

The Permanent Diaconate Today

June 2000

A Research Report by the Bishops' Committee on the Diaconate of the NCCB and by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

Introduction

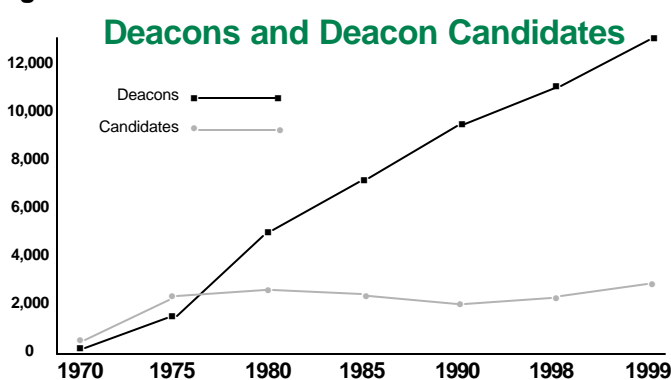
This report is a joint effort of the Bishops' Committee on the Diaconate of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. The report makes use of information from the 1999 triennial survey of the Secretariat for the Diaconate of the Bishops' Conference which obtained responses from 155 United States dioceses. Other statistical information was compiled from the Official Catholic Directory and from CARA's survey of diaconate formation programs, conducted annually since 1996. The intent of this report is to give a clear picture of the current state of the diaconate in the United States.

Table 1
**Permanent Deacons in the United States:
1971 - 1999**

	1971	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1999
Deacons	7	1,230	4,744	7,560	9,727	11,244	12,862
Candidates	529	2,243	2,514	2,263	1,980	2,026	2,582
Deacons per Parish	.00	.06	.24	.37	.48	.58	.67

Source: Official Catholic Directory and CARA Catholic Ministry Formation Directory

Figure 1
Deacons and Deacon Candidates



Part I: The Diaconate in the Church Universal and in the United States

After the restoration of the diaconate in the universal Church in 1967, bishops' conferences were asked to consider the terms under which they might approve and extend this ministry. In the United States, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops restored this ministry in 1968, citing these reasons:

- To strengthen the many and various diaconal ministries at work in the U.S. with sacramental grace.
- To enlist a new group of devout and competent men in the active ministry.
- To aid in extending needed liturgical and charitable services to the faithful.
- To provide an official and sacramental presence . . . where few or no priests are available.

The diocesan bishops in the United States who considered this ministry to be opportune then began to accept candidates.

Most deacons are ordained for the diocese in which they serve, except for a few religious brothers who have been ordained to the diaconate and who therefore extend their ministry on behalf of their religious institute. Deacons presently serve in every state in the United States and the District of Columbia. They serve in nearly every diocese of the country as well. In 1999, only seven of the 177 Latin Rite dioceses and four of the 15 Eastern Church eparchies report not having deacons.

The United States has almost 13,000 deacons — more than any other country in the world. According to the

Annuario Stasticum Ecclesiae published by the Vatican for 1998, the countries following the United States in numbers of permanent deacons were Germany, with 2,056 deacons, and Italy, with 1,430. In the Americas, the countries with the next largest numbers of deacons in 1998 were Brazil, with 952, and Canada, with 834. Overall, there were 25,345 deacons serving in 129 countries in 1998; of them, 514 (2 percent) were members of religious communities. Thus about half of all deacons worldwide are in the United States.

According to the International Diaconate Center, there were deacons serving in about 1,100 of 2,800 archdioceses and dioceses worldwide as of January 1998. However, only 45 of these dioceses had more than 100 permanent deacons, and another 25 had between 80 and 100 deacons. Roughly 9,500 deacons serve in those 70 dioceses, while the remainder serve in about 990 other dioceses.

In the United States, eleven dioceses have more than 200 deacons each. According to the 1999 Triennial NCCB Survey of the Diaconate, the Archdiocese of Chicago had 817 deacons, the highest number for any single diocese in the United States. It is followed by the Archdiocese of New York, which had 340 deacons, and by Hartford, with 319.

Part II: A Profile of Deacons Today

Between 1996 and 1999 the number of deacons in the United States increased from 11,868 to 12,862. This increase of 994 deacons represents an increase of over eight percent.

