prayer, spiritual direction and training courses to increase understanding of the Catholic faith and theology. With this in mind, the Fall River Diocese has established these guidelines for the ongoing formation of Permanent Deacons.

2. **OBJECTIVES**

Deacon continuing formation is essential for the spiritual growth and effectiveness of the permanent deacon. It enhances ministerial competency and aids in personal development. Continuing formation prevents stagnation and improves the deacon's ability to serve bishops, priests, one another and faithful laity on their journeys of faith, i.e., to know and follow Christ.

Specific objectives of the continuing formation program are:

- A. To guide spiritual formation and growth
- B. To provide for updating and increasing knowledge and experience.
- C. To improve ministerial skills and competence.
- D. To promote forums for discussion and communication.
- E. To provide opportunities for the integration of spiritual, academic and pastoral components of ministry.

3. **POLICY**

To accomplish the aforementioned objectives, it is the policy of the Diocese of Fall River that all permanent deacons given faculties to minister within the Diocese must complete a minimum of thirty (30) hours of continuing formation each year. Only the Director of the Permanent Diaconate can give waiver for these requirements.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Director of the Permanent Diaconate together with the Assistant Director for Continuing Formation:
1. Establishes policy, provides guidance, and maintains supervision over the continuing education of permanent deacons.
 2. Approves changes to these guidelines.
 3. Approves alternate methods of obtaining continuing education credits
 4. Approves waivers of continuing education requirements.
 5. Maintains continuing education records for each deacon.
 6. Counsels deacons who fail to meet the requirements of this policy and, if appropriate, recommends action to the Bishop.
 7. Develops and promotes educational opportunities: e.g., workshops, Days of Recollection, lectures, retreats, etc.
- B. Permanent Deacon:
1. Establishes his personal program to meet the goals prescribed for continuing education.
 2. Provides annual documentation to the Office of the Permanent Diaconate Program.
 3. Provides the Director of the Permanent Diaconate or Assistant Director for Continuing Formation with suggestions for developing formation opportunities.

5. PROCEDURES

The requirement for continuing education is measured in clock hours of contact. This means that for every hour of instruction or skill building is considered one hour of credit given towards the fulfillment of this requirement.

While some courses may not be offered by a Catholic institution, deacons are encouraged to look upon workshops or formal academic courses in counseling, social work and other human helping skills as appropriate for continuing education credit.

To insure that the educational requirements are achieved, certain criteria are established and stated below to assist each deacon in determining what qualifies as appropriate content for the fulfilling of the "clock hours of contact."

- A. One of the most important aspects of formation is a spiritual director. Each deacon is to have a spiritual director and should meet with him at least five times a year and receive five formation credits. Guidelines for spiritual directors are available from the Office of the Permanent Diaconate.
- B. Each deacon may establish his own annual program, which is in accord with the intent of the goals of continuing education and must submit a personal program to the Diocesan Director for approval.

C. Activities, which may be included in the program:

1. **Certificate Courses:** When a certificate is issued at the end of the instruction, one point may be credited for each contact hour shown on the certificate (e.g., Regional Assembly).
2. **College Courses:** Courses should be related to ministerial service. One credit point will be given for each classroom hour attended. This applies to audited courses, if the entire course completed.
3. **Other Courses:** Conferences, seminars, workshops, enrichment courses, Priests' Work Study Days, Courses sponsored by the diaconate program, etc. Credit is one point for each contact hour (excluding all non-academic activities such as social hour, coffee breaks, lunch, etc.)
4. **Bi-Lingual Education:** (English for Portuguese/Spanish speaking deacons or Portuguese/Spanish for English speaking deacons) will count one hour for each hour of formal training.
5. **Retreats:** Retreats are primarily for the spiritual growth of the deacon. A deacon is required by canon law to make an annual retreat. A deacon must attain a minimum of five (5) points each year through a retreat. A weekend retreat will normally account for five (5) points. If unable to attend an annual weekend retreat, a deacon may attend several shorter retreats, with points computed on the basis of two (2) points per day (1/2 point per 1/2 day, etc.).
6. **Days of Recollection/Reflection/Convocation:** These days are mandatory days of attendance and will be credited accordingly.
7. **Deanery Meetings:** Although the monthly deanery meetings are also meant to deepen spirituality and foster community, they also are a means of continuing formation through the presentations made and the subsequent periods of group discussion on subjects relating to ministry or spirituality. Area meetings will be counted as one hour for each meeting attended.
8. **Self-study Projects:** Individual study, such as reading of professional books and periodicals, listening to educational tapes, and viewing of educational video cassettes is acceptable. One point may be counted for every fifty (50) pages read or each hour of listening or viewing.

