



Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service
Committee on Catholic Education

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Certification Approval Handbook

“Ministry is diverse and, at the same time, profoundly relational. This is so because ministry has its source in the triune God and because it takes shape within the Church understood as a communion. Ministerial relationships are grounded first in what all members of Christ’s Body have in common. Through their sacramental initiation all are established in a personal relationship with Christ and in a network of relationships within the communion of the People of God. The personal discipleship of each individual makes possible a community of disciples formed by and for the mission of Christ. The further development and ordering of right relationships among those called to public ministries is done with a view to enabling all the disciples to realize their calling to holiness and service.”

- *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, p. 21

“Regardless of how the desire to invest a significant part of one’s life in some form of ecclesial ministry develops, that desire deserves the support of the whole Church.... Lay ecclesial ministers, just like the ordained, need and deserve formation of high standards, effective methods, and comprehensive goals.”

- *Co-Workers*, pp. 28, 33

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	iii
Mission Statement.....	v
Website	v
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 About this Handbook	1
1.2 Audience for Whom this Handbook is Intended	1
1.3 Review and Revision of This Handbook	1
1.4 Scope of Approval of Certification Standards and Procedures	1
1.5 Staff for the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service ..	2
1.6 Clarifying USCCB Subcommittee Approval of Certification and Standards.....	2
1.7 Clarifying USCCB Subcommittee Approval of Certification Standards for Specialized Ministers	2
1.8 Focus of This Handbook.....	2
1.9 Resources	2
2.0 Benefits of Life-Long Ministry Formation & Certification.....	4
2.1 Benefits to the Church in the United States	4
2.2 Benefits to Provinces, Regions, and State Catholic Conferences	5
2.3 Benefits to the Local Church	6
2.4 Benefits to Academic Institutions	7
2.5 Benefits to Mentors of Candidates for Certification	8
2.6 Benefits to Lay Ecclesial Ministers.....	8
2.7 Benefits to Agencies, Institutions, and Church Communities	9
3.0 Submitting Certification Standards and Procedures.....	11
3.1 Establishing a Relationship with the USCCB Office of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (USCCB Office).....	11
3.2 Gathering Initial Documentation	12
3.3 Peer Review	14
3.4 USCCB Subcommittee Review and Decision	15
3.5 Diocesan or National Organization Response to Major Required Changes, Recommendations, or Delay / Denial of Approval.....	17

3.6	Periodic & Statistical Reports.....	18
3.7	Periodic Review Process for Re-Approval.....	19
3.8	Withdrawal of Approval	21
3.9	Procedures Regarding Compliance with Approved Standards and Procedures.....	22
4.0	Required Documentation	23
	As noted in Section 3.2.1, the documentation required may be submitted in other media formats, provided all the information requested is accessible and clearly presented.	23
4.1	Table of Contents	23
4.2	For Diocesan Offices	23
4.3	For National Organizations.....	26
5.0	USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service Standards for Specialized Ecclesial Ministers	30
5.1	Mission	30
5.2	Standard One: Human	30
5.3	Standard Two: Spiritual.....	32
5.4	Standard Three: Intellectual.....	34
5.5	Standard Four: Pastoral.....	35
6.0	Fees.....	37
6.1	Fees for a Diocesan Office / Catholic Conference.....	37
6.2	Fees for an Organization of Specialized Ministers with Certification Standards and Procedures Approved by the USCCB Subcommittee	39
6.3	Adjustment of Fees.....	40
6.4	Extensions.....	41
7.0	Policies and Procedures of the USCCB Subcommittee.....	42
7.1	Certification Standards and Procedures for a Specialized Ministry	42
7.2	Revision of this <i>Certification Approval Handbook</i>	42
7.3	Listing of Approved Programs and Organizations and Those Preparing for Approval on the USCCB website.....	42
7.4	Location of the USCCB Office of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service.....	42
Appendix 1:	Glossary.....	43
	Glossary Grid #1: Distinctions between Accreditation, Certification and Approval.....	56
	Glossary Grid #2: Distinctions - Endorsement, Appointment, Commissioning and Authorization.....	61

Appendix 2: Sample Codes of Ethics Statements from Members of the Alliance for Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers63

 National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM) – Revised 201863

 National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry – Revised 201865

Appendix 3: History of the Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service68

Appendix 4: Letter from Bishop Dale Melzcek Regarding the Use of the Term “Chaplains” in Reference to Lay Ecclesial Ministers – May 7, 2004.....69

Appendix 5: NACC and the need for Ecclesial Endorsement for Board Certified Members: What does endorsement mean and what is expected of the local ordinary? (2019).....70

Mission Statement

The Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service¹ assists the bishops in establishing, reviewing, and approving certification standards and procedures to be used on a voluntary basis by arch/dioceses² and national organizations in the certification of specialized ecclesial ministers. It also offers consultative services aimed at improving the quality of lay ministry formation programs that are sponsored by dioceses and academic institutions.

Website

Details about the subcommittee, including current members, contact information, a copy of this *Handbook* and other materials can be found at <https://usccb.org/certification>. For additional information, contact the Office of Certification at certification@usccb.org.

¹ In this document, the name “USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service” is frequently shortened to “USCCB Subcommittee,” “Subcommittee on Certification,” or simply “the Subcommittee.”

² In this document, the term ‘diocese’ and all other versions of the term will refer to both dioceses and archdioceses. The term ‘bishop’ refers to both bishops and archbishops.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 About this Handbook

This handbook outlines the steps involved in the application process, the certification standards, policies and procedures for compliance and approval by the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service. It describes and enumerates the standards and other documentation which need to be submitted for initial and periodic reviews.

This handbook also includes information about reports that directors will need to prepare for the USCCB Subcommittee and other related means of updating the USCCB Subcommittee after initial and periodic approval of certification.

There is no copyright on this or other publications of the USCCB Subcommittee. Therefore, executive and diocesan directors may copy materials in this handbook as needed.

1.2 Audience for Whom this Handbook is Intended

The material in the *Certification Approval Handbook* is intended for executive directors of national organizations, directors of diocesan offices, certification committees, assessment committees, and subcommittees of directors. National organizations include both national Catholic organizations of ecclesial ministers for a specialized ministry and Catholic state organizations developing and overseeing certification standards and procedures for the archdioceses within a given state.

National organizations and diocesan offices who wish to certify ecclesial ministers for a specific ministry submit their certification standards and procedures for approval according to the policies in this *Certification Approval Handbook*.

1.3 Review and Revision of This Handbook

The USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service reserves the right to revise, supplement, or rescind any policies or portions of the handbook from time to time as it deems appropriate, in its sole and absolute discretion. A complete evaluation process for updating the *Handbook* occurs when deemed appropriate by the USCCB Subcommittee.

1.4 Scope of Approval of Certification Standards and Procedures

The USCCB Subcommittee only approves diocesan certification standards and procedures for diocesan offices, national organizations of specialized ministers listed in *The Official Catholic Directory*, and national organizations sponsored by state Catholic conferences. Diocesan offices, national organizations of ecclesial ministers, and state Catholic conferences with approved certification standards and procedures are listed in the *USCCB Subcommittee Directory*, which is available on the subcommittee section of the USCCB website at usccb.org/certification.