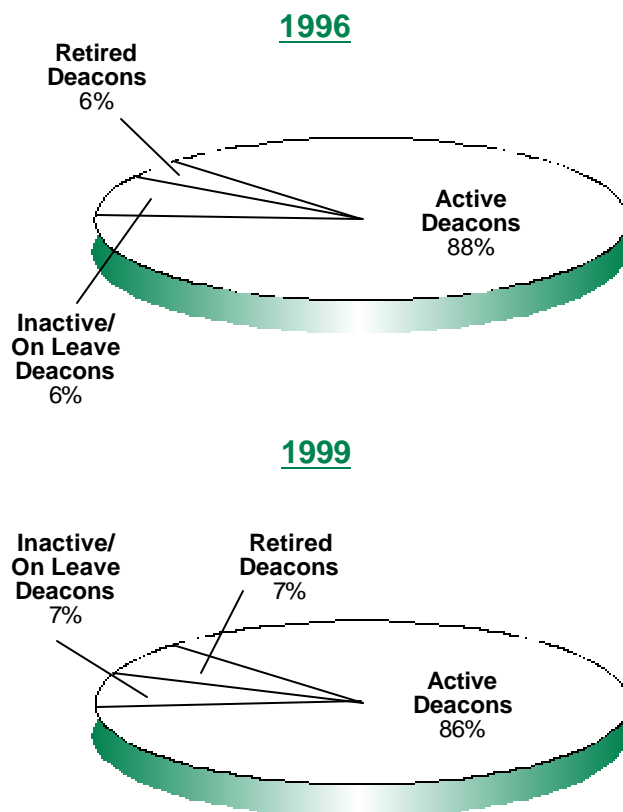
The number of deacon candidates has reached a relatively steady level at about 2,500. Given that ordinations to the diaconate only began some three decades ago, retirements and deaths have only slightly slowed the growth in the number of active and total deacons. Thus, deacon ordinations to the present have had an essentially cumulative effect on the total number of deacons each year. [See Figure 1]

The deacon is now common in parish life in the United States. According to the CARA database on parishes in the United States, the National Parish Inventory (NPI), more than one in three parishes reports having at least one deacon in ministry. The relative presence of deacons in parish life has grown very quickly, from one deacon for every 16 parishes in 1975 to two deacons for every three parishes today. However, deacons are not distributed evenly throughout all parishes. Nor are all deacons assigned to a parish-specific ministry. In addition, many parishes have more than one deacon in ministry.

Figure 2

RETIRED / ACTIVE DEACONS

The number of deacons in the U.S. and the Territorial Sees (which include Puerto Rico and Guam) continues to grow. The rate of growth is under 3% annually. This is a slight decrease from the prior reporting period. The number of retired deacons is up 20% in the past three years. A large number of deacons ordained in the early years of the restoration of the Diaconate is now reaching retirement age. Many of the retired deacons continue to minister in parishes and institutions to the extent their health permits.



Source: NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate

Assignments

The 1999 Triennial NCCB Survey of the Diaconate found 71 of the 155 responding dioceses reported an expectation that their deacons be active in ministry 10 to 12 hours each week, excluding Sunday liturgies and homily preparation time.

In cases where there is no resident pastor, deacons are sometimes given the pastoral care of a parish. Some 81 deacons are appointed to this position full-time in 39 dioceses, and 32 deacons serve as part-time administrators in 24 dioceses.

The survey also found that the few deacons who are compensated for their ministry receive the following:

- 255 deacons in 65 dioceses are compensated for full-time diaconal ministry beyond their expenses.
- 451 deacons in 63 dioceses are compensated for part-time diaconal ministry beyond their expenses.
- 503 deacons in 87 dioceses are compensated for full or part-time work other than diaconal ministry.

Deacons in Active Ministry

Retired deacons are beginning to appear in larger numbers: they increased 20 percent over the past three years while the total number of deacons only increased by eight percent. [See Figure 2] As a result, about 86 percent of all deacons today are in active ministry whereas almost 88 percent were in active ministry in 1996. A significant number of deacons ordained in the 1970s are now reaching retirement age. Nevertheless, many retired deacons continue to minister in parishes and other ministry sites to the extent their health permits. Assuming that current diaconate ordination rates and age patterns continue, the total number of deacons in active service is likely to stabilize at about 16,000 within the next ten years.

