

## 6. Petitions

### 6.0 Introduction to Petitions

It is the Church's norm that the call to priesthood is accompanied by various liturgical celebrations marking the candidate's progress in discernment and the Church's response to his petitions. At each step of the way, the local bishop acts as the official voice of the Church in calling the candidate to express his conviction of a call, his freedom to accept that call, his promise to live the priestly life faithfully, and his desire to accept the will of God in all of this.

It has been the custom of the Church in Canada to begin marking these liturgical steps with the admission of the seminarian as a Candidate for Ordination to the Diaconate and the Priesthood. This has been followed by the seminarian's institution in the ministries of Lector and Acolyte. This was then followed by the celebration of ordination to the transitional Diaconate, leading finally to ordination as a Presbyter. However, new times call for a new view of the way to mark these liturgical steps.

It should be considered that the admission of a candidate for ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood is to be a recognition on the part of the Seminary faculty and the local bishop that, to the best of their knowledge, a particular seminarian is called to priestly life and ministry. It should be seen as the celebration that marks the man's personal choice and the Church's choice of him as having moved from discernment to decision. In the celebration, the candidate implicitly promises to do all in his power to make good his final preparations for ordination to the presbyterate by further study, by availing himself of the required formation and by the deepening of his life of prayer. He declares to do all he can, in his desire to serve the Church, to be fully configured to Christ. On her part, the Church promises, through the local bishop and the Seminary faculty, to provide the candidate with the best formation possible, guiding him in the final stages of preparation for the ministry.

As such, then, the call to admission as a Candidate for Ordination to the Diaconate and the Priesthood should only come after a proper period of testing the candidate in both the seminary and parochial settings. There must be sufficient time for reflection and discernment on the part of the individual aspirant and the Church. It would seem appropriate that such a petition and call would rightly occur after the seminarian has undertaken the pastoral year and successfully demonstrated his knowledge of the life and ministry of the priest, his aptitude for priestly ministry, his ardent desire to serve God's people, and his fervent commitment to live faithfully the Christian life as a priest.

It must be recognized that petitioning for and receiving the call to Candidacy does not ensure the seminarian's ordination to the transitional diaconate or the priesthood will proceed, but is a statement that all those entrusted with his formation believe, with all the human certitude possible, that he truly is called by God and that he will be a good and faithful priest. Candidacy cannot be granted, therefore, as a mere encouragement for a seminarian in the program, as a way to keep his interest, but must be the demarcation point between those who are still discerning and those who are clearly preparing for priesthood. If there is any doubt of the seminarian's call at that point, he should either undertake a second pastoral year or take time out from the program.

Following on this line of thought, it would be appropriate to invite seminarians who have proved their ardent desire to be ordained and who themselves feel strongly about the validity of their call, to apply for the ministries of Lector and Acolyte at the end of their first and second years of theological training, without having first been admitted as Candidates for Ordination to the Diaconate and the Priesthood. While these ministries of the Word and of the altar are specifically connected to preparation of men for the priesthood, they are also given to men in the Catholic community who demonstrate a certain holiness of life and a desire to serve the Church, though not in ordained ministry. As such, these ministries given to seminarians can help them in the pastoral assignments given them. However, it should be clearly understood that these ministries should not be given as signs of encouragement only, if there is doubt about a seminarian's suitability for priesthood. Where there is doubt, there must be delay.

The progress for institution in ministries and as a candidate for the priesthood would then normally follow this order:

- Institution in the ministry of Lector
  - Petition usually at the end of first year theology
- Institution in the ministry of Acolyte
  - Petition usually at the end second year theology
- Admission as a Candidate for Ordination to the Diaconate and the Priesthood
  - Petition usually at the end of the pastoral year
- Ordination as a Deacon
  - Petition usually at the end of fourth year theology
- Ordination as a Priest
  - Petition usually at the end of fifth year theology

The Seminary schedules celebrations at the seminary for institution in the ministries and Candidacy each year in the autumn. These may be celebrated during the summer in home-dioceses, at the discretion of the local bishops.

This section of the *Handbook* includes the timetable for making petitions, and sample letters for petitions with instructions for their completion. Included, as well, is information on the ministries, candidacy and orders, and a sample form for the "Examination of Candidates for Candidacy, Ministries and Orders".

