

Metropolis Clusters*

Guidelines

Special Program for the Diaconate

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology

(updated 7/16/09)

The Metropolis Clusters component is administered directly by the local Metropolis under the guidance of the local Metropolitan. The Metropolis Clusters are intended to regularize diaconal liturgical practices within each Metropolis and provide a forum in which the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of students are met.

General Information

The Metropolis Clusters are the vehicle through which the local Metropolitan conveys and imparts the scope and responsibility of the diaconal ministry within his Metropolis. For Metropolises covering relatively small geographical areas, there may be need for only one cluster group to meet periodically at the Metropolis center. For geographically larger Metropolises, regional cluster groups may be needed. The number, organization and frequency of meetings of the cluster group(s) is at the discretion of the Metropolitan, although it is recommended that a diaconal candidate participate in a minimum of two cluster groups during his time as a student in the Special Program for the Diaconate. Each cluster group will provide an organizational framework wherein specialists, theologians, and local clergy can work together to reinforce and enhance students' understanding of core topics and especially liturgical skill proficiency. It is understood that the diaconal candidate, once ordained, will be under the omophorion of the local Metropolitan.

The aims of the cluster group are:

- to develop consistency of approach and method in teaching students core liturgical skills,
- to outline the scope and extent of the diaconal ministry within the local parish and Metropolis,
- to expand students' knowledge of theology,
- to determine, through dialogue, what is the students' current understanding of a particular topic area,
- to provide students' and their families a forum for discussing issues related to clergy life, and
- to provide the opportunity for students to discuss their experiences in "shadowing" their clergy mentor.

Although the number and frequency of meetings of cluster groups is determined by the local Metropolitan, it is expected that a student will have participated in a minimum of two cluster groups during his enrollment in the Special Program for the Diaconate.

* These are general guidelines; local Metropolitans may wish to alter or augment them based on the needs and resources of their metropolis.

The Metropolis Clusters component of the Special Program for the Diaconate is under the direct administration of the local Metropolitan.

Specific Guidelines

1. Length and Frequency of the Metropolis Clusters Component

- The Special Program for the Diaconate is designed to be completed within a period of three years. During this time, it is recommended that a student participate in a minimum of two Metropolis clusters. Each Metropolis will determine the dates and frequency for the Metropolis clusters. It might be beneficial to hold yearly or semi-annually cluster groups at the same time of the year: for example the third weekend in September, or the weekend of the Publican and Pharisee. Given that students are already missing, on average, two weeks of work due to the summer sessions held at Holy Cross, cluster groups might meet on weekends from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon.
- Cluster groups may provide a means for continuing education and training after the student completes the diaconate program. Students who have completed the program and are serving as a deacon could continue to participate in cluster groups for further training and in order to assist those currently in the diaconate program.

2. Intake and Evaluation

- Prior to enrollment in the Special Program for the Diaconate, the parish priest of a prospective student should meet with the Metropolitan to discuss the candidate's calling, character, and possible ministry. This meeting should begin to define, as best as possible, the general parameters of the future diaconal ministry of the student. For example, will the future deacon participate in the administrative or educational aspects of the local parish, the parish's pastoral outreach (e.g. visitations to hospitals, nursing homes, and shut-ins), or will his ministry be focused on assistance at the liturgy and other sacraments (e.g. Holy Unction). The scope of the mentoring program (and thus its flexibility) will depend on the gifts and strengths of the student, the needs of the local parish where the student will be assigned, and the understanding of the diaconal ministry within a given Metropolis.
- Prior to enrollment in the Special Program for the Diaconate, a student and his parish priest will meet with the local Metropolitan to discuss the candidate's calling, the requirements of the program, and the specific expectations of the Metropolitan related to the diaconal ministry within his Metropolis. This meeting should stress that although the Special Program for the Diaconate is designed to meet individual needs of a particular parish, the pastoral placement of the deacon remains the prerogative of the Metropolitan in relation to the overall needs of the Metropolis. Further, this and subsequent meetings, should make clear the scope of the diaconal service in which the prospective candidate can expect to participate. That is, will the student's future diaconal ministry be focused primarily within the context of liturgical service (assisting at divine liturgy and other services); or will the deacon over time assume a wider range of pastoral responsibilities.

3. Liturgical Skills

- The main vehicle for a student to “learn” liturgical practices will be through observation of the liturgy in the altar of one’s home parish. The practicing of liturgical skills will also be carried out under the guidance of the clergy mentor. However, the Metropolis will set the specific liturgical guidelines for the deacon, among which are included, but not limited to, the following:
 - diaconal vesting
 - proskomide and preparation of liturgical vessels
 - proper location of deacon during liturgy
 - diaconal litanies
 - censuring (technique and rubrics)
 - small and great entrances
 - reading of the gospel
 - participation at the anaphora
 - preparation of the eucharistic cup
 - distribution of the eucharist
 - consuming of the gifts
 - proper storing of liturgical vessels

4. Hierarchal Vespers and Liturgy

- Each Metropolis will define how a deacon is to serve at hierarchal vespers and liturgy.

5. Non-Liturgical Ministries

- The scope and range of non-liturgical ministries in which the candidate for the diaconate may participate needs to be determined on an individual basis according to the gifts of the candidate, the needs of a particular parish, and the understanding of the role of the deacon within the Metropolis. Discussion of pastoral skills related to, for example, hospital visitations and shut-ins, may or may not form part of the Metropolis clusters. This is left to the discretion of the local Metropolitan.

6. Clergy Family Issues

- At least one (or part of one) of the Metropolis clusters should be devoted to issues of clergy families. Specifically, what are the expectations of the family of the deacon (spouses and children) in relation to their local parish and the Metropolis as a whole. Is there a “proper conduct” for the deacon and his family? What are the expressed and unexpressed expectations placed upon clergy families?

7. Parish, Metropolis, and Archdiocesan Administration

- At least one (or part of one) of the Metropolis clusters should be devoted to the administration of the Metropolis and its relationship with the local parish and the Archdiocese. Particular attention should be given to the guidelines a deacon must follow in order to attend or serve at a neighboring Orthodox parish. Further, guidelines on how the deacon should deal with the Metropolis need to be articulated. It is paramount that the Metropolis utilize the cluster groups to articulate specific expectations of the ministry of the diaconate within the Metropolis.