

Process for Becoming a Candidate for Deaconess:

Once a woman has discerned her call to become a Deaconess and desires to become a Candidate for the Order, she must submit a formal application to her Bishop Ordinary (*Diocesan Bishop*). The official application form is available online at <https://recdss.org/application/>, or may be requested from either the office of her Bishop or the Canon Deaconess. A background check will be initiated by the Bishop's office upon receipt of the application and fees. Once the application process begins, these are the steps that usually take place in the dioceses of the REC leading to the Setting Apart of a Deaconess:

1. Application received in the Bishop's office → Background check initiated

The following should be submitted with the application:

- a. A letter of recommendation from the Rector or Minister in Charge of the parish she attends, to include a declaration that she is a communicant of the Church in good standing.
- b. Letters of recommendation from two women communicants of the parish.
- c. Evidence that she is a graduate of a four-year institution of higher learning. Any Candidate who does not meet this requirement shall have attained the age of thirty-five years, and must provide evidence to the Board of Examining Chaplains that she possesses the intellectual ability to enter with advantage upon a course of study preparatory to being Set Apart.

2. Interview with the Bishop once application and background check accepted

- This gives the Bishop an idea of whether the potential candidate is spiritually prepared to enter this vocation, and where she is in terms of theological education.
- The Bishop determines whether the candidate needs a directed course of study (usually supervised by her Rector after approval by the Bishop), or a more formal certificate or degree plan through the seminary. If seminary is desired, an appointment with the Dean of the seminary is made and an application to the seminary completed to begin a course plan. (**Note:** Application to become a seminary student is a separate process from applying as a Deaconess Candidate.)

3. The Bishop presents the credentials of the potential candidate with his recommendation to the Standing Committee. If approved, she officially becomes a Candidate for Deaconess, and a letter to that effect is sent to her from the Bishop's office. The date of the letter is the official start of her Candidacy. In the letter she is assigned a member of the Board of Examining Chaplains or a Deaconess to be her mentor. (The Standing Committee is also made aware of any changes to her status that may occur at any time during her Candidacy.)

4. The new Candidate embarks on her course of study and probationary requirements as stipulated in Canon 22 of the REC Constitution and Canons. This usually runs between eighteen months to two years, but not less than one year, and includes a nine month internship under the supervision of a presbyter. She sends a report to the Bishop, her mentor, her Rector, and the seminary Dean quarterly at the Ember Days summarizing her progress during the period of her candidacy. (*After becoming a Deaconess, she sends a written report of her activities to her Bishop annually.*)

5. Once it is determined by her panel (Bishop, Dean, Mentor, Rector) that she is ready to take her Canonical Exams, the written exam is sent to her to complete. After the written exam is

submitted and assessed by her panel, a date is set for the oral exam. Her mentor, the Bishop Ordinary or Suffragan, and another member of the Examining Chaplains administer the oral exam. She must show competence in the following areas of study:

- (1) **Holy Scripture:** The Bible in English; introduction to and contents of the various books; special knowledge of at least one Gospel and one Epistle.
 - (2) **Church History:** A general outline, including the History of the Church in the United States, and special knowledge of the first five centuries, and to include the history of Deaconesses both ancient and modern.
 - (3) **Christian Missions:** History; present extent and methods; at least one missionary biography.
 - (4) **Doctrine:** Contents and teaching of the Book of Common Prayer, including preparation for the Sacraments.
 - (5) **Christian Ethics and Moral Theology:** Particular emphasis on matters pertaining to the counseling of women and children.
 - (6) **Ministration:** The office and work of a Deaconess; Parish Work and Organization.
- (During this time information is sent to the Candidate about her habit, vestments, and arrangements to have her Deaconess Cross made. - *The Candidate usually wears her vestments for her Setting Apart and is presented with her collar and cross, the marks of the Order, during the service. It takes a minimum of six weeks to receive the custom made cross and vestments. This should be kept in mind when setting a date for the service.*)
6. Upon successful completion of her Canonical Exams, the Standing Committee is notified by the Bishop that she has successfully completed all of the requirements and asks approval of her being Set Apart. A date is then set for the service for her Setting Apart.

The Bishop exercises discretion as to whether the potential candidate's circumstances will allow her to attend seminary, or if extra time is needed for her candidacy, or even if she passes her exams with provisos for more study. This is usually done in consultation with the other members of her panel. However, the ultimate decision to Set Apart a Deaconess and when, is determined by the Bishop with the advice and consent of the Standing Committee.