Ages of Deacons

Usually, deacons are expected to continue in their secular career after ordination. However, most deacons are ordained relatively late in life, after they have developed their careers and their families have matured. Many men elect to become deacons upon retirement from their secular career. Thus it is not surprising that about half of all deacons are aged 60 years or older, in spite of the fact that most ordinations occurred over the past two decades. [See Figure 3] In 1999, 77 percent are between 40 and 70, and more than 20 percent are over age 70, according to the latest NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate.

While not all dioceses and eparchies have a set retirement age for deacons, 66 of the 155 responding dioceses report having a set retirement age, and these range between age 69 and 75, with most being at 75 years of age. The ministry and expectations for deacons are very different than those for priests. In addition, since deacons are ordained later in life and typically are expected to remain in their secular employment, they serve in active, full-time ministry for fewer years – and for fewer hours per week – than priests.

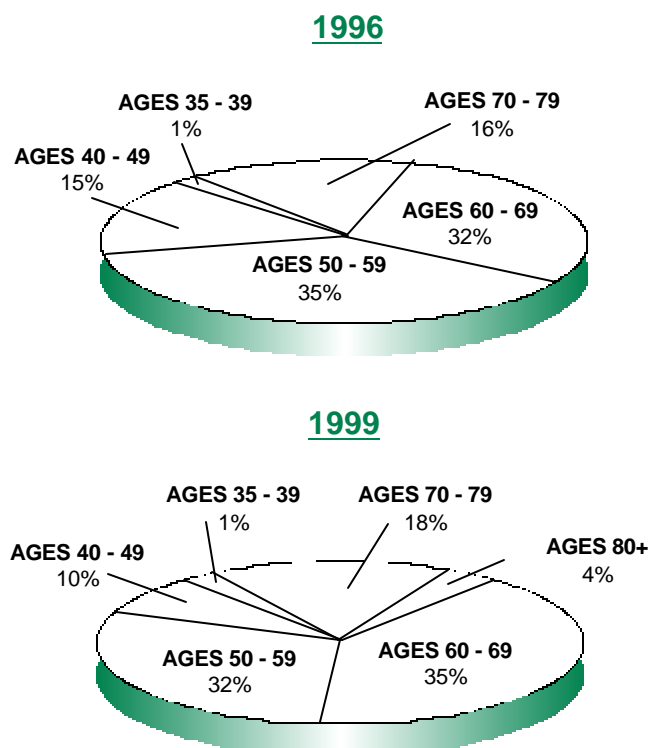
Racial and Ethnic Background of Deacons

The racial and ethnic profile of deacons today is similar to the typical profile for Catholics in the United

Figure 3

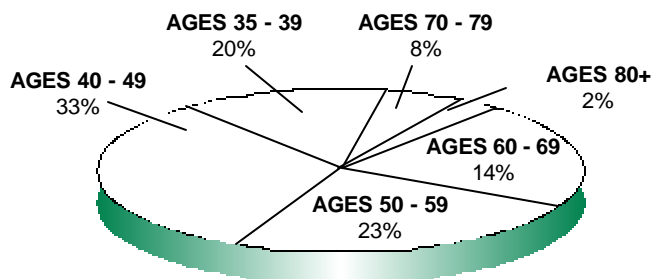
AGES of DEACONS

There has been a significant shift in the age of deacons from the forty-nine and under group to the fifty and over age group in the past three years. In part this is a result of the large class sizes in the early years of the diaconate now reaching sixty and older. The increasing number of diocesan formation programs extending their formation to four and five year programs (78%) is also impacting the average age at the time of ordination.



Source: NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate

Catholic Men 35 and over in 2000



Source: CARA Catholic Poll 2000

States, as found in the recent set of estimates produced by the CARA Catholic Poll 2000 (CCP 2000), a national random survey of Catholics completed in February 2000. [See Figure 4] In the case of Hispanics/Latinos, CCP 2000 estimates show that deacon candidates are just a little less representative of the Catholic population as a whole.

