

APPLICATION PROCESS FOR SEMINARY FORMATION

UPDATED AS OF APRIL 2024

WHY THE PROCESS

The application process is intended to encourage the candidate to realize that his vocation does not simply enjoy a personal dimension but rather flows from the Church and toward ministry within the church. Through personal interaction with the Bishop, Pastors, other priests, the Vocation Office, and fellow seminarians, the candidate will experience more fully the knowledge that he has a specific identity as a candidate for the priesthood for the Diocese of Grand Island. The application process for those seeking affiliation as a seminarian with the Diocese of Grand Island involves several steps designed both to aid the Diocese in the evaluation of applicants and to contribute to the individual applicant's ongoing discernment. The same application procedure is used for all candidates regardless of age or background.

THE RIGHT OF THE BAPTIZED

The baptized faithful enjoy a number of rights within the Church: the right to a good name, and the right to receive the sacraments, etc (barring excommunication). Holy Orders, it must be remembered, is not a right: no one has the right to Holy Orders, rather, the individual proposes himself for orders based on a calling he has received, and his discernment of that call. This call is verified by the Church, who does her own discernment of that call.

SUMMARY OF APPLICATION PROCESS

For a young man who feels called to Seminary Formation for the Diocese of Grand Island, there are either two or three separate application procedures that must be completed.

1. Admission and acceptance to Diocesan Sponsorship towards seminary formation
2. If the application above is successful, you will then apply to attend a seminary for formation. Each seminary will require you to complete a separate application form.
3. A candidate accepted by the Diocese will generally attend the institute designated by the bishop and his Office for Vocations.
4. The application for the Diocese of Grand Island must be completed first before a candidate begins the Seminary application process. A candidate for seminary formation must be accepted both by the Diocese and the assigned seminary to begin formation.

STAGES OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

All fees associated will be paid for by the applicant. Unless stated otherwise.

STAGE ONE: DOCUMENTATION AND WRITTEN APPLICATION

1. Notarized signature of the Declaration of Intent, which includes:

- Agreement to undergo the process of seminary application.
- Agreement to release information shared, medical and psychological evaluation reports to relevant individuals.

2. The Diocese of Grand Island Application Form for Diocesan Sponsorship towards seminary formation and Letters of recommendation contact form.

3. Essays (2-4 pages each double space on the following topics)

- Autobiography
- What does priesthood mean to me?
- Why do I think the Lord is calling me to be a priest?

4. Copies of the following Identification and Records

- Copy of Passport or Driver's License
- Copy of your Social Security Card
- 2 official baptismal certificates with a raised seal
- 2 official confirmation certificates with a raised seal
- 2 unopened official high school transcripts
- 2 unopened official transcripts from any post-high school institutions or classes
- Official ACT score

5. Background Check in conjunction with Safe Environment Training – Paid by the Diocese

STAGE TWO: INTERVIEW WITH THE VOCATIONS DIRECTOR

Interview with the Vocations Director: The Executive Officer for Vocations will schedule an application interview for the applicant. This is a comprehensive application interview, lasting up to 1-2 hours. This interview can take place during or before the application process has begun, depending on the candidate.

STAGE THREE: MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

The Office for Vocations will work with the applicant to schedule a medical and Psychological Assessment. **Paid for by the Diocese.**

The Medical Evaluation will be completed by a doctor selected by the Diocese of Grand Island and will consist of a personal and family medical history and a physical exam that aims to ensure the applicant possesses “the good health necessary for seminary training and priestly ministry.”

The Psychological Evaluation will be completed by a licensed psychologist selected by the Diocese of Grand Island and will include a clinical interview and psychological testing as required by the seminary. Upon conclusion of the Psychological Evaluation, the candidate will meet with the examining psychologist for a feedback session and a detailed report will be given to the Director of Vocations.

STAGE FOUR: REVIEW OF APPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Once the application, interviews, and medical and psychological testing have been completed, the Director of Vocations, after careful review and consultations with relevant personnel, determines if the process should continue and submits a recommendation to the Bishop.

Interview with the Bishop: The Office for Vocations will work with the applicant to set up an interview with the Bishop and if necessary, an additional interview with a Diocesan Interview Panel. This interview usually happens after the Vocations Director has received your medical and psychological evaluation report.

