

February 11, 2017  
25<sup>th</sup> World Day of the Sick

NAME  
(ARCH)DIOCESE  
ADDRESS  
CITY, STATE, ZIP

Your Eminence/Excellency,

As in past years, I thank you for your support of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) and our members, on behalf of our members, our USCCB Episcopal Liaison, Bishop Donald Hying, and our Episcopal Advisory Council. Our NACC members throughout the country join you on this World Day of the Sick (WDS) in reflecting on Pope Francis' 2017 WDS message, "*Amazement at what God has accomplished: The Almighty has done great things for me...*" (Lk 1:49). As Pope Francis wrote about how Bernadette felt that "Mary was looking at her as a person. The Lovely Lady spoke to her with great respect and without condescension." Then His Holiness reflects that "This reminds us that every person is, and always remains, a human being, and is to be treated as such. The sick and those who are disabled, even severely, have their own inalienable dignity and mission in life. They never become simply objects. If at times they appear merely passive, in reality that is never the case."

The ministry of our NACC members continues this healing ministry of Jesus to uphold the inviolable sacredness of each person they care for, and advocate for the dignity of humanity. They are grounded in and guided by what is stated in Part Two of your *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care*, caring for all "in need in a way that respects the *human dignity* and *eternal destiny* of all. The Words of Christ have provided inspiration for Catholic health care: "I was ill and you cared for me." (Mt 25:36).

During the USCCB's November 2016 Assembly, our Episcopal Advisor, Bishop Donald Hying, and our Episcopal Advisory Council (list included) met to review NACC's mission, health, and programs and discuss how the NACC can better serve you and Church's pastoral care for sick, aging, and dying. This letter highlights four points from the Council's discussion.

**NACC is providing leadership in preparing and overseeing those providing diverse pastoral care services:** While the NACC has for 50 years educated, certified and supported chaplains and CPE supervisors, we are currently leading a planning process, funded by the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities, to identify and support standards/competencies for those who provide pastoral care in diverse pastoral settings, whether in parishes, health care entities, correctional institutions, long term care settings, or among migrant/immigrant/refugee population. We seek to better support the work of dioceses and other organizations as the Church lives out its mission to provide healing pastoral care for all who are broken and vulnerable, especially the sick, aging, dying. We are collaborating with Catholic ministry associations and the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service in this planning process.

**NACC members are meeting with you in your Provincial meetings**

On April 1, 2016, Bishop Don Hying sent a letter to all Archbishops requesting the opportunity for representatives of NACC to meet with you at one of your Provincial meetings to seek your advice on how best to encourage our Church's priests, deacons, religious, and lay members to consider this ministry of pastoral care, and how NACC can best support those in your diocese who are designated to provide the pastoral care ministry in your parishes. We have successfully begun this process, and have been part of several provincial meetings. We are receiving helpful feedback, as well as learning your concerns. Included with this

letter is a document listing key points from these visits. We are planning to continue in 2017 to continue these visits to the provincial meetings.

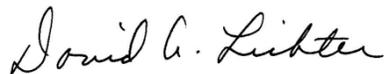
**Our NACC Profile and Implications:** Compared to 20 years ago when NACC's membership profile was 52 % religious, 28 % priests, 16 % lay, and 4 % deacons/brothers, today NACC's profile continues to become more lay person centered as our membership is now 55% lay (40% women, 15% men), 22% sisters, 18% priests, 4% brothers and deacons with 65% board certified, our members decreasing from 3,600 to 2,100. However, our lay member growth (one new member for every two religious women and priests who retire) is too slow to meet the demand for the prepared, certified Catholic ministry presence in health care. While NACC takes the lead to help prepare those to do pastoral care who will never be board certified, too few of board certified Catholic chaplains and lay ecclesial healthcare minister adversely affects the availability of those who can provide the timely counsel for Catholic ethical decision-making, appropriate care for Catholics and their religious needs, and the healing outreach to many who have been at the margins or outside of the Catholic Church and seek, in their time of suffering and confusion, the Church's tenderness and compassion. Through our visits with you, we want to learn ways to make priests, religious, deacons, and lay people aware of this vital ministry, and seek your assistance in helping us to do so.

**Our members are a resource for you:** We are also learning through our visits to your Provincial meetings, that our members can be a resource to you. Besides their service to the Church where they are employed as spiritual care providers and chaplains, they often serve in a variety of volunteer ministry roles. Parishes and diocesan programs utilize our members to form parish ministers in visiting the sick, provide information on advanced directors, conduct bereavement groups, and train permanent deacons in the pastoral care ministry. Please let me know if I can be of assistance to you to communicate with our members on how they could be helpful resources to you and your priests in the Church's pastoral care ministry.

We are again providing you, as ordinary of your (arch) diocese, a list of our members who serve in and are employed by institutions in your (arch) diocese. This list does not include our members who are retired or only reside in your diocese. Please let me ([dlichter@nacc.org](mailto:dlichter@nacc.org)) know if you (or your delegate) see any names that you have questions about or have knowledge about that person that would be helpful to us. We are also including again with this letter a document that explains the nature and purpose of your ecclesial endorsement for our members who are prepared for board certification. We hope it will be helpful to you.

The NACC remains deeply grateful to you for the diverse ways you offer your support of our members in their ministry to the ill, aging, and dying. During our Annual Appeal, many of you also financially support the mission of the NACC, for which we are deeply grateful. If there are other ways, the NACC can be of support to you, please let me know. Please contact me ([dlichter@nacc.org](mailto:dlichter@nacc.org)) or Bishop Donald J. Hying ([bishophying@dcgary.org](mailto:bishophying@dcgary.org)), if you have questions about the work of the NACC, NACC members in your (arch) diocese, or any other concern.

In Christ's service,



David A. Lichter  
Executive Director, NACC

cc: Bishop Donald J. Hying