Marital Status

More than nine in ten deacons are married. Only three percent have never been married. This differs from the figures for Catholic men as a whole, in part because deacons tend to be older and more likely to be married. [See Figure 5] Regardless of age, however, deacons are more likely to be married and less likely to be separated or divorced than their peers. This may be why only 29 dioceses report having a formal policy for deacons who are divorced or separated after their ordination.

The following information regarding the marital status of deacons has been accumulated since the restoration of the diaconate in the late 1960s. Each of the categories represents less than 1 percent of today's deacons.

- 157 deacons have been returned to the lay state at their request.
- 37 have been granted dispensations to remarry.
- 110 have remarried without a dispensation.
- 224 have divorced or separated since ordination.

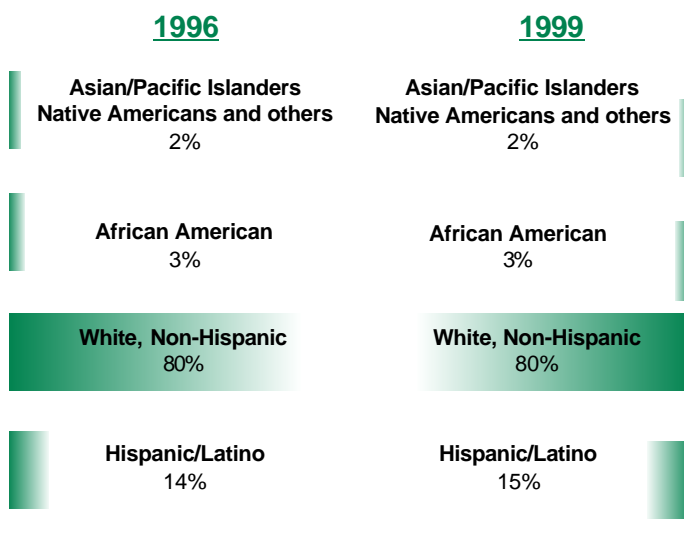
Education

About half of all deacons have a college degree, similar to the proportion of Catholic men 35 and over. Deacons differ from the total population of Catholic men over 35 in that, proportionally, more deacons than Catholic men in general have gone to graduate or professional school. [See Figure 6]

Figure 4

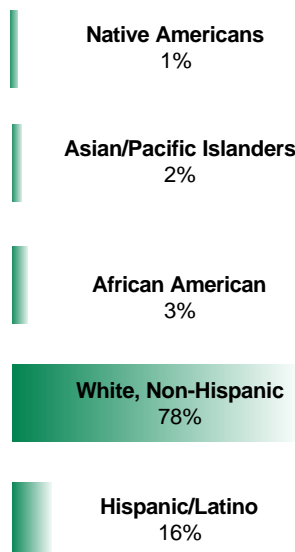
DEACONS' ETHNIC DIVERSITY

The cultural diversity among deacons remains constant with the prior reporting period.