C. The following activities are normally not creditable:

1. *Travel time to and from classes or activities.*
2. *Informal meetings and conferences.*
3. *Prayer services and liturgies.*
4. *Parish Council meetings or committee meetings.*
5. *Social gatherings.*
6. *Diocesan Boards and committee meetings.*
7. *Support group functions.*
8. *Courses not related to ministerial service or spirituality.*
9. *Ministry/work related to activities that are part of your job/ministry.*

6. REPORTING AND RECORDING

- A. While only thirty (30) credits are required per year, deacons are encouraged to submit all their activities to show the entire scope of their self-improvement activities
- B. Each deacon, who has been ordained, will be required to program and document his own continuing education. A form will be provided to record and report credit hours to the Permanent Diaconate Office on an annual basis. This reporting period each year will be September 1- August 31.
- C. The Diaconate Office will review annual reports for compliance with this policy.
- D. Retired Deacons are excused from reporting their continuing formation hours.

7. ACCOUNTABILITY

The deacon is called to minister to and in the name of the Church under the leadership of the local Bishop. With the explosion of information and the constantly accelerating rate of change that are the hallmarks of our time, continuing formation is essential for effective ministry. The Gospel call to service and the tenor of the time demand it.

If a deacon fails, without sufficient reason, to participate adequately, i.e., in at least fifty percent (50%) of the required programs, the permanent diaconate director (or designee) will personally discuss with the deacon the reasons for his lack of participation. The director may schedule a meeting with the Bishop and/or the deacon to discuss the matter further. After such a meeting, the deacon's failure to participate may result in loss of Diocesan Faculties and stipulation of the conditions under which the Faculties may be renewed.

8. WAIVER OR EXTENSION OF REQUIREMENT

Waiver of the thirty (30) hours per year norm or extension of time to complete it can be granted by the Director of the Permanent Diaconate Program. Such waivers will be considered upon receipt of a written request by the deacon. Waivers may consider but not be limited to age, health, employment, family, or ministry demands. Waivers or extensions must be confirmed in writing.

9. CONTINUING FORMATION PROGRAMS SPONSORED AND FUNDED BY THE DIACONATE OFFICE

All expenses required by the Diocesan Diaconate Program are funded by the Office of the Permanent Diaconate. Deacons are encouraged to attend Continuing Education on their own but all courses/programs taken outside required guidelines are to be funded from their own resources. In fact, pastors are discouraged from funding programs for deacons who have involved themselves in outside diocesan programs.

If a deacon wishes to participate in courses that are beyond these guidelines, the expenses are not funded by the diocese but are personal to them. Therefore it would be wise to check with the office before enrolling.

It is envisioned that each deacon can easily attain 30 hours of formation annually.

A suggested model:

Retreat	5
Convocation	5
Spiritual Direction	5
Deacon Study Days	5
Self-Study	5
Deanery Meetings	5
Offering In-Parish	
Lectures/workshops	5
Other	5-10

Other participation opportunities are ordinations, diocesan ceremonies (like the Chrism Mass), abuse workshops, etc. You may also offer lectures or workshops in one parish or other parishes. (e.g. apologetics)