

The Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

1025 Michigan Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20017



Military Men Discerning

A Primer for Vocation Directors

The **Vocations Office of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA**, is here to support any military member discerning a priestly vocation, regardless of his desire to serve as a military chaplain.

Please contact us with you questions or concerns.

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Introduction

Vocation Directors frequently come into contact with men on active duty in the military, in college ROTC programs and at military academies who are discerning a priestly vocation and military chaplaincy. These men, though well along in the discernment process, may still be obliged to several years of military service. This Primer provides some initial guidance on the possibilities for an early release in order to enter the seminary.

Definition of Terms

Early Release from Active Duty: Department of Defense Directives allow a military member to be discharged early to pursue his education if he is within 90 days of his normal separation date. Sometimes the service branch will approve an educational discharge request of more than 90 days.

Educational Delay: An Education Delay allows service academy and ROTC graduates and active duty officers to apply for a delay of their Active Duty Service Obligation in order to study for the priesthood and military chaplaincy.

- A Cadet/Midshipman should normally apply for an educational delay at the beginning of his junior year of college.

The Co-Sponsored Seminarian Program is an agreement among the seminarian, his diocese and the AMS whereby the AMS agrees to pay half of the seminarian's expenses while in formation and the seminarian and his home diocese agree that, after three years of priestly ministry, the priest will serve for a minimum of five years as an active duty chaplain.

- While the AMS reserves the right to withdraw its endorsement of a seminarian, all decisions regarding his formation and call to orders are made by his sponsoring diocese.

Chaplain Candidate: The Chaplain Candidate Programs of the Army, Navy and Air Force are for seminary students of any faith preparing for military chaplaincy.

- He must have a bachelor's degree to qualify.
- The seminarian is commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant/Ensign and attends Chaplain School during one summer or part of two summers.
- There are also opportunities for summer ministry with Catholic chaplains both in the States and overseas.
- In order to ensure that they will be accepted as chaplains after ordination, the Archdiocese for the Military (AMS) requires that all Co-Sponsored Seminarians be commissioned as Chaplain Candidates.

Continuity of Service: If an active duty or reserve candidate wishes to serve as a chaplain after ordination it is important to maintain at least a passive membership in the armed forces while in the seminary.

- This is especially true for those men who have been in the military for a number of years and will be returning to active duty as priests in their late 30's or early 40's. Without this continuity he runs the risk of being disqualified for the relatively minor medical issues that often arise at that stage of life.

Possibilities for Early Release

The following is a brief outline of the possibilities for Early Release and/or Educational Delay available to military men discerning a priestly vocation. It is important to realize from the beginning that each branch of the armed forces has a unique culture and way of doing business. What applies to one branch may not apply in the others. In addition, no two cases will be exactly the same, even in the same branch.

Timing and Department of Defense Bureaucracy: All the scenarios listed below take at least eighteen months.

- In each case the first document required by the military is the letter of acceptance from the seminary rector to the candidate
- Both candidate and diocese should be prepared for unforeseen delays when requesting a release from active duty.

Active Duty Enlisted with no Bachelor's Degree approaching the 90 day mark for release from active duty can apply for an Early Release. They are not eligible for the an Educational Delay or the Chaplain Candidate Program but can request a transfer to the Reserves and drill two days a month and two weeks in the summer while attending College Seminary. Once they have a BA they can apply for a commission in the Chaplain Candidate Program.

- In order to apply for an Early Release he must be fully accepted by the diocese and college seminary.
- In some cases it is possible, with the approval of service branch chief, to obtain an unconditional release from service. This, however, will break his continuity of service.

Active Duty Enlisted with Bachelor's Degree can apply for a commission as a Chaplain Candidate. This may or may not involve an educational delay, depending on the amount of specialized training he has received and the current policies of his branch of the military.

- In order to apply for a commission as a Chaplain Candidate he must be fully accepted by the diocese and seminary.

Service Academy & ROTC Scholarship Cadets/Midshipmen: Freshmen and Sophomores are free to leave their respective academies at any time before the first day of class in their junior year without incurring either a service obligation or a financial payback.

- In the case of the Air Force Academy and Air ROTC he can continue in the program and apply for a direct commission as a Chaplain Candidate upon graduation. This includes an Educational Delay with a pay-back of five years of active duty as a chaplain.
- In order to initiate this application he must be fully accepted by the diocese and seminary while still in college.
- Individual ROTC Scholarship Contracts may have different terms regarding financial and service obligations.
- In the Naval ROTC (but NOT the Naval Academy) Midshipmen incur a service obligation at the beginning of their sophomore year.

Service Academy & ROTC Scholarship Cadets/Midshipmen: Juniors and Seniors are committed to at least five years of active duty upon graduation. However, once commissioned they can apply for a transfer to the Chaplain Candidate Program.

- In order to initiate this application he must be fully accepted by the diocese and seminary while still in college.

- This includes an Educational Delay with a pay-back of five years active duty as a chaplain.
- In the case of the Air Force Academy and Air ROTC he can apply for a direct commission as a Chaplain Candidate upon graduation. This includes an Educational Delay with a pay-back of five years of active duty as a chaplain.

Commissioned Officers can apply for a transfer to the Chaplain Candidate Program. This usually involves an Educational Delay, the pay-back depending on the amount of time he has already served.

- In order to initiate this application he must be fully accepted by the diocese and seminary.

Priest Recruiters: Each Chaplain Corps has a Catholic Priest assigned to recruiting both priests and seminarians. They are more than happy to answer your questions specific to their branch of the military.

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