Source: NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate

Catholic Men 35 and over in 2000



Source: CARA Catholic Poll 2000

Part III: Diaconate Formation Programs

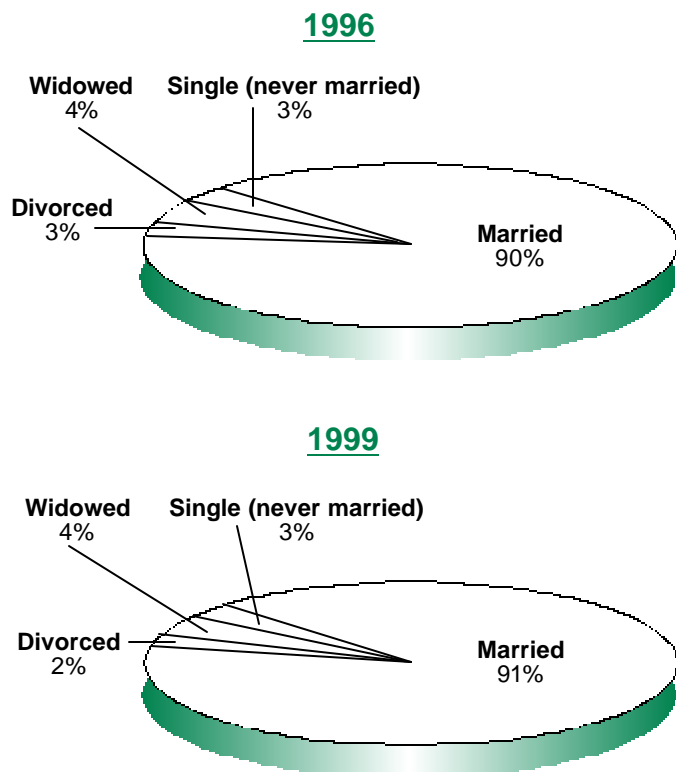
Diaconate formation programs of some form currently exist in 46 of the 50 states. As of 2000, active programs exist in 127 of the 177 Latin Rite dioceses whose bishops belong to the NCCB, and in 8 of the 15 eparchies of the Eastern Churches whose eparchs belong to the NCCB. At least 18 other dioceses or eparchies indicate they are beginning, redesigning, or reactivating diaconate formation programs within the next two years. Some deacon candidates leave their dioceses for their formation: at least 33 dioceses report providing formation for candidates from other dioceses.

Diaconate formation programs differ in their requirements for admission, program duration, the number of required courses, the frequency with which candidates meet, and tuition and fees. Typical admission requirements include a period of discernment, recommendation by the candidate's pastor, the support of the candidate's wife (if married), letters of reference, psychological testing, and interviews. Although many programs do

Figure 5

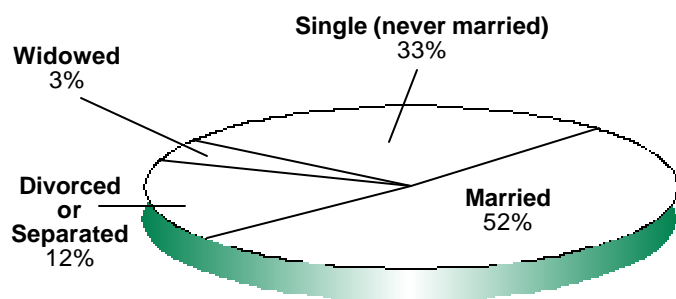
DEACONS' MARITAL STATUS

The marital status of deacons continues to remain constant during this reporting period compared to the prior period.



Source: NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate

Catholic Men 35 and over in 2000



Source: CARA Catholic Poll 2000

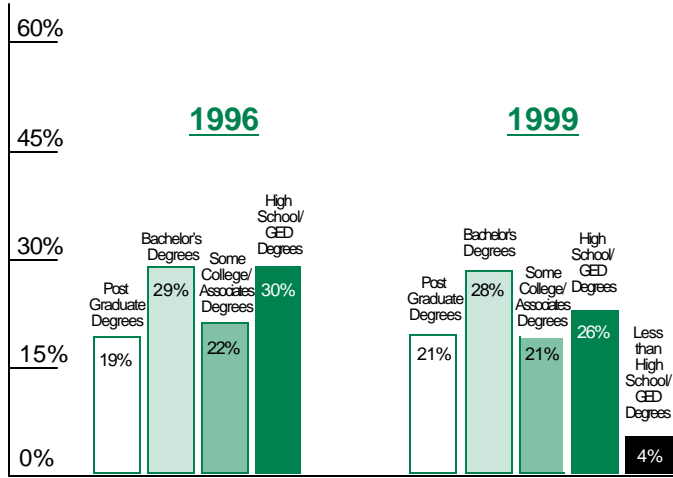
not specify academic prerequisites, some stipulate high school, college, or even graduate degrees.