STAGE FIVE: APPLICATION OUTCOME

After the Bishop reviews the candidate's file and recommendation from the Director of Vocations – a decision will be made and communicated to the candidate in writing via the Bishop's office.

FINAL ACCEPTANCE IS CONTINGENT UPON THE SEMINARY'S ACCEPTANCE

If the Bishop grants initial acceptance, the director also informs the applicant of the seminary where he is being considered to begin his formation. He then completes the required seminary application which is compiled with previously submitted material and is forwarded, by the Office for Vocations, to the seminary. After review, the seminary will write to the candidate informing him of their decision of acceptance or non-acceptance.

IF THE APPLICATION IS UNSUCCESSFUL

If the candidate's application is not accepted either by the diocese or the seminary and he wishes to apply to another diocese or religious order when that diocese or order requests a copy of the applicant's Diocese of Grand Island application file, a notarized written letter of permission to release the entire file must be drafted and signed by the applicant then forwarded to the Vocations Director before such a release request can be honored.

TIMELINE

Individual circumstances may adjust or vary the sequence of events outlined above. Generally, the time frame to compile and complete all required application material and evaluations is between 4-6 months and no later than May 1st to be considered for the fall semester.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CRITERIA

- 1) Single, baptized, and confirmed Catholic male between 18-45 years of age.
- 2) National Citizen or Resident Alien of the United States of America for at least 2 years
- 3) Measurable history with the Diocese of Grand Island.

4) **HAVE NO IRREGULARITIES FOR RECEIVING HOLY ORDERS (CANON 1041)**

- A person who labors under some form of amentia or other psychic illness due to which, after experts have been consulted, he is judged unqualified to fulfill the ministry properly.
- A person who has committed the delict of apostasy, heresy, or schism;
- A person who has attempted marriage, even only civilly, while either impeded personally from entering marriage by a matrimonial bond, sacred orders, or a public perpetual vow of chastity, or with a woman bound by a valid marriage or restricted by the same type of vow.
- A person who has committed voluntary homicide or procured a completed abortion and all those who positively cooperated in either.
- A person who has mutilated himself or another gravely and maliciously or who has attempted suicide.
- A person who has placed an act of orders reserved to those in the order of episcopate or presbyterate while either lacking that order or prohibited from its exercise by some declared or imposed canonical penalty.

5) **HAVE NO IMPEDIMENTS FOR RECEIVING HOLY ORDERS (CANON 1042)**

- A man who has a wife, unless he is legitimately destined to the permanent diaconate.
- A person who exercises an office or administration forbidden to clerics according to the norm of canon ⇒ 285 and ⇒ 286 for which he must render an account, until he becomes free by having relinquished the office or administration and rendered the account.
- A neophyte (Recently baptized and confirmed into the church – less than 2 years) unless he has been proven sufficiently in the judgment of the Bishop.

FULFILLING THE PRECEPTS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH:

- You shall attend Mass on Sundays/Holy Day of obligation & rest from servile labor.
- You shall confess your sins at least once a year.
- You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.
- You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.
- You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.

PREFERABLE CHARACTER QUALITIES TO STRIVE FOR:

- Man of prayer/Holiness – Receiving the sacraments frequently (Eucharist and Penance), Adoration, reading Sacred Scripture, having a prayer life and relationship with the Lord.
- High moral character, observable by those in the parish, workplace family, and friends.
- Integrity, humility, honesty, and transparency. Open to learning and accountability.
- Seeking to grow in their academic formation and learning.
- Involved in the life of the Church, an active member of a community.
- Man of Service & Mercy – within the church and the wider community.
- Understanding the mission of the Church and the Christian Baptismal calling
- Seeking unity in the life of the Church – Demonstrating fidelity to the Teachings and Tradition of the Church with respect to the Roman Pontiff & Bishops.
- Right Intentions and understanding of priestly life and ministry must correspond to that of the Church.

FAMILIARITY WITH THE DIOCESE OF GRAND ISLAND

A candidate must have some familiarity with the Diocese of Grand Island and the people with whom he feels called to serve here as a future priest, i.e., by living (past or present), working, or studying within the Diocese for a period of at least two years prior to applying to seminary. (On a case-by-case basis, consideration will be given to those who do not meet this criterion only after they have seriously considered the possibility of serving in their home diocese.

