

February 11, 2016  
24<sup>th</sup> World Day of the Sick



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Your Excellency,

As in past years, on behalf of our members, our USCCB Episcopal Liaison, Bishop Donald Hying, and our Episcopal Advisory Council, I thank you for your support of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) and our members. Our NACC members throughout the country join you on this World Day of the Sick (WDS) in reflecting on Pope Francis' 2016 WDS message, "Entrusting Oneself to the Merciful Jesus like Mary: 'Do whatever he tells you.'" (Jn. 2:5), especially where he wrote, "In Mary's concern we see reflected the tenderness of God. This same tenderness is present in the lives of all those persons who attend the sick and understand their needs, even the most imperceptible ones, because they look upon them with eyes full of love." NACC remains dedicated to educating, certifying, and supporting our members so that they continue the healing ministry of Jesus in the name of the Church with that same love and tenderness.

During the USCCB's November 2015 Assembly, our Episcopal Liaison, Bishop Donald Hying, and our Episcopal Advisory Council (list included) met to review NACC's mission, health, and programs and to discuss how the NACC can better serve you and the Church's pastoral for persons who are sick, aging, and dying, and their families. This letter highlights four points from the Council's discussion.

**NACC Profile and Implications:** Here is a comparison of our membership from 1990s to today:

|              | <b>Sisters</b> | <b>Priests</b> | <b>Laity</b> | <b>Permanent Deacons, Brothers</b> |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>1990s</b> | 50%            | 19%            | 26%          | 5%                                 |
| <b>Today</b> | 23%            | 18%            | 55%          | 4%                                 |

We added 137 new members in 2015:

| <b>Sisters</b> | <b>Priests</b> | <b>Laity</b> | <b>Permanent Deacons</b> |
|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 8%             | 21%            | 65%          | 6%                       |

The 2015 new member profile reflects the trend of recent years with nearly two-thirds of our new members being lay people. While our lay members increase annually, this increase (one new lay member for every two religious women and priests who retire) remains slow, too slow to meet the demand for the prepared, certified Catholic ministry presence in health care that our members provide. At this pace of growth, we will have a serious lack of prepared, certified Catholic chaplains 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 tenderness and compassion that our NACC members can provide. We continue to seek ways to make priests, religious, deacons, and lay people aware of this vital ministry, and we seek your assistance in helping us to do so.

**Our members are a resource for you:** Please know that our members live, worship, and serve with their local parishes and faith communities. 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 advance directives, conduct bereavement groups, and train permanent deacons in the pastoral care ministry. I know our members want to be helpful resources to you and your priests in the Church's pastoral care ministry.

**NACC can offer more 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 exploring how we can 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. As this ministry is provided in a variety of ways and settings, those Catholic members providing this ministry require different levels of competencies and education/formation to develop these competencies. So the NACC seeks to help lead a planning process to help identify sets of standards/competencies, and best practices for preparing those providing the service to ensure the highest quality of pastoral care in our Catholic pastoral care ministry. NACC will work on this project with the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service, and other Catholic ministry associations in the coming months.

**NACC members seek to meet with you:** In the coming months, NACC members will seek to get a few minutes on the agenda of your provincial meeting to update you on the work of NACC and to seek your advice on how we can better promote and support chaplaincy and the pastoral care ministry with you and your diocesan leaders.

We also are again providing you, as ordinary of your (arch)diocese, a list of our members who have reported to us that they serve 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 us know if you (or your delegate) see any names that you have questions about, or have knowledge of, that would be helpful to us.

The NACC remains deeply grateful to the bishops of the Church 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

Enclosure

cc: Bishop Donald J. Hying