About two dozen dioceses offer separate English-language and Spanish-language programs or tracks and others conduct some of their classes in Spanish. A few dioceses provide instruction in other languages or train candidates to serve particular ethnic or cultural groups. As many as 15 say they are considering establishing formation programs in language other than English within the

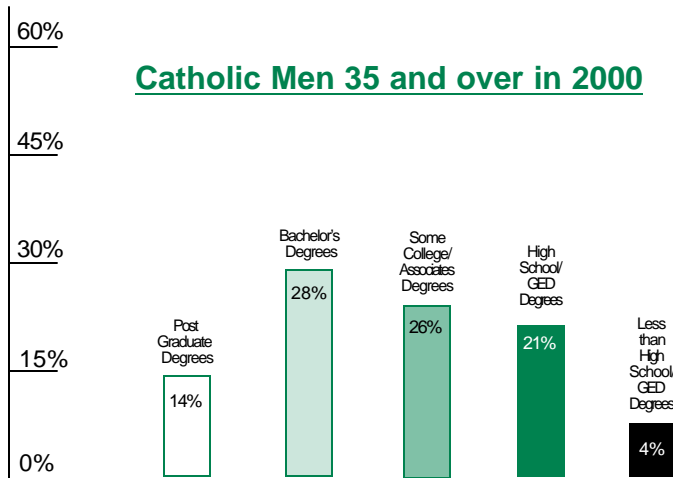
Figure 6

DEACONS EDUCATION

The number of deacons with college or post graduate degrees continues to increase.



Source: NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate



Source: CARA Catholic Poll 2000

next two years. The Diocese of Spokane, among others, makes special adaptations in its program for the culture and language of its Hispanic, Native American, and Asian participants. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee conducts its program in English, Spanish, and American Sign Language. Multicultural training in general is important to many dioceses; 68 say they have multicultural training as part of candidate formation.

Diaconate candidates typically meet one or two evenings per week or one weekend per month over the course of four years, for an average of 187 hours annually. Diocesan formation programs range from two to six years. Those programs that are two years long stipulate the prior completion of a lay ministry formation program.

Other prerequisites include:

- 48 dioceses require lay ministry training.
- 52 dioceses include lay ministry training as part of the formation program.
- 4 dioceses report that they require a graduate degree.
- 7 require an undergraduate degree.

Further, some 47 dioceses of the 155 reporting say that they require wives of candidates to participate in formation and another 60 dioceses expect, but do not formally require, that their wives participate. Eight dioceses have programs for the children of candidates. Program costs are often shared by participants, parishes, and dioceses, with the largest share typically paid by the diocese. Other requirements are shown in **Figure 7**.

Once ordained, ongoing formation is common:

- 24 dioceses provide for continuing formation in languages other than English.
- 110 dioceses offer ongoing formation for both deacons and their wives.
- Over 65 percent of those dioceses require 20 or more hours of continuing formation each year.
- 28 dioceses have a formal policy to which they refer when deacons do not complete continuing formation requirements.

Almost all of the dioceses that have deacons in ministry report that they have a regular gathering of deacons, and 127 dioceses require an annual retreat. Finally, 90 dioceses report that they have an active council or assembly of deacons.

Part IV: Profile of Diaconate Candidates

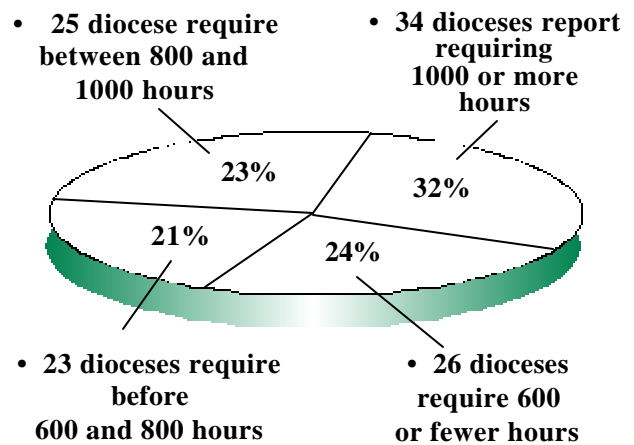
CARA completed its first comprehensive study of diaconate formation programs in 1996-97. This information has been updated at the beginning of each academic year ever since. This year, CARA received 1999-2000 enrollment information from every diocese that currently has programs that select and prepare candidates for the diaconate. The total number of candidates in the 116 active diaconate formation programs at the beginning of the 1999-2000 formation year was 2,582. This represents an increase of 12 percent over the past three years, or an average annual increase of 4 percent.