1.5 Staff for the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service

The Assistant Director for Certification of Ecclesial Ministry and an administrative assistant in the Secretariat of Catholic Education serve on behalf of the USCCB Subcommittee and support its mission and mandate. Upon invitation, and in keeping with the collaborative nature of the work, the assistant director provides consultation and workshops on the process for the approval of diocesan and national organization certification standards and procedures. The office also engages in promotional efforts related to ministry formation for specialized roles.

1.6 Clarifying USCCB Subcommittee Approval of Certification and Standards

The USCCB Subcommittee **approves** certification standards and procedures voluntarily submitted by dioceses or national organizations. The organization or diocese **certifies**. Lay ecclesial ministers who have proven that they have the competencies required by specialized certification standards are granted a professional certification by their national organizations or diocese. Their certificate states that they are granted certification under the USCCB-approved certification standards and procedures **for (a) particular specialized ministry role(s)**.

1.7 Clarifying USCCB Subcommittee Approval of Certification Standards for Specialized Ministers

The USCCB Subcommittee does **not** approve certification standards and procedures for a generic category often termed “lay ecclesial ministers” or “lay ecclesial ministries.” The USCCB Subcommittee approves certification standards and procedures for lay ecclesial ministers who serve in ministry specializations such as campus ministers, hospital chaplains and pastoral care ministers, prison ministers, diocesan directors of worship, parish directors of liturgy, parish life coordinators, parish business managers, parish catechetical leaders, parish directors of evangelization, family life ministers, directors of music ministries, pastoral associates, pastoral ministers, and youth ministry leaders.³ National organizations certify their members according to specialized certification standards and procedures approved by the USCCB Subcommittee under the title of the certification candidate’s area of ministry specialization.

1.8 Focus of This Handbook

These guidelines are intended for national organizations and dioceses that voluntarily choose to submit standards and procedures for approval by the USCCB Subcommittee. The focus of this handbook is to provide dioceses and national organizations with a list of the steps and documentation needed to submit a complete request for approval to the USCCB Subcommittee.

1.9 Resources

³ A complete list is available on the [Subcommittee section of the USCCB website](#).

The USCCB Office of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (hereafter “Office of Certification”) has provided steps and checklists for the processes of opening a file with the USCCB Subcommittee and gaining initial approval. The USCCB Office also provides downloadable templates of all sections of the required documentation to assist in the preparation of the documents. These can be accessed via an online file sharing service made available to dioceses or organizations who have officially opened a file with our office. The assistant director and the office staff are also available to further resource dioceses and national organizations in their preparation through consultations, site visits, or responses to any any questions. Current contact information is available on the [subcommittee section of the USCCB website](#) and in this handbook.

2.0 Benefits of Life-Long Ministry Formation & Certification

While the certification of ecclesial ministers⁴ in professional roles involves a specific procedure guided by established standards and competencies, the procedure is designed to be indicative of an integral process of life-long ministry formation. It is a common practice in most areas of professional competence that learning does not conclude with the formal granting of a credential needed to be an acknowledged competent practitioner in one's field. Rather, professional competence is usually self-assessed by the practitioner and trusted peers on a regular basis. This endeavor usually requires the practitioner to engage in a regular process of updating their education and competencies in certain skills, often in response to important developments in their fields of expertise. This process of renewal enables the practitioner to better evaluate their own progress within their field and enables others to objectively assess their professional growth.

Just as this process is a common best practice in multiple fields, it is that much more valuable in the field of ministry according to the model and pattern of the Gospel and in the name of the whole church. In the case of the formation and certification of both lay and ordained ecclesial ministers, the initial procedure of certification and subsequent re-certifications are in the service of this life-long professional development and formation. As a result, both life-long formation and certification offer significant benefits to the national and local church, academic institutions, the candidates themselves, lay ecclesial ministers as a whole, as well as to agencies, institutions and church communities.

2.1 Benefits to the Church in the United States

Certified lay ecclesial ministers contribute to the continued growth and definition of the rightful position of the lay ecclesial ministry in the Church. This responds to a need identified in *Parishes and Parish Ministers: A Study of Lay Ministry* (National Pastoral Life Center, 1999),⁵ reiterated in *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions* (NCCB/USCC, 1999),⁶ and reemphasized in *Co-Workers in*

⁴ In this section, the presentation of the specific benefits of lifelong formation and certification are presented with specific reference to "lay ecclesial ministry." This is done to recognize that a large majority of certification and formation materials presented in this *Handbook* focuses on the development of those laity who serve in ministerial leadership roles in the church. This convention is not meant to diminish the reality of ordained leaders and those in institutes of consecrated life who are also called to the tasks of lifelong formation, and who also may be certified for professional specialized ministerial roles. The use of the term "ecclesial ministry" is often also used in this document to express the need for professional development, formation and certification for specialized roles in ministry for both laity and clergy. However, in places where the term "lay ecclesial ministry" is specifically used the information can equally be applied to ordained leaders and those in consecrated life as well.

⁵ Philip J. Murnion and David DeLambo, *Parishes and Parish Ministers: A Study of Lay Ministry* (New York: National Pastoral Life Center, 1999)

⁶ A Report of the Subcommittee on Lay Ministry, *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1999)

the Vineyard of the Lord (USCCB, 2005; hereafter cited as *Co-Workers*).⁷ Certified lay ecclesial ministers also help Catholic Church entities to be in compliance with norms and guidelines for formation as stated in *The Code of Canon Law* and *Co-Workers*: “Lay persons who devote themselves permanently or temporarily to some special service of the Church are obliged to acquire appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly and to carry it out conscientiously, zealously, and diligently.”⁸

2.2 Benefits to Provinces, Regions, and State Catholic Conferences

When provinces, regions, and state Catholic conferences work together toward certification, all can benefit from and promote the following values as stated in *Co-Workers*: “Whenever possible, provinces or regions can develop consistent certification standards and procedures so that lay ecclesial ministers might transfer from one diocese to another in the region with the approval of the sending and receiving bishops.”⁹

Certification promotes collaboration and cooperation among dioceses within provinces and regions and statewide Catholic conferences through utilization of the common certification standards and specialized competencies published by the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers (hereafter referred to as the Alliance).¹⁰

In the fall of 2018, the Alliance received reapproval from the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service for its revised standards for lay ecclesial ministers. The standards were written collaboratively by the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC), the National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM), the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), the National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM), and the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM). These common certification standards and specialized competencies offer direction to the future of lay ecclesial ministry in the church, recognizing and affirming those already in ministry, and promoting faithful and competent lay ecclesial ministers who are accountable to standards and to the diocese or organization that certifies them.

USCCB Subcommittee standards require diocesan offices and national organizations to provide verification that the assessment of specialized ministers seeking certification is based on the

⁷ USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005). This document is available for free download in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

⁸ *Code of Canon Law, Latin-English Edition*, New English Translation (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1999), *Code of Canon Law*, c. 231, §1 and *Co-Workers*, 33.

⁹ *Co-Workers*, 57.

¹⁰ Visit the website of the Alliance website for additional information: www.lemcertification.org.

competencies outlined by the Alliance. Hence these standards serve as *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministry (NCS)*. The Alliance website and the USCCB Subcommittee website are the primary tools for making the national certification process accessible to lay ministers across the country. All materials pertaining to the standards and certification process are available on these websites.