CANDIDATE WITH A LARGE FINANCIAL DEBT

The Diocese recognizes that each candidate comes to formation with a unique financial background. No candidate will be barred from formation because of a large financial debt they have incurred. However, case-to-case scenarios will be taken into consideration before accepting a candidate for formation. Which may include a plan and agreement to minimize the debt during seminary formation. When applying for Seminary formation for the Diocese of Grand Island, the candidate agrees that the Diocese will not cover or take on pre-existing debt.

CANDIDATES PREVIOUSLY IN ANOTHER FORMATION PROGRAM

If a candidate has previously been dismissed from another priestly formation program or an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life, he must wait at least two years prior to being considered for priestly formation in the Diocese of Grand Island. If the departure was other than a dismissal, sufficient time should be allotted to carefully evaluate his application. The norms given by the USCCB are to be followed in evaluating these applicants, and permission must be given to release information to the Diocese of Grand Island from the previous seminary, diocese, and/or institute of consecrated life.

AGE FOR ENTRANCE TO SEMINARY FORMATION

Candidates for the priesthood in the Diocese of Grand Island must begin formation no older than 45. Candidates without a college degree may be asked to complete an undergraduate degree on their own before being accepted as seminarians for the Diocese of Grand Island. And will be decided on a case-to-case basis.

CRITERIA FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN MARRIED

Divorced, and who have received a canonical decree of nullity.

While applicants for the priesthood whose marriages have been annulled may have the canonical freedom to pursue the priesthood, the presumption is normally against acceptance. It is important to discern if and how previous obstacles to a marriage commitment might create a possible scandal or affect the man's viability as a candidate for the priesthood. Seminary formation will only be considered if, the following criteria are met.

1. The marriage ceremony did not take place within the Diocese of Grand Island.
2. The candidate has never resided with his former spouse in the Diocese of Grand Island.
3. The former spouse does not presently live in the Diocese of Grand Island.
4. All children are at least 21 years old & not financially dependent upon their father
5. The gentleman has settled all financial obligations pertaining to the marriage.
6. Documents regarding the civil divorce and tribunal decree are properly made available to the Office for Vocations and Chancellor.

Candidate who is a widower

Applicants for the priesthood for those who are accepted on condition that a thorough discernment process between the candidate and the Bishop has been diligently observed. Additionally, for such men, an opportunity for seminary formation will only be considered if, the following criteria are met.

1. All children are at least 21 years old and not financially dependent upon the father.
2. Must wait a period of 12-24 months after the death of his spouse before applying.
3. Is able to financially support himself throughout the formation.
4. Will not exceed the age of 65 at his Presbyterate Ordination

NON-U. S CITIZENS OR LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENTS

Candidates who are not US Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents must be able to obtain and maintain a valid F-1 student visa prior to admission as a seminarian. They also must have no known barriers to receiving US Citizenship or Legal Permanent Resident status. In addition, candidates must have either lived within the Diocese of Grand Island prior to application or have a significant family or ecclesial tie to the Diocese. Candidates for Seminary who are not US Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents may be admitted if they have been approved for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) by the Department of Homeland Security. Cases will be considered individually and at the discretion of the Bishop and Director of Vocations.

IF A CANDIDATE IS NOT CURRENTLY EITHER A CITIZEN OR PERMANENT RESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, HE MUST ALSO MEET THE FOLLOWING.

- Live on a self-sustaining basis within the Diocese of Grand Island for at least two years.
- Have legal status or lawful presence here in the United States prior to beginning the application process.
- As circumstances warrant, be able to obtain and maintain an F-1 Student Visa,
- an R-1 Religious Worker Visa or T.P.S. (Temporary Protected Status) Visa.
- Be able to converse and write in English at a level acceptable to the seminary formation program as determined by TOEFL scores.
- Avail himself, on an as-needed basis and at the discretion of the Bishop/Vocations Director, of some form of U.S. Cultural Adaptation Program which could range from seminars or coursework at the seminary to a pastoral year assignment.

BACKGROUND CHECK POLICY

All candidates for seminary formation in the Diocese of Grand Island must agree to participate in a background check through the Safe Environment office and must give permission for the results of this background check to be shared with the director of vocations through the Safe Environment officer.