Figure 7

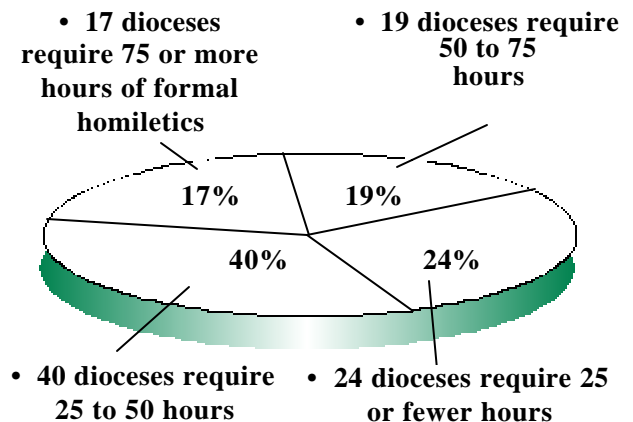
ORDINATION REQUIREMENTS

Hours of required classroom and field experience for ordination are shown in the top chart. Patterns of requirements for homiletics training vary as shown in the second chart. Ninety of 155 responding dioceses say they use the Bishops' Conference document "Fulfilled in Your Hearing" as part of their homiletics formation training.

Required Classroom and Field Experience for Ordination:



Patterns of Requirement for Homiletics Training:

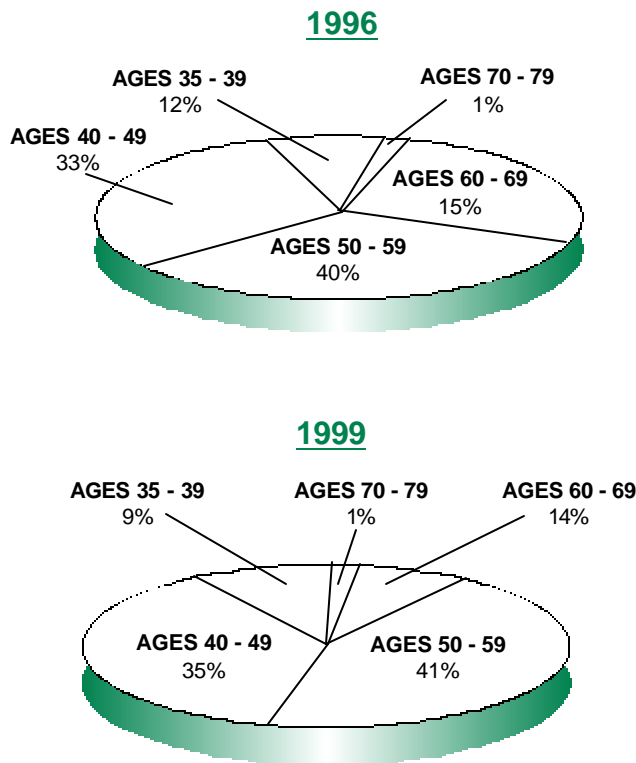


Source: NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate

Figure 8

AGES of DEACON CANDIDATES

The proportion of deacon candidates in each of the following age groups ranges as follows:



Source: NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate

Age Distribution of Diaconate Candidates

Roughly 75 percent of candidates for the diaconate are in their forties and fifties. [See Figure 8] Only about one in ten is under age 40, while one in six is over 60. This age distribution is markedly older than that of both priesthood candidates and lay ministry formation program participants. As noted before, many deacons entered the diaconate after actual or near completion of a secular career, unlike the greater part of those entering the priesthood. However, they bring with them the richness of decades of professional and family life which enhances their ministry.

Marital Status of Diaconate Candidates

The marital status of deacons remains unchanged over the past three years. Almost all candidates – 95 percent – are married. About 3 percent are single and have never been married. About 1 percent have been divorced and are not remarried, and less than one percent are widowed.

Racial and Ethnic Background of Candidates

Minority racial and ethnic groups represent more than 22 percent of total enrollments in permanent diaconate programs. For deacons in formation in 1999-2000, White, Non-Hispanics are 79 percent of all deacon candidates, African Americans comprise another four percent, Asians, a little over two percent, and Native Americans, under one percent. Over the past three years, the proportion of deacon candidates who are White, Non-Hispanics has declined by one percentage point with the difference being made up by a proportional increase in African American and Hispanic/Latino candidates.