2.3 Benefits to the Local Church

Certification is a process that enables diocesan officials to formally identify and authorize lay people for key positions and major leadership roles for specialized ecclesial ministries. Diocesan directors offer vital support to parishes by assisting them in the identification of the need for, and availability of, certified lay ecclesial ministers with specialized competencies. As stated in *Co-Workers*, “A diocese must first identify those roles that, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop, are so essential to collaborating in the pastoral care of people that diocesan policies are needed to ensure that those who are given these roles have the appropriate education, formation, experience, and ecclesial recognition to meet the needs of the community.”¹¹

The USCCB Subcommittee provides the directors of diocesan and organizational programs the resources to assess the competency of candidates for levels of academic formation and skills training required of certified ministers. For dioceses, this assessment can be based on certification standards developed directly by the diocese or correlated in some way to the certification programs in place with national organizations, depending on the specialized competencies needed for the ministers in the diocese. Diocesan office directors, as agents of their bishops, are enabled to provide clear standards for formation that fit the needs and special circumstances of the local church as stated in *Co-Workers*:

The publication *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers Serving as Parish Catechetical Leaders, Youth Ministry Leaders, Pastoral Associates, and Parish Life Coordinators*¹² addresses these and related qualities as they are developed through ministry formation programs. The standards are a resource that can be helpful in identifying prospective lay ecclesial ministers as well as in setting goals for the formation and certification of those who are completing programs.

The diocese can establish a program that candidates must complete prior to consideration for service within the diocese.¹³

¹¹ *Co-Workers*, 56.

¹² The most recent version of these standards can be accessed at the [website of the Alliance](#).

¹³ *Co-Workers*, 30, 56-57.

Certification testifies that lay ecclesial ministers have received the appropriate formation required to enable them to be competent ministers in the area of specialization for which they are prepared. The certification of lay ecclesial ministers may also provide legal safeguards for both new and existing individual lay ecclesial ministers and diocesan parish communities. *Co-Workers* points out the importance of formation in this manner:

Ensuring the quality of pastoral care provided by lay ecclesial ministers requires a process for deciding that a given candidate has the education, formation, and professional skills necessary to serve in a particular role. This involves establishing the requirements for education, formation, and experience for specific ministerial roles and evaluating the extent to which individuals meet these requirements. This may vary from diocese to diocese, but the competence of those who serve needs to be verified in some way.

The diocesan bishop has several options for setting certification requirements. Some examples for specific ministry roles can be found in the certification standards established by national associations serving lay ministers in general or role-specific sub-groups¹⁴

The approval of these standards is overseen by the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service.

Diocesan directors can benefit from the assessment process of candidates. This process will assist them in responding to the continuing education and formation needs of the lay ecclesial ministers. This ongoing process will ultimately establish clearer standards of ministry competence and accountability for specialized ministries. *Co-Workers* provides the following criteria to help guide this process: “Among the criteria the diocese might use in deciding how flexible these requirements can be are the availability of existing formation programs within the diocese or region, the financial and personnel resources of the diocese, the size and location of the diocese, and changing pastoral needs. In all cases, the requirements should be clearly stated and readily accessible to those interested in preparing for lay ecclesial ministry and to those who lead existing programs.”¹⁵

2.4 Benefits to Academic Institutions

The process of certifying lay ecclesial ministers will enhance collaborative efforts between programs of formation. Academic institutions can benefit from the national certification standards for lay ecclesial ministers because these standards provide a framework to demonstrate how their programs of study assists candidates in the process of certification. It is valuable for academic organizations to consider how their own programs align with these standards as they continue to develop and how

¹⁴ Ibid., 56.

¹⁵ Ibid. This list should be seen as descriptions of examples, but not exhaustive of options in the implementation of standards of competence and accountability.

they might promote the value of standards and certification in ministry roles to their students. Certification also provides a common language for dialogue and collaboration between diocesan office personnel and faculty members, as well as national ministry organizations, all of whom are responsible, in different but related ways, for providing programs for the formation of lay ecclesial ministers.

2.5 Benefits to Mentors of Candidates for Certification

Certification includes the opportunity for mentors to guide candidates through the process of certification. Mentors nurture and foster discipleship with those lay ecclesial ministers who are candidates for certification. Mentors also benefit from the process of guiding certification candidates. Both mentors and candidates benefit from the experiences of reciprocity and mutual support. As stated in *Co-Workers*:

Mentoring, formal or informal, can be especially helpful. An experienced Church minister introduces the prospective lay minister into the ministerial workplace. A mentor passes on more than skills. He or she presents an understanding of the particular culture in which the ministry will take place, including the challenges and the opportunities. The mentor helps the prospective minister to develop realistic expectations about ministry, including the limits of what can be accomplished. This can prevent the burnout that results when actual experience fails to meet expectations. By sharing their own stories of progress and accomplishments, sacrifices and frustrations, mentors prepare new ministers to make an informed commitment to ministry.¹⁶ (29-30)

2.6 Benefits to Lay Ecclesial Ministers

Certification recognizes lay ecclesial ministers as professional and competent in their respective areas of specialization. Certification also provides the minister with one of the primary acknowledgements that he or she is able to perform specified duties in a ministerial role(s) with demonstrated professionalism and competence. Certification is also frequently necessary for the authorization by local church authority (e.g. a bishop) as a co-worker in the ministry of a diocese. Such authorization is, in turn, a vital element of affirming the value and capabilities of the lay ecclesial minister. According to *Co-Workers*, “Most importantly, the authorization process can provide occasions for the bishop to demonstrate his support for the lay ecclesial ministers of his diocese and to model collaboration with them as his lay co-workers.”¹⁷ (60)

The specific vocation of lay ecclesial ministers and their authorization by the diocesan bishop is emphasized in *Co-Workers*:

¹⁶ *Co-Workers*, 29-30.

¹⁷ *Co-Workers*, 60.

While all members of the lay Christian faithful work to further the Church’s mission, some are entrusted with certain offices and roles connected to the ministry of the ordained pastors. The lay women and men who are given these responsibilities are not only distinguished by particular gifts and a willingness to serve the Church—these qualities could apply to all the laity—but are also responding to a call to work in greater collaboration with ordained ministers.

They are authorized by ecclesial authorities to carry out certain ministerial responsibilities in public service of the local church.

Authorization is the process by which properly prepared lay men and women are given responsibilities for ecclesial ministry by competent Church authority. This process includes the following elements: acknowledgment of the competence of an individual for a specific ministerial role (often called “certification”); appointment of an individual to a specific position (in some dioceses called “commissioning”), along with a delineation of the obligations, responsibilities, and authority of that position (and length of term, if specified); and finally an announcement of the appointment to the community that will be served by the lay ecclesial minister. (54)

The process of receiving initial certification and then maintaining that certification through periodic renewal challenges lay ecclesial ministers to greater authenticity and integrity. Certification offers a way of documenting credibility and becomes part of the resume of the lay ecclesial minister. The process of certification also provides candidates with the opportunity to reflect on their specialized ministries, engage in self-analysis, and benefit from assessment by their peers, whether they are just beginning or are experienced in their ministry. As noted in *Co-Workers*, “Throughout the discernment process a person needs to ask: What talents, virtues, and limits do I possess that indicate my ability to serve God’s people through a commitment to lay ecclesial ministry? Lay persons with a call to lay ecclesial ministry possess certain dispositions, which are further developed during the formal preparation process.” (30)

This process also provides candidates with a context for ongoing assessment and formation. It emphasizes the need for lifelong intellectual learning and spiritual formation as essential components during the process of initial certification and renewal of certification.

