

Questions/Answers from September 8 NACC Virtual Town Hall

1. Will any of these changes impact the process of certification?
Anita Houghton and Jeanine Annunziato continue to look for ways to streamline the Certification and Renewal of Certification process to make it more accessible to current and aspiring Chaplains seeking certification. We continue to work with our strategic partners to maintain a professional certification process and complete ongoing review of our common competencies.
2. What areas will be a challenge with these changes to NACC.
The recent changes to the NACC infrastructure will present opportunities for growth and development. We have an opportunity to share our story in new ways by utilizing new technology, growing our media platforms, expanding our reach beyond healthcare, and empowering our members to share the joy of chaplaincy.
3. Are there any questions or issues pertaining to the NACC that will be addressed by the upcoming synod?
The number one issue that was surfaced out of the NACC Synodal process was access to Sacraments. Our chaplains work diligently and tirelessly to meet the Sacramental needs of the people we serve, but there are often times when a priest is unavailable, so many Catholics facing some of the most difficult transitions of their lives go without Sacraments.
We invite our members to prayerfully participate in the upcoming Synodal gathering.
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/09/08/230908e.html>
4. Since ordination is required to serve as a military, fire dept or police chaplain, does or will the NACC support the restoration of women to the diaconate so we can serve in those chaplain roles?
The NACC does not have a role in the decision to ordain women to the diaconate. There are restrictions to who can serve as a chaplain in the military. This is not necessarily true in our prisons. Lay men and women are allowed to serve as chaplains in our prisons, jails, immigration facilities, Federal Detention Centers, First Responder ministries, Port ministries, etc.
5. As much as I feel sad for Phil's departure, I am all for cyber security especially in this day and age. In a time when cybercrime is significant, especially amongst our healthcare facilities, we must take all necessary precautions to protect the information and data of our members. In order to do this well, we needed to hire a team of professionals who keep the NACC data secure, support our technology needs, and back up our data regularly.
6. Has there been any significant effort to engage/utilize Catholic Radio. In Santa Cruz the Station 1200AM is a very theologically conservative station. The shows are mostly apologetic and dogmatic question and answer. It would be great to have NACC influence in theological scope and to share stories. Wondering if there is anyone who has radio show interest to offer stories of chaplain engagement, ethical issues, etc., from a more theologically broad perspective.
The NACC has been invited to participate in a handful of radio interviews this year. We have also been interviewed by local and national magazines and other media platforms. One of our major goals in the coming year is to better utilize all our communication platforms, continuing to reach out to local and national Catholic radio and TV stations, grow our presence on social media, enhance our website and begin a Podcast. Much of our success will depend on our members and their ability to help us spread our story by connecting us with local and national media partners.

7. What does the Board feel is the primary reason for decline in membership over the last 15 years? The NACC experiencing a decline in membership is similar to that of our Catholic parishes and organizations. A significant make-up of our membership for years were religious sisters who have diminished greatly over the past 60 years. We must move forward by growing the lay presence in our organization, being active in recruiting, and fostering the vocation of chaplaincy among our young adults and growing ethnic communities.
8. Is NACC decline in membership consistent with the experience of other certification organizations? Are 4 Unit CPE graduates being hired without certification? Do employers care whether chaplains are certified?
Many healthcare providers, especially our Catholic Systems, require board certification for employment. We are being invited to look at other levels of certification, especially for people serving in areas of ministry outside of healthcare (e.g., correctional facilities, first responder ministry, work with the unhoused, etc.). We have restructured the Certified Associate Chaplain which required 2 units of CPE, a Bachelor's degree and 18 credits of post-graduate work (which includes the diaconate formation and other faith based programs). We want to continue to grow professional chaplaincy while inviting new members into our organization with varying levels of certification requirements. There are also wonderful non-certified chaplains in our communities.
9. I think there are many priests also serving as chaplains that are not connected to the NACC and don't necessarily see value in it. They would see value if they knew more about it and could find value in the quality webinars and educational opportunities NACC provides and the fellowship. Perhaps reaching out Bishops and clergy vicars to invite activate priest chaplains to get involved.
We continue to work with our bishops and clergy to grow their understanding of chaplaincy and how it benefits the local and national church. We will work with our Episcopal Liaison and our Episcopal Advisory Council to continue to educate and advocate for the work of chaplaincy. We are working to grow our Catholic Partners in Pastoral Care program, which will be specifically developed to provide training and support to pastoral volunteer, staff and clergy in dioceses and other Catholic organizations. We hope this program will help us better articulate the role of the chaplain and their value to the church as a whole. It will take time and patience, but we are optimistic in our growing relationship with the local and national church.
10. Will there be more efforts with State Liaison and local "chapter" type gatherings?
Yes! The board has surfaced State and Regional Liaisons as a priority to evaluate, restructure and grow. This model has the opportunity to offer tremendous support to new and experienced members. Again, this will be an area of the organization that can only grow with the support of our members.
11. How can the rapport between the diaconate ministry and board certified chaplaincy be improved? My experience with deacons who are not as highly educated as most chaplains, is that they have little to no understanding of a chaplain's skill set and sense of security in their own, that rather than seek to collaborate they tend to compete or minimize and show little respect of how we could work in the unity of the body of Christ for the betterment of the parish.
This is a primary initiative for the NACC in the coming year. One of the reasons for restructuring the Certified Associate Chaplain is to provide an opportunity for deacons to engage with professional chaplaincy. We will be presenting at the National Association of Deacon Directors in the spring, and we will be actively reaching out to 10 of the strongest diaconal programs in the country to begin promoting chaplaincy.
- Most deacons must complete 4 to 5 years of formation (including aspirancy and candidacy). If dioceses are following the updated National Directory for the Formation, Ministry, and Life of

Permanent Deacons in the United States, the deacon will have accomplished the work equivalent to a Master's Degree. We want to encourage our deacon formation programs to include at least 1 or 2 units of CPE during formation (or at least provide it as an option) so deacons can become Certified Chaplains upon ordination.

12. Based on a previous webinar, the average age of our membership is 64. Chaplaincy is one of the fields where age can be an advantage because of accumulated life experiences that are conducive to making connection to older hospitalized patients. The marketing efforts to recruit young chaplains might help the organization to survive. Will it change the essence of the practice of chaplaincy? Alternatively, should we push for chaplain candidates who are looking for a second or third life career (like many of us)?

We need to continue to grow chaplaincy as a second and third career, but we must be intentional and invest resources into building chaplaincy as a first career. It is the responsibility of all of our members to invite, help mentor, and support a new generation of chaplains.

13. On www.indeed.com you can set up search for chaplain jobs near you and indeed will send you emails several times per week with openings. Most positions are in hospice care.

We do encourage our members to utilize the professional sites available to them to help grow their careers in chaplaincy such as Indeed.com, Linked-In, etc.

14. If I had known about chaplaincy in my early twenties, I would have explored it. I started when I was 35 and still at it. JVC and other young adult groups will be important going forward.

Part of our initiative to reach out to new members is to be intentional about engaging organizations with young adults such as JVC, FOCUS, etc.

15. I value the great questions and key clarity about lists of opportunities and numbers along with engagement of emerging chaplaincy areas for those in advocacy of chaplaincy, emerging research and exciting growth in the field beyond the walls and in areas of environmental stewardship of chaplaincy, World Health Organization and CMS acknowledging Spiritual wellbeing.

The exciting news to share is that chaplaincy is growing, and it is expanding beyond healthcare into fields we couldn't have imagined when the NACC first started. We serve people on the margins, in corporate settings, on the sports field, secular and religious. We need to recruit so we can provide the chaplains needed in so many fields of ministry.