Hispanics/Latinos form the largest minority group with 15 percent of enrollments, one percentage point lower than CARA Catholic Poll 2000 estimates for the Catholic population. In general, however, the ethnic and racial background of deacon candidates is comparable to that of the general Catholic population in the United States as estimated in CCP 2000.

Educational Attainment of Diaconate Candidates

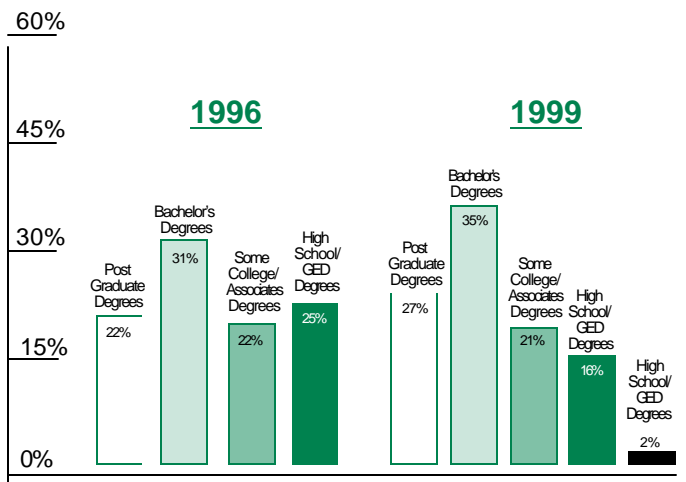
Over 80 percent of current diaconate candidates have attended at least some college. One-third have college degrees and one-fourth have graduate degrees.

Compared to 1996, more candidates have college and graduate degrees; their proportion has risen by about fifteen percentage points over the past three years, according to the triennial survey. Proportionately fewer have only a high school diploma or less. [See Figure 9]

Figure 9

CANDIDATES' EDUCATION

The number of candidates with college or post graduate degrees continues to increase. The rate of college or post graduate degrees among candidates has increased 15% in three years.



Source: NCCB Triennial Survey of the Diaconate

Table 2**DIACONATE FORMATION PROGRAMS AND CANDIDATES, 1997-2000**

	1996 - 1997	1997 - 1998	1998 - 1999	1999 - 2000
Dioceses and eparchies with formation programs	122	127	135	135
States (including Wash. DC) with formation programs	45	46	46	46
Programs reporting enrollments	117	77	115	116
Total enrollment	2,183	2,338	2,483	2,582
Average enrollment per program	19	20	22	20

Source: CARA Catholic Ministry Formation Directories

Part V: The Permanent Diaconate in the United States Today

The permanent diaconate has prospered since the Bishops' Conference approved its restoration in the United States in 1968. The number of deacons has grown dramatically over the past few decades. Those ordained to the order of deacon for permanent service are now a large, established portion of the Catholic clergy in the United States. The great majority of dioceses either have or are planning formation programs to train deacons for the future.

Deacons now have a near-universal place in Catholic experience all over the country. In many ways, however, the diaconate is still a ministry in development, with a

new identity emerging over time and in practice, having only been present in its post-conciliar form in the U.S. for about three decades.

While deacons now comprise more than one in five of all ordained Catholic clergy in the United States, the ministry to which they are ordained is very distinct from the priesthood. The diaconate is a ministry of service that extends the apostolic ministry of the Bishop throughout the local diocesan Church. Deacons work together with priests, religious, and laity in Catholic parish and diocesan life. The Diaconate builds the body of Christ by concretely focusing on service to the Word, Liturgy and Charity.

"DEACONS SHARE IN CHRIST'S MISSION AND GRACE IN A SPECIAL WAY.

**THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS MARKS THEM WITH AN IMPRINT WHICH CANNOT BE REMOVED
AND WHICH CONFIGURES THEM TO CHRIST,
WHO MADE HIMSELF THE 'DEACON' OR SERVANT OF ALL."**

— CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH,
2ND EDITION, ARTICLE 1570



Prepared by the
Bishops' Committee on the Diaconate of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops
 3211 Fourth Street, N.E. · Washington, DC 20017-1194
 and by the
Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
 Georgetown University · Washington, DC 20057