2.7 Benefits to Agencies, Institutions, and Church Communities

Certification of lay ecclesial ministers benefits agencies, institutions, and church communities by ensuring a higher quality of ministry for the people they serve. Both lay ecclesial ministers and those to whom they minister benefit from ongoing effective ministry, and those served value those certified as a vital part of their communities. As the number of certified lay ecclesial ministers increases, both ministers and those to whom they minister benefit from the additional spiritual resources available to them. Certification reinforces higher expectations on the part of all. Certified ecclesial ministers are challenged to deliver quality service and sustained excellence as they fulfill their responsibilities. Agencies, institutions, and church communities have confidence that certified

lay ecclesial ministers are responsible agents of the church and are qualified to serve in the specialized ministry for which they have been certified.

3.0 Submitting Certification Standards and Procedures

3.1 Establishing a Relationship with the USCCB Office of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (USCCB Office)

3.1.1 *Requirements for Seeking Approval*

Diocesan offices shall seek a letter of approval from their local ordinary to open a certification file for a specialized ministry with the USCCB Subcommittee. Templates for such letters can be provided by the USCCB Office of Certification.

National organizations shall meet the following requirements before opening a file with the USCCB Subcommittee:

3.1.1.1 The organization shall be listed in *The Official Catholic Directory* (P.J. Kenedy & Sons).

3.1.1.2 The organization shall be incorporated as a not-for-profit organization.

3.1.1.3 The Executive Director shall seek approval from the organization's board of directors.

3.1.2 *Opening a Certification File*

After authorization is received, directors or executive directors shall contact the USCCB Office staff stating that the diocesan office or national organization is seeking approval for its certification standards and procedures from the USCCB Subcommittee. The letter should indicate the specific roles which the program or organization is offering certification. After receiving the statement from the director, the USCCB Office staff will provide access to a shared online file repository which will include online forms, documentation templates, submitted documentation, etc.; and a fee schedule. This repository will be used for the Office of Certification and the program or organization to share files during and after the approval process. After receiving these resources, the organization or diocese takes the following actions:

3.1.2.1 The director/ executive director and all individuals who will be involved in the certification process review the *Certification Approval Handbook* and other materials.

3.1.2.2 The director/ executive director completes the application form provided by the office. The form will ask for a PDF version of a letter of approval from either the local ordinary or Board of Directors.

3.1.2.3 The director or executive will receive an invoice from the USCCB Office for the fee to open a file with the USCCB Subcommittee (Filing Fee). A check for the fee must be received in the Office of Certification no more than 60 days after the invoice date. (More information on fees and fee schedules can be found in Section 6.0 of this handbook.)

3.1.2.4 Certification files remain open until written notification is received in the Office of Certification from directors to close the file, or the USCCB Subcommittee determines to do so based on its policies.

3.1.2.5 Diocesan offices or national organizations who have opened a file and are preparing to submit certification documentation for approval, as well as those already approved, are listed on the USCCB Subcommittee website (usccb.org/certification).

3.1.3 *Forming a Certification Commission/Committee*

The mandate of the diocese or national organization certification commission/committee shall be to oversee the self-study process involving the examination, review, formulation and ongoing revision of certification standards and procedures in an effort to base the standards and procedures on the USCCB Subcommittee certification standards found in Section 5.0 of this handbook.

3.2 **Gathering Initial Documentation**

3.2.1 *Required Documentation / Information*¹⁸

All diocesan programs and organizations seeking approval of certification standards are required to submit detailed information about their formation and certification programs according to the guidelines indicated below. Templates and samples are provided by the Office of Certification. If there is a need or desire to submit this information in ways which complement written documentation (e.g. training / descriptive videos, audio, etc.) these items can be submitted as well. The documentation can be adapted based on the needs of the diocese or organization, and other types of media can also be substituted for written documentation, provided that the information covered in them meets the requirements stated below. The Office of Certification is available for consultation on these adaptations to assist dioceses and organizations in completing their documentation.

3.2.1.1 Part One shall contain information about the diocese and the diocesan office or the national organization mission, staff, certification commission, committees, interview teams, etc. that assess the competencies of specialized ministers, diocesan or organization requirements established for applying for initial and renewal of certification, ongoing formation events sponsored by the office or organization, and other pertinent information.

Evidence that the diocese or eparchy is in compliance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*¹⁹ including such items as:

¹⁸ A full explanation of each of these parts of the Documentation can be found in Section 4.0.

¹⁹ For information on the Charter and compliance resources, visit the [section of the USCCB website for the Committee on Child and Youth Protection](#).

- Copy of the diocesan policies and procedures in accord with ARTICLE 2²⁰ of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.
- Evidence that the diocese or eparchy is in compliance with Article 12²¹ of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* and maintains “safe environment” programs which the diocesan/eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles.
- Evidence that the organization requires its members seeking to be certified to be in compliance with of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. This can be as simple as a clear statement within the Code of Ethics that is signed by each candidate.²²

3.2.1.2 Part Two shall provide the certification standards by which candidates for certification and renewal of certification will perform a self-assessment and be assessed in four major competency categories that candidates demonstrate: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Within these competency categories, attention should be given to articulation of intercultural competencies and/or standards. Certification standards shall incorporate diocesan or organization standards, the USCCB Subcommittee approved *Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers* (found in Section 5.0 and at the [Alliance website](#)), and directives of church documents. (More information on the Alliance can be found in Section 2.0.)

3.2.1.3 Part Three shall be the full text of the separate *Certification Approval Handbook* provided to candidates for certification and renewal of certification. This handbook will contain the requirements for applying for certification and renewal of certification, the diocesan or organization certification standards and procedures, assessment instruments, information about the certification process, forms, and other information that candidates would need to know. Some of this information is expected to be partially duplicative of information provided in Parts One and Two above.

In accord with the pledge of U.S. Catholic Bishops in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* to do their best to ordain to the priesthood and diaconate, and to put into positions of trust only those lay ecclesial ministers who share their commitment to protecting children and youth:

- Handbooks should clearly state that all candidate for certification are in compliance with Article 12 and Article 13²³ of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

²⁰ See [Charter for Protection of Children and Young People](#) (revised 2018), pp. 9-10.

²¹ Ibid, p.146.

²² See [Appendix 2](#) for Sample Code of Ethics Statements from Members of the Alliance.

²³ ²³ See [Charter for Protection of Children and Young People](#) (revised 2018), pp. 14-15.

- Being adequately screened and evaluated to decide if they are fit candidates for certification.
- Having background checks utilizing the resources of law enforcement and other community agencies.
- Being aware that the code of ethics for each role certified clearly states that candidates for certification both know of, and comply with, all applicable parish, organizational, and/or diocesan policies with special attention to sexual misconduct, safe environment, risk management, safety, transportation, parental permission, and medical emergency policies.

