

February 11, 2020  
World Day of the Sick

Archbishop/Bishop  
Diocese  
Address

Your Excellency,

In Pope Francis' message for this 28th World Day of the Sick, he begins with "*Jesus' words, 'Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.' (Mt 11:28) point to the mysterious path of grace that is revealed to the simple and gives new strength to those who are weary and tired.*" Members of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) are deeply grateful for the gift of serving the Church's mission since 1965. They encounter daily God's mysterious grace of comfort and strength for the sick, aging, dying, imprisoned, and the most vulnerable of our society. The ones they serve experience by our members' ministry the invitation to mercy in Jesus' words, "Come to me."

Our NACC members continue to be grateful for the leadership of our Episcopal Liaison, Bishop Donald Hying, Bishop of Madison Wisconsin. They also value the guidance provided by our Episcopal Advisory Council representing the USCCB as they live out the Church's healing ministry.

In last year's World Day of the Sick letter we shared with you how the NACC along with its Partners in Pastoral Care are strengthening the ministry of pastoral care, not only by certifying priests, religious, deacons, lay men and women to serve in health care and other settings, but also by creating resources and programs to support the formation of the many men and women in your parishes who want to serve the homebound, those in eldercare facilities, hospitals, and prison/correctional settings.

We noted several resources NACC was developing to support those in your diocese who are designated to oversee and/or provide direct pastoral care ministry in your parishes. They include:

- **Sets of competencies for pastoral care.** The initial drafts of the Criminal Justice Ministry Pastoral Care Competencies, Diocesan Pastoral Care Competencies for the Sick, the Homebound and Older Adults, Elder Pastoral Care Competencies and Permanent Deacon Pastoral Care Competencies have been shared with the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification of Ecclesial Ministry and Service (SCEMS). They are now available in both English and Spanish on the NACC website, on our Partners in Pastoral Care webpage.
- **A model of a pastoral care formation program**, entitled the "Pastoral Care Project Booklet," based on the four pillars of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard*. This model includes pathways for formation with suggested content, methodologies and resources for the program. This can also be found on our Partners in Pastoral Care webpage. This document will be translated into Spanish this spring.
- Thirdly, we will be providing **links to current diocesan programs** offering examples of pastoral care formation. Currently, we have on our website, in the Pastoral Care Project Booklet, several appendices with sample programs. We will be adding more as we receive them. We have also begun **a network** for best-practice and resource sharing among those who oversee diocesan pastoral care ministry across the country. We welcome and encourage someone from your diocese to affiliate with this group. Please contact me if you are interested.
- We aspire to create an **on-line training/formation program for pastoral care** that will make it possible for dioceses to access a **national** program, endorsed by the USCCB, that they would be able to create/sustain on their own. These plans are pending funding and partnerships to make this a reality.

We alert you to the many resources available on our Partners in Pastoral Care webpage that provides a background on this work and programs. (<https://www.nacc.org/about-nacc/partners-in-pastoral-care/>).

Also, over the past year the NACC has been partnering with the Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition (CPMC) (<https://www.catholicprisonministries.org/>) to develop a national formation program and credentialing process for those involved in prison/correctional ministries, as well as assisting with building a network among those leading the coordination of these programs in their dioceses. We are grateful for this partnership and hope that you would encourage those involved in prison/correctional/detention ministry in your dioceses to become members of NACC for networking and certification. <https://www.catholicprisonministries.org/training-and-certification>

Finally, the NACC is currently developing pilot projects with select dioceses to determine how to partner with their pastoral care leaders to strengthen and sustain their pastoral care programs. We plan to offer a diocesan membership for networking, program development and support, and a national credentialing for pastoral care. We will communicate with you more about this in the coming months. Bishops of our Episcopal Advisory Council have already expressed their interest in this membership.

Before closing, we make a plea again for your help to communicate the urgent need for men and women to consider this pastoral care ministry as a full-time apostolate. The NACC continues to experience two retirements for every new member who embraces this ministry of pastoral care. Half of our members are age 65 and older. In the past twenty years, while our religious sisters decreased from 1700 to less than 400, and our priests decreased from over 600 to less than 400, our lay men and women have only increased from 980 to 1150, an increase of only 170! Professionally prepared and board-certified priests, religious, permanent deacons, lay men and women are greatly needed to provide 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 who, in their time of suffering and confusion, seek the Church's tenderness and compassion. Through our marketing efforts ([www.ChooseChaplaincy.org](http://www.ChooseChaplaincy.org)) we are striving to create a greater awareness of this calling to the pastoral care ministry, and are encouraging our members to approach their pastors to promote it.

Please remember that our members can be resources for you. While they serve the Church where they are employed as spiritual care providers and chaplains, our NACC members can help prepare parish ministers to visit the sick, as well as provide sessions on advance directives and bereavement. Some assist in the training of permanent deacons in the pastoral care ministry.

With this letter, we again provide you, as ordinary of your (arch) diocese, a list of our members who serve in and/or 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 about whom you have questions or have knowledge that would be helpful to us.

On behalf of the leaders and members of the NACC, we remain deeply grateful to you for your support of the NACC and our members in their ministry to the sick and dying. During our Annual Appeal, many of you financially support the mission of the NACC. We are deeply grateful.

If there are other ways the NACC can support you, please let me know. Please contact me ([dlichter@nacc.org](mailto:dlichter@nacc.org)) or Bishop Donald J. Hying ([Donald.Hying@madisondiocese.org](mailto:Donald.Hying@madisondiocese.org)) if you have questions about the work of the NACC, NACC members in your (arch) diocese, or any other concern.

In the words of Pope Francis, "To the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, I entrust all those who bear the burden of illness, along with their families and all healthcare workers." NACC members join in that prayer of entrustment and are committed to work with you to be instruments of Jesus' peace and comfort to the most vulnerable.

In Christ's service,



David A. Lichter  
Executive Director, NACC

cc: Bishop Donald J. Hying

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