

An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Titus 1:5-9

**Process for DOS Parishioners Who Desire
to Enter Seminary or a Diaconal Vocations Program
With the Intention of Exploring Ordination to the Major Orders**

It is an honorable thing when a follower of Christ desires to pursue a vocation in the Church, and the exploration of an ecclesiastical vocation should be encouraged in missions and parishes throughout our diocese.

It should also be recognized that the life of an ordained clergyman can be at once a tremendous blessing and a heavy burden. While there is no greater honor than to stand at Christ's holy altar, leading the faithful in true worship, the weight of responsibility that is placed upon the cleric is profound.

Should we avoid that which is difficult? Certainly not! It is the grace of the Holy Spirit that enables the priest to hear the confessions of the faithful without falling into despair. It is the mystery of the *ecclesia*, the gathered faithful, who make the difficult work of supporting parish life somehow manageable. And, it is God's promise to sustain his ministers of the Gospel in spite of the way of the cross and kenosis that each clergyman must follow.

Our Holy Synod has, accordingly, recognized the importance of pastoral and theological education in the formation of our deacons and priests so that they may enter this sacred ministry well prepared and aware of both the joys and struggles of the clergy. Therefore, ordination to the Holy Priesthood is almost always predicated by a Divinity degree from one of our seminaries – it is a rare situation when this is not the case. It is also important to recognize that a seminary education does not guarantee that the student or graduate will be ordained to holy orders – readiness for ordination is something that is discerned by the bishop in concert with those who know the candidate best.

So, I offer the following process for those who are considering holy orders in the Orthodox Church. These steps will help both the parish pastor and the seminary candidate work through the important first steps in the process of discerning a vocation in Christ's Holy Church. Far from "weeding out" or discouraging priestly vocations, it is my hope that these clear steps will encourage more men in our parishes and missions to explore the possibility of priestly and pastoral service in a world that needs honorable and well-prepared clergymen more now than ever.

In Christ,



Archbishop Alexander

**PROCESS FOR THE ENDORSEMENT OF
SEMINARY AND DIACONAL VOCATION
CANDIDATES IN THE DIOCESE OF THE SOUTH**

- 1) No parishioner may petition for entry into seminary until he has spent at least three years in the parish or mission:
 - a. Consistently participating in the sacramental life of the Church.
 - b. Serving and assisting in the upkeep and administration of the parish according to their unique gifts and abilities.
 - c. Financially contributing to the parish through tithes and offerings.
- 2) The candidate for seminary must meet the qualifications for the Holy Priesthood as outlined in Titus 1:5-9, to include the canonical requirement that the candidate and his spouse have been married only to each other (e.g. - no history of divorce).
- 3) Assuming the conditions above are met, the candidate's parish priest must take the initiative in guiding the seminary candidate through the discernment process by writing a letter of recommendation to their Dean (or, in the case where this is the Dean's parish, to the Chancellor, and Bishop of the Diocese of the South), to include:
 - a. A formal letter of recommendation detailing:
 - i. The length of time that the priest has known the candidate.
 - ii. A narrative description of the candidate's life (from the priest's perspective).
 - iii. Any special talents that have been recognized in the candidate.
 - iv. Any concerns about the suitability of the candidate for holy orders.
 - v. The timeline that the pastor sees as reasonable to begin a seminary education.
 - vi. In closing, an explicit request that the candidate be approved to move through the endorsement process.
- 4) The Dean will address particular concerns (if any) with the parish priest and will then forward the letter, via email, to the diocesan administration (administration@dosoca.org) with his request that the candidate be permitted to continue with the endorsement process.
- 5) The diocesan administration will review the request and communicate the next steps to the candidate, which would be:
 - a. Notification of next steps in the process, or
 - b. Notification that the request has been denied, and the reasons for the denial (or deferment).
- 6) If approved to continue the sponsoring parish will coordinate with the Diocese of the South to have a psychological evaluation and criminal background check completed at the parish expense before proceeding to the next steps.
- 7) A member of the diocesan administration, the regional Dean and the parish priest will review the results of the psychological assessment. They will decide, at this point, whether to continue through the endorsement process or to deny the request. If the request is denied,

the candidate is entitled to a meeting with the endorsing committee (Diocesan Administration/Dean/Parish Priest) to discuss the reasons why the request was denied.

- 8) If approved to continue through the endorsement process, the diocesan administration will send a questionnaire to the candidate that should be completed and returned to the Diocese for review.
- 9) The application and accompanying personal references, will be reviewed by a member of the diocesan administration, the regional dean and the parish priest, and then an interview with the candidate and his spouse (if applicable) will be scheduled by the diocese.
- 10) Subsequent to the interview with the candidate and his spouse (if applicable), the interviewing committee will either endorse or deny the request to apply to a Diaconal Vocations Program or seminary.
- 11) If the request for endorsement is approved by the committee, the bishop will provide a letter of endorsement to accompany the candidate's application to the Diaconal Vocations Program or seminary as appropriate.