3.2.1.4 Part Four shall be appropriate appendices of resources helpful for the certification process including sample forms, letters, rosters, job description(s) of position(s) being certified and publications used to promote the certification process. Some of this material is expected to be partially duplicative of the information in Part Three above.

3.2.2 *Electronic Copies and Submission Deadlines for USCCB Office Review*

The final and fully formatted certification documentation outlined in this handbook for USCCB Office review can be submitted via the online file repository and/or by email or other electronic sharing means eight weeks (2 months) before a scheduled spring meeting of the USCCB Subcommittee. A penultimate draft version may be submitted as early as ten weeks prior to the scheduled spring subcommittee meeting for review with the USCCB Office and follow up to prepare a final draft for submission.

3.2.2.1 The schedule of yearly USCCB Subcommittee meetings is available through the Office of Certification. Subcommittee meetings are generally held in mid-March and mid-September.

3.2.3 *USCCB Office Review*

The USCCB Office staff and, as needed or if the need suggests, an informal advisory group of selected ministry professionals, shall review submitted documentation, give commendations and recommendations and determine when the revised documentation is ready for review by the peer review group within the USCCB Subcommittee.

3.3 **Peer Review**

The peer review committee is an essential part of the approval process. The members are named by the chair of the subcommittee and include at least a bishop, an office staff person, a consultant, with the option to also include an advisor of the office or a ministry professional from a similar organization or diocese.

3.3.1 Preparatory Virtual Meeting(s) with Peer Review Team

Diocesan programs and organizations seeking approval are expected to participate in virtual meetings or conference calls with representative(s) of the USCCB Subcommittee during the preparation process. Such conversational meetings allow the program directors to provide updates, review initial materials, and enable a smoother review process when final documentation is submitted. These meetings are synodal in nature and designed to help all parties best understand the developments of the program, its needs, and to give and receive feedback and information to guide the process to successful approval.

The director of the program or organization shall contact the USCCB Office staff to schedule at least one such meeting to take place before the peer review of documentation. It may be fruitful to have more than one meeting (e.g. quarterly) to maintain momentum, engagement, and accountability. When such meetings can take place in-person or in a hybrid fashion, this is encouraged. For an in-person meeting, every effort is made to ensure that a person from the same region of the country, or a region as close as possible, is chosen for the preparatory visit(s) to help keep expenses to a minimum. Those who part of the preparatory meetings will be a member of the peer review committee who is appointed by the USCCB Subcommittee.

Review of a program through these preparatory meetings may include a summary of interviews and either an oral or written report, or further conversations with the Office of Certification or the entire USCCB Subcommittee. During an in-person liaison visit, travel, room and board, and any other related expenses during the visit are to be covered by the diocese or organization involved.

Overall, the diocesan director or appropriate national organization representative should plan to be available for questions as requested from the peer review committee throughout the process. Focus for these meetings will generally include reference to the information to be submitted in the documentation, as outlined in Section 3.2.1.

3.3.3 Peer Review Committee Makes Recommendation

When final documentation / information is received from the program or organization, the peer review team reviews the materials and discusses whether the standards and/or procedures should be approved, whether minor changes are needed, and develops commendations and recommendations to be brought to the next Subcommittee meeting for review with the whole subcommittee. The diocesan office or national organization will be billed a fee for this final review of certification documentation by the USCCB Subcommittee. Details on fees are found in Section 6.0.

3.4 USCCB Subcommittee Review and Decision

3.4.1 USCCB Subcommittee Review Process

During the preparatory period, the Subcommittee may meet virtually or in-person with the program or organization director if it is felt it would be valuable to the overall process. After the peer review

team has made their evaluation of the final documentation, their report is reviewed by the subcommittee at the next available fall or spring meeting.

3.4.1.1 The USCCB Subcommittee grants initial approval of certification standards and procedures for the certification of specialized ecclesial ministers after the review of the documentation submitted indicates that the diocesan office or national organization certification standards and procedures are in compliance with the requirements outlined in this *Handbook*.

3.4.1.2 Often during their review, the USCCB Subcommittee makes commendations for the work done and innovative approaches in the certification process. They may also make recommendations for improving the submitted certification standards and procedures. Occasionally, changes required for approval may be indicated.

3.4.2 Initial Approval

3.4.2.1 If initial approval has been granted, often with recommendations to assist with the further development of certification standards and procedures, the USCCB Subcommittee shall grant initial approval of certification standards and procedures for a period of up to seven years.

Diocesan offices or national organizations with initial approval are listed on the USCCB website as approved.

3.4.2.2 If initial approval has been delayed or denied the diocese or organization ought to make an effort to correct the reasons listed for the delay or refusal and resubmit within the time frame given within the letter of delay / refusal.

3.4.3 Notification of Decision

The USCCB Subcommittee shall formally communicate its decision in writing to the local ordinary and diocesan director or the national organization executive director within sixty business days after the meeting.²⁴ The notification letter will generally be electronic, which can be printed for a hard copy. When approval has been granted, electronic copies of the certificate of approval will also be sent.

Included in the letter may be commendations and recommendations by the USCCB Subcommittee with a request that a plan of action for addressing the required changes or recommendations be reported to the USCCB Subcommittee by its next meeting, if major, or in the first periodic report after approval, if minor.

²⁴ Informal communication of the decision by the subcommittee will ordinarily be communicated within 48 hours.

3.5 Diocesan or National Organization Response to Major Required Changes, Recommendations, or Delay / Denial of Approval

When the USCCB Subcommittee indicates required changes or notes major recommendations regarding the submitted certification standards, or has delayed or denied approval of the standards, the director of the diocesan office or national organization shall consult, as appropriate, with the diocesan or national organization certification committee, and shall respond in writing or via follow-up meeting with the Office or the peer review team to the recommendations given by the USCCB Subcommittee with a plan for addressing recommendations.

3.5.1 Addressing Minor Recommendations

In periodic reports thereafter, diocesan or national organization directors continue to describe progress in achieving recommendations of the USCCB Subcommittee or provide additional updates on actions related to the recommendations provided and other areas of development in the field of ministry.

3.5.2 Statement of Approval

After approval, and to assist with promotion and recognition of the work of everyone in the process, the diocesan or national organization directors must include a statement of USCCB Subcommittee approval of certification standards and procedures with the USCCB logo, and the full name of the USCCB Subcommittee and website. The figure below provides sample messaging. A template with this information will be provided from the Office of Certification.

N.B. This information should be included in the appropriate location of the full standards documentation with the appropriate information filled in where the yellow highlights appear. This should also be the text used on formal certificates presented to certified lay ecclesial ministers. Please remove the yellow highlights and insert your organization's logo where the square appears. The text must be presented exactly as noted here, with adjustments as needed for administrative elements.

