

February 11, 2011
World Day of the Sick

Dear Bishop _____,

On this 2011 World Day of the Sick, the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) joins you in prayer and in the Church's mission to serve with Christ's love all those who are suffering and dying and who seek God's mercy, healing, and compassion.

On behalf of the NACC, I also thank you for your ongoing support of the mission of the NACC and its work to educate, certify and support Catholic priests, sisters, deacons, brothers, and lay people who continue the healing ministry of Jesus in the name of the Church. More than 45 years ago the NACC began its work because of the Catholic bishops' concerns that those responding to the sick, ill, and dying might be well prepared and supported. The NACC continues to prepare and certify those serving in specialized ministry settings, from hospitals to hospices, to provide for the spiritual and sacramental needs of the sick and dying.

The profile of NACC members has changed over the years, reflecting the Church's trends in its parochial life. Twenty years ago, over fifty percent of its members were religious women, twenty-five percent priests, and only seventeen percent lay people. Now nearly half (47 percent) of its members are lay men and women, with religious women (32 percent) and priests (17 percent) comprising nearly half. We rely upon lay people to become certified to meet the spiritual needs of our Catholics, and to assist in arranging for priests to provide for the sacramental needs of our faithful. Becoming "board certified" and maintaining that professional certification are the expectations of the diverse institutions within which our members serve.

The purpose of this communication is twofold: (1) familiarizes you again with the approved NACC Standards for USCCB Commission on Certification and Accreditation (USCCB/CCA), and (2) explains what your endorsement of a lay person or priest means to his/her certification. Included with this letter is a document that outlines in greater detail what qualifications are needed for one to be certified by the NACC.

I am grateful to Archbishop Paul Coakley, our NACC Episcopal Liaison, and the NACC Episcopal Advisory Council (roster included with this letter) for their ongoing direction and leadership to the NACC, and for their review of this letter before sending it to you. They advised that this information would aid your understanding of the role of the NACC and the meaning and purpose of your endorsement of an applicant for certification or renewal of certification.

What does endorsement mean and what is expected of the local ordinary?

In the case of a priest in your (arch) diocese seeking your endorsement, you know whether this priest has faculties to serve therein and you choose to endorse that priest or not. In the case of a lay person, you are asked to consider endorsing that person as a "lay ecclesial health care minister." The term lay ecclesial minister takes its meaning from *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. So what does endorsing a person as a lay ecclesial health care minister through NACC mean?

First of all, the NACC's mission states "to continue the healing ministry of Jesus in the name of the Church." What does *in the name of the Church* mean? In Bishop Dale Melczek's letter to all bishops on May 4, 2004, (copy included with this letter) which asked bishops to endorse lay people as lay ecclesial health care ministers who were being certified, he wrote, "The NACC offers an enormous advantage to the Church in assisting the bishops in the oversight of this vital ministry. It also assures the people whom we serve that those who minister to them on behalf of Jesus and his Church are grounded in Catholic theology, adhere to the 'Ethical and Religious Directives,' and extend the ministry of the Church with the formal approval of the bishop." What Bishop Melczek refers to as "with the formal approval of the bishop" situates the meaning of endorsement.

As a ministry of the Church, our NACC members recognize their call to serve requires a discernment and affirmation process structured by the Church and approved by the bishop(s). The seminary process for priests is clear. In the case of lay people who are considered by the Church for lay ecclesial ministry, this discernment and affirmation process may vary from diocese to diocese.

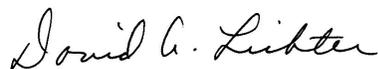
Bishop Melczek's comments cited above refer to NACC's certification process as part of that discernment and affirmation process for our members. Our certification process is intended to provide an *assurance* that our board certified members are prepared for this specialized ministry and will represent the Church.

Your letter of endorsement conveys two messages. First of all, it implicitly is an affirmation of the NACC process that informs you that a person's call and preparation align with the ministerial competencies and expectations found in NACC's USCCB/CCA approved Standards for Certification. Secondly, while endorsement is neither an *authorization* nor an *appointment*, its most common understanding is that it affirms that the person is "in good standing" and has the disposition or character to serve. In most cases in considering whether to endorse a lay person, you rely on the recommendation of the person's pastor. Hopefully, over time you will be able to personally meet with our member to get to know him/her whenever possible.

Some ordinaries delegate this endorsement process to another person in the (arch) diocese; some ordinaries require a meeting with the person requesting endorsement. We respect whatever process the ordinary puts in place. However, your endorsement does not authorize, appoint, or designate someone as an agent or an employee of the (arch) diocese. It does not make the (arch) diocese liable for the chaplain's performance, unless that chaplain is an employee of the (arch) diocese or a diocesan institution like any other employee.

I hope the above information proves helpful to you. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to call me at our office in Milwaukee (414-483-4898). I thank you for your ongoing support of the NACC's mission, and I pledge to you that we will continue to do our best to prepare health care ministers who meet the highest standards to serve the needs of the faithful in your (arch)diocese.

In Christ,



David A. Lichter

Executive Director, NACC