## 6.1 Timetable for Making Petitions

### I September to January

- a candidate for a ministry, candidacy for ordination, or for orders themselves should be discussing with his spiritual director about his desire for and intention to apply for the ministry, candidacy or order
- this discussion, in the context of spiritual direction, helps the candidate to formulate his motives and test them end of January
- express a desire for petitioning

## II February

- candidates are invited to submit petitions by the end of the month
- students are examined by their Formator or other delegated priest on their intention, freedom and the obligation of the promise of celibate chastity (this accompanies the petition)
- this petition is not submitted without the prior approval of one's spiritual director

## III March

- bishops or their delegates meet members of the Seminary faculty to discuss the candidates and their petitions
- the bishop may ask for a vote from the faculty at that time when the petitions are accepted

### 6.2 Institution of Lectors

Excerpts from the Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam*, 15 August 1972:

*The lector is appointed for a function proper to him, that of reading the Word of God in the liturgical assembly. Accordingly, he is to read the lessons from Sacred Scripture, except for the Gospel, in the Mass and other sacred celebrations; he is to recite the psalm between the readings when there is no psalmist; he is to present the intentions for the prayer of the faithful in the absence of a deacon or cantor; he is to direct the singing and the participation by the faithful; he is to instruct the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments. He can also, insofar as necessary, take care of preparing other faithful who by a temporary appointment are to read the Sacred Scripture in liturgical celebrations. That he may more fittingly and perfectly fulfill these functions, let him meditate assiduously on Sacred Scripture.*

*Let the lector be aware of the office he has undertaken and make every effort and employ suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love and knowledge of the Scriptures that will make him a more perfect disciple of the Lord.*

### 6.3 Institution of Acolytes

Excerpts from the Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam*, 15 August 1972:

*The acolyte is appointed in order to aid the deacon and to minister to the priest. It is therefore his duty to attend to the service of the altar and to assist the deacon and the priest in liturgical celebrations, especially in the celebration of Mass; he is also to distribute Holy Communion as an extraordinary minister when the ministers spoken of in canon 845 of the Code of Canon Law [see canon 910 of the 1983 Code] are not available or are prevented by ill health, age or another pastoral ministry from performing this function, or when the number of those approaching the Sacred Table is so great that the celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.*

*In the same extraordinary circumstances he can be entrusted with publicly exposing the Blessed Sacrament for adoration by the faithful and afterwards replacing it, but not with blessing the people. He can also, to the extent needed, take care of instructing other faithful who by temporary appointment assist the priest or deacon in liturgical celebrations by carrying the missal, cross, candles, etc., or by performing other such duties. He will perform these functions the more worthily if he participates in the Holy Eucharist with increasing fervent piety, receives nourishment from it and deepens his knowledge of it.*

*Destined as he is in a special way for the service of the altar, the acolyte should learn all matters concerning public divine worship and strive to grasp their inner spiritual meaning: in that way he will be able each day to offer himself entirely to God, be an example to all by his seriousness and reverence in the sacred building, and have a sincere love for the Mystical Body of Christ, the People of God, especially the weak and the sick.*

#### 6.4 The Admission to Candidacy for Ordination as Deacon and Priest

Excerpts from the Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI, *Ad pascendum*, 15 August 1972:

*... [A] new rite is introduced, by which one who aspires to ordination as deacon or presbyter publicly manifests his will to offer himself to God and the Church, so that he may exercise a sacred order. The Church, accepting this offering, selects and calls him to prepare himself to receive a sacred order, and in this way he is properly numbered among candidates for the diaconate or presbyterate.*

#### I Norms

*A rite of admission for candidates for ordination as deacons and presbyters is now introduced. In order that his admission be properly made, the free petition of the aspirant, made out and signed in his own hand, is required, ...*

*... Those can be accepted who give signs of an authentic vocation and, endowed with good moral qualities and free from mental and physical defects, wish to dedicate their lives to the service of the Church for the glory of God and the good of souls ....*

*In virtue of the acceptance the candidate must care for his vocation in a special way and foster it. He also acquires the right to the necessary spiritual assistance by which he can develop his vocation and submit unconditionally to the will of God.*

*Candidates for the permanent diaconate and for the diaconate leading to the presbyterate, as well as candidates for the presbyterate itself, are to receive the ministries of reader and acolyte, unless they have already done so, ...*