Notification of USCCB Subcommittee - Approval for Certificates

Upon recommendation of its Certification Commission
[Name of Diocese/Diocesan Office or Organization]

Confers upon

CANDIDATE'S NAME

certification for the following ministry (ministries):

SPECIALIZED MINISTRY POSITION TITLE



*Under the authority of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and according to the National Certification Standards and Procedures for Lay Ecclesial Ministers approved by the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service from **20XX** until **20XX**.*



*Given under the Seal of the **[Name of Diocese/Diocesan Office or Organization]** at the **[City of Diocese or Organization]** this **[Date]** of **[Month, Year]** valid until **[Date]** of **[Month, Year]**.*

Similar information should be included in publications and on areas of the programs or organization's website that do not directly pertain to ministry formation and certification as long as the context in which they are used specify the approval only applies to the ministry formation and certification standards and procedures, with appropriate links to such information. Such publications are, but are not limited to, the following:

3.5.2.1 A certification brochure

3.5.2.2 Notification of workshops pertaining to ministry formation or certification

3.5.2.3 A *Certification Handbook* or equivalent, for candidates seeking certification

3.5.2.4 A certification newsletter

3.5.2.5 An easily found website page for the office with documentation pertaining to the USCCB Subcommittee-approved certification standards and procedures.

3.6 Periodic & Statistical Reports

3.6.1 Submitting a Periodic Report

After consultation with the diocesan or national organization certification commission/committee, the director of the diocese or national organization shall complete a report when requested following the USCCB Subcommittee initial approval or re-approval. This will often occur at the mid-point of an approval period (e.g. if approval is for seven years, a report may often be requested in year three or four). A brief online statistical report may be requested at other times, to properly record certification and membership numbers and other required data. The report may often be requested by online form or some other means for tracking submissions.

3.6.1.1 The USCCB Office staff sends diocesan or national organization directors a reminder to complete all reports with sufficient time to gather information and document it. A due date is provided based on when the information is needed to discuss in upcoming meetings of the Subcommittee.

3.6.1.2 Periodic reports describe the progress made in achieving the recommendations from the USCCB Subcommittee approval or re-approval as well as from reviews of previous reports biennial. They also include any details describing continued development of the certification standards and procedures, changes since approval. Like the initial documentation, a template for the report is provided, but alternative means of reporting can be discussed with the Office of Certification.

3.6.1.4 Unless prior timely notice is provided, diocesan offices and national organizations are billed a late fee when requested reports are not received by the due date. Normally the due date allows for a short grace period.

If diocesan or national organization directors communicate in writing with the staff of the USCCB Office regarding the reason for a delay in submitting their report, the late fee may be waived. Directors shall also notify the staff of the date by which their late report will be received in the USCCB Office.

3.6.1.5 If it seems advantageous, the director of the diocesan program or organization may delegate the preparation of the report to another person in responsibility in the program (e.g. the leader of the Certification Committee). However, all reports should be submitted by the director.

3.6.1.6 Occasionally, directors and other leaders may be invited to discuss developments and update with the Office of Certification, a peer review team or the entire Subcommittee. These conversations are synodal in nature and designed to help keep all parties informed of ministry formation and certification efforts and to respond to the needs of the program or organization.

3.6.2 Revision of Report Format

The USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service reserves the right to revise, supplement, change, or rescind any portion of required reports from time to time as it deems appropriate, in its sole and absolute discretion. Appropriate changes and additions are made as necessary and communicated in a timely way to approved organizations and programs.

3.7 Periodic Review Process for Re-Approval

3.7.1 Notification

After initial approval, the USCCB Subcommittee grants re-approval every seven years thereafter, pending continued compliance with certification standards and procedures.

The USCCB Office staff shall notify diocesan or national organization directors in writing twelve months before documentation for renewal of approval is due.

The diocesan or national organization director must acknowledge in writing that notification has been received. This communication will most likely be done electronically.

3.7.2 Re-Approval

During the last year of the approval period, and prior to this period as helpful, the diocesan or national organization director should reach out to the Office of Certification to discuss the re-approval process. The director shall prepare updated certification standards and procedures for review and re-approval by the USCCB Subcommittee, reflecting the appropriate timely developments related to ministry formation and certification which have emerged since the previous approval.

3.7.3 Preparing Documentation / Information for Re-Approval

Diocesan and national organization directors and certification committees shall prepare documentation for periodic approval by the USCCB Subcommittee. The documentation / information presented may follow the format provided in Section 4.0 or through the use of other media, as long as all required information is presented.

3.7.3.1 During the re-approval preparatory period, conversations and coordination with the subcommittee's peer review team as indicated in 3.3.1 will be undertaken in a similar manner.

3.7.3.2 In the documentation / information, a description should be included (e.g. via introductory letter) of how USCCB Subcommittee recommendations for the continued development of diocesan or national organization certification standards and procedures from initial approval and periodic reports have been addressed (**Note:** If recommendations have not been implemented, a plan and timeline for implementation or other reasons indicating why they have not been implemented shall be included.)

3.7.3.3 The re-approval documentation / information should also include summaries of evaluations received from those certified, those involved in the certification process (such as mentors and interviewers), and others on results of the program. Indication should be made where there have been changes and/or improvements in diocesan or national organization certification standards and procedures. It is expected that the diocese or organization will have a means of receiving feedback from those certified through its procedures prior to the preparation of documents for re-approval and will utilize this information in those preparations.

The director of the diocese or national organization shall submit the documentation to the USCCB Office by the date specified by the office staff. Documentation shall be submitted following the same guidelines listed in Section 3.2.2, "Electronic Copies and Submission Deadlines for USCCB Office Review." The documentation will then be reviewed by the peer review team and a report prepared for the entire subcommittee, as noted in section 3.3.3.

3.7.4 USCCB Subcommittee Review

During a regularly scheduled meeting the USCCB Subcommittee shall review the documentation / information submitted by the diocese or organization for re-approval, along with commendations, as well as recommendations for continued development from the peer review team. Special attention is paid to how responsive the diocese or organization has been to the recommendations made and what improvements have been made to reflect the learning during implementation.

3.7.5 Notification of Decision & Follow Up

The USCCB Subcommittee formally communicates its decision to the diocesan bishop or director or the national organization director within sixty business days after the decision has been made, in

according with Section 3.4 above. Responses from the program or organization proceed according to Section 3.5 above.

3.7.6 Extensions

The USCCB Subcommittee grants extensions for serious cause. Letters from the executive directors of national organizations or dioceses requesting extensions are addressed to the chair of the USCCB Subcommittee and sent in care of the USCCB Office.

3.8 Withdrawal of Approval

3.8.1 Circumstances of USCCB Subcommittee Withdrawal of Approval

When it is determined that the USCCB Subcommittee must consider whether to withdraw approval of previously approved standards of certification, the consideration to do so will be considered as part of a regular meeting of the USCCB Subcommittee or by other electronic means as the nature of the case warrants. Notification of this consideration will be provided in writing one month prior to the consideration, when the case enables this to occur. Similarly, efforts will be undertaken to engage with the program or office before adverse action is taken, to determine if other options are available.

