NACC and the need for Ecclesial Endorsement for Board Certified Members
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 on opposite side of this document) 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 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.