The following circumstances may be grounds for the USCCB Subcommittee to withdraw its approval of certification standards:

3.8.1.1 Not submitting documentation for the review of certification standards and procedures when scheduled for review, without an explanation and a request for an extension

3.8.1.2 Not submitting documentation for the review of certification standards and procedures after two (2) years from the scheduled review have elapsed

3.8.1.3 Not paying appropriate fees, as noted in Section 6.0

3.8.1.4 Non-adherence to USCCB Subcommittee-approved certification standards and procedures.

3.8.2 Notification of Withdrawal of Approval

After a decision of the USCCB Subcommittee is rendered, the chair of the USCCB Subcommittee notifies diocesan or national organization directors of the results of reviewing the case as soon as possible. Diocesan or national organization directors have thirty (30) business days to respond to the USCCB Subcommittee's decision, should the review result in the withdrawal of USCCB Subcommittee approval. For dioceses, the local ordinary is also notified in writing when approval is withdrawn. The diocesan office or national organization is also removed from the approved list on the USCCB website.

3.9 Procedures Regarding Compliance with Approved Standards and Procedures

Since seeking approval of standards and procedures by dioceses and organizations is a voluntary process, the USCCB Subcommittee is not involved in enforcement of the approved standards and procedures. It is up to the local ordinary of a diocese, the executive director of a national organization or their designee to enforce the approved standards and procedures. If a candidate for certification has complaints about the application of the approved standards and procedures for certification, the principal of subsidiarity applies; complaints are handled within the local diocese or organization involved using the approved process for handling complaints in the diocese's or organization's *Certification Approval Handbook*, if any.

Any complaints received by the USCCB Subcommittee members or consultants or by the USCCB Office about the enforcement of the approved standards and procedures in individual cases will be forwarded to the appropriate certifying diocese or organization for follow up. Non-enforcement of the approved standards, or non-adherence to those approved standards, however, may be grounds for the USCCB Subcommittee to consider withdrawal of approval of the diocese's or organization's certification standards.

4.0 Required Documentation

As noted in Section 3.2.1, the documentation required may be submitted in other media formats, provided all the information requested is accessible and clearly presented.

4.1 Table of Contents

The pages for each of the Parts described in Section 3.2.1, under *Required Documentation*, subsections and appendices shall be listed in a table of contents or provided in some organizing list that allows easy access to all information. A template of required documentation that should accompany the four parts of submitted documentation, including the table of contents, is provided in the shared online document repository provided by the USCCB Office.

4.2 For Diocesan Offices

4.2.1 *Documentation for Part One: The Diocese*

Requirements

Part One shall contain information about the diocese and the office. This part includes, but is not limited to, information about the mission, staff, certification commission, committees, interview teams, etc. that assess the competencies of specialized ministers, diocesan requirements established for certification, ongoing formation events sponsored by the office, etc.

Each diocese and office is unique and not every office will have the same components for the certification of specialized ministers as another. Resources and regions of the country differ drastically in terms of size, Catholic population, ethnic and cultural diversity and resources.

Dioceses differ in size and population. Therefore, the number of committees and the number of committee members, mentors, consultants and interviewers involved in the certification process will vary according to local need. Those involved in the certification process may serve in more than one capacity or function. The diocesan director states in documentation submitted what is not applicable for their local situation.

A diocesan template for required documentation of Part One is in the shared document repository provided by the USCCB Office.

4.2.2 *Documentation for Part Two: Standards*

Requirements

Part Two shall provide the certification standards by which candidates for certification and renewal of certification will perform a self-assessment and be assessed in four major competency categories: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Within these competency categories, attention should be given to some articulation of intercultural competencies and/or standards. Certification standards in the four areas shall also incorporate the following:

4.2.2.1 Diocesan certification standards (normally derived from directives or guidelines to the office)

4.2.2.2 The directives and vision of Church documents (especially the 2005 USCCB document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*)

4.2.2.3 The current edition of the USCCB Subcommittee-approved *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers* appropriate for the specialized minister and the local church available on the [website](#) of the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers.

Requirements²⁵ may include, but are not limited to, full Christian Initiation in the Roman Catholic Church, formal academic education such as a college or a post graduate degree in designated areas of theology or ministry, a set number of years as a specialized minister in full or part-time (salaried or volunteer) ministry, and successful completion of a diocesan ministry formation or certificate program.

Diocesan Certification Standards by Which Candidates are Assessed

The diocesan director involves appropriate committees and consultants in the formulation of diocesan certification standards under the four major categories for the formation of lay ministers outlined in the USCCB document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*.

It is also important to distinguish formation standards from certification standards. The document *Co-Workers*, and Section 5.0 of this document, describes formation standards in four areas. Formation includes all of life's experiences including family background, formal education, occupation, vocational choices, religious experiences, cultural realities, etc. These standards refer to four major standards for ministry formation programs noted in 4.2.2 above. Diocesan certification standards articulate the competencies that candidates should have gained from formation in these four areas. Candidates for certification shall be able to demonstrate, or be assessed, in a measurable way, the certification standards.

Certification standards are **not** vision statements of religious belief or values, though the standards may be guided by these statements or values. Instead, certification standards establish **measurable** skills, knowledge, indicators and abilities in which specialized ministers must be able to demonstrate

²⁵ There is a distinction between the diocesan *requirements* for applying for certification or renewal of certification and the diocesan certification *standards* by which candidates are assessed as competent. For the purposes of this Handbook, requirements are the conditions with which candidates must comply in order to enter into the certification process; standards are the eligibility criteria for certification. Requirements for applying for certification are determined by the diocese.

that their competence. Diocesan directors and appropriate consultants determine the degree or level to which candidates for certification or renewal of certification attain competency.

Major Resource for the Formulation of Diocesan Certification Standards

The certification standards published by the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministry and approved by the USCCB Subcommittee, which are also adapted in Section 5.0 of this *Handbook*, are the most up-to-date resource for the development of diocesan certification standards. They are available on the Alliance [website](#).

Additional insight for diocesan certification standards may be found in the USCCB Subcommittee approved standards for other diocesan formation programs and other national organizations. Access to those approved standards is available through upon request from the Office of Certification or from the approved diocese or national organization.

The standards in these publications will assist diocesan directors in determining the language for the certification standards under which the specialized ministers in their diocese will be assessed as competent. Consideration needs to be given in writing these standards to the special needs, economic realities, accessibility to academic institutions, and the circumstances of their local church as ministers in leadership roles serve the ever-growing groups of African Americans, Asian Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and various migrant groups and refugees. Diocesan certification standards are written so that candidates for certification renewal of certification are able to demonstrate that they are competent with the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral skills needed for their specialized ministry.

It is the hope of the USCCB Subcommittee that diocesan certification standards are particularized to the local church within which the diocesan office serves.

A diocesan template for required documentation of Part Two is provided in the shared document repository provided by the USCCB Office. This template will be revised and modified as the experience of the USCCB Subcommittee grows with future documentation and certification standards and procedures submitted for approval.

Additional resources for the development of particular diocesan program or organizational standards can be included and discussed with the Office of Certification.

4.2.3 Documentation for Part Three: Handbook for Candidates

Requirements

Part Three of the required documentation submitted to the USCCB Subcommittee is a whole and complete copy of the *Certification Approval Handbook* provided to candidates for certification and renewal of certification in a specialized ministry. The handbook shall contain all the information for candidates to understand and follow in seeking certification or renewal of certification. If a diocesan

office certifies more than one specialized minister, then standards and self-assessment forms are included for each of the specialized ministers.

While formats of *Certification Approval Handbooks* are unique to each diocesan office, a template of required information for the *Certification Approval Handbook* (part three of documentation) is provided in the shared document repository provided by the USCCB Office. This template will be revised and modified as the experience of the USCCB Subcommittee grows with future documentation and certification standards and procedures submitted for approval.

4.2.4 Documentation for Part Four: Appendices – Information and resources for those who help with the process

Requirements

Part Four consists of resources to be used throughout the process, including forms, letters, rosters of the members of the commission or committees, job descriptions for the ministries for which the diocese is seeking approval and publications and/or websites used to support the diocese's certification efforts. Be sure to include all of the essential information that candidates will need to know as part of the certification handbook (Part Three of documentation).

A diocesan template for required documentation of Part Four is provided in the shared document repository provided by the USCCB Office. The templates will be revised and modified as the experience of the USCCB Subcommittee grows with future documentation and certification standards and procedures submitted for approval.

4.3 For National Organizations

4.3.1 Documentation for Part One: Information about the Organization

Requirements

Part One shall contain information about the national organization and national office. This part includes, but is not limited to, information about the mission, staff, certification commission, committees, interview teams, etc. that assess the competencies of specialized ministers, organization requirements established for certification, ongoing formation events sponsored by the organization, etc.

Each organization is unique and not every organization will have the same components for the certification of specialized ministers as another. Resources and regions of the country differ drastically in terms of size, Catholic population, ethnic and cultural diversity and resources.

National organizations also differ in size and population. Therefore, the number of committees and the number of committee members, mentors, consultants and interviewers involved in the certification process will vary. Those involved in the certification process may serve in more than one capacity or function. The executive director states in documentation submitted what is not applicable for their organization.

A national organization template for required documentation of Part One is provided in the shared document repository provided by the USCCB Office.

4.3.2 *Documentation for Part Two: National Organization Certification Standards*

Requirements

Part Two shall provide the certification standards by which candidates for certification and renewal of certification will perform a self-assessment and be assessed in four major competency categories: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Within each of these competency categories, there should also be included some articulation of intercultural competencies and/or standards. Certification standards in the four areas shall incorporate the following:

4.3.2.1 National organization certification standards (normally developed, adapted or adopted by a standing committee of the organization and approved by the USCCB Subcommittee)

4.3.2.2 The directives and vision of Church documents (especially the 2005 USCCB document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*)

4.3.2.3 The current edition of the USCCB Subcommittee-approved *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers* appropriate for the specialized minister and the local church, available on the [website](#) of the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers. Requirements²⁶ may include, but are not limited to, full Christian Initiation in the Roman Catholic Church, formal academic education such as a college or post graduate degree in designated areas of theology or ministry, a number of years as a specialized minister in full or part-time (salaried or volunteer) ministry, successful completion of a national or diocesan ministry formation or certificate program and membership in the organization.

National Organization Certification Standards by Which Candidates are Assessed

The executive director involves appropriate committees and consultants in the formulation of national organization certification standards under the four major categories for the formation of lay ministers outlined in the USCCB document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*.

It is also important to distinguish formation standards from certification standards. The document *Co-Workers* describes formation standards in four areas. Formation includes all of life's experiences including family background, formal education, occupation, vocational choices, religious experiences, cultural realities, etc. These standards refer to four major standards for ministry formation programs noted in 4.3.2 above. . National organization certification standards articulate the competencies that candidates should have gained from formation in these four areas. Candidates

²⁶ See prior footnote.

for certification shall be able to demonstrate or be assessed, in a measurable way, the certification standards.

Certification standards are **not** vision statements of religious belief or values, though the standards may be guided by these statements or values. Instead, certification standards establish **measurable** skills, knowledge, indicators and abilities in which specialized ministers must be able to demonstrate that their competence. Diocesan directors and appropriate consultants determine the degree or level to which candidates for certification or renewal of certification attain competency.

Major Resource for the Formulation of National Organization Certification Standards

The certification standards published by the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministry and approved by the USCCB Subcommittee, which are also adapted in Section 5.0 of this *Handbook*, are the most up-to-date resource for the development of diocesan certification standards. They are available on the Alliance [website](#).

Additional insight for diocesan certification standards may be found in the USCCB Subcommittee approved standards for other diocesan formation programs and other national organizations. Access to those approved standards is available through upon request from the Office of Certification or from the approved diocese or national organization.

The standards in these publications will assist executive directors in determining the language for the certification standards under which the specialized ministers in their organization will be assessed as competent. Consideration needs to be given in writing these standards to the special needs, economic realities, accessibility to academic institutions, and the circumstances of their local church as ministers in leadership roles serve the ever-growing groups of African Americans, Asian Pacific Islanders, Hispanics a, and various migrant groups and refugees. National organization certification standards are written so that candidates for certification renewal of certification are able to demonstrate that they are competent with the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral skills needed for their specialized ministry.

It is the hope of the USCCB Subcommittee that national organization certification standards are particularized to the national organization within which the national office serves.

A national organization template for required documentation of Part Two is available in the shared document repository provided by the USCCB Office. This template will be revised and modified as the experience of the USCCB Subcommittee grows with future documentation and certification standards and procedures submitted for approval.

Additional resources for the development of particular diocesan program or organizational standards can be included and discussed with the Office of Certification.

4.3.3 Documentation for Part Three: A Certification Approval Handbook for Candidates

Requirements

Part Three of the required documentation submitted to the USCCB Subcommittee is a whole and complete copy of the *Certification Approval Handbook* provided to candidates for certification and renewal of certification in a specialized ministry. The handbook shall contain all the information for candidates to understand and follow in seeking certification or renewal of certification. If a national office certifies more than one specialized minister, then standards and self-assessment forms are included for each of the specialized ministers.

While formats of *Certification Approval Handbooks* are unique to each national organization, a national organization template for required documentation of Part Three, the *Certification Approval Handbook*, is provided in the shared document repository provided by the USCCB Office.. Included in the template is some of the essential information that candidates will need to know. This template will be revised and modified as the experience of the USCCB Subcommittee grows with future documentation and certification standards and procedures submitted for approval.

4.3.4 Documentation for Part Four: Appendices-Handbook and/or resources for those who help with the process

Requirements

Part Four consists of Resources to be used throughout the process including forms, letters, rosters of the members of the commission or committees, job descriptions for the ministries for which the national organization or alliance of national organizations is seeking approval and publications and/or websites used to support the organization or alliance of organization's certification efforts. Be sure to include all of the essential information that candidates will need to know as part of the handbook, Part Three of the documentation.

A national organization template for required documentation of Part Four is provided in the shared document repository provided by the USCCB Office. This template will be revised and modified as the experience of the USCCB Subcommittee grows with future documentation and certification standards and procedures submitted for approval. The samples will be revised and modified as the experience of the USCCB Subcommittee grows with future documentation and certification standards and procedures submitted for approval.

5.0 USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service Standards for Specialized Ecclesial Ministers

The information presented in this section is based upon and slightly adapted from the standards and competencies developed by the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers (www.lemcertification.org), the standards of which have been approved by the USCCB Subcommittee. These standards reflect core competencies for ecclesial ministers, to which competencies in specialized areas are generally added in the four dimensions of formation presented.

These standards are presented here as guidance for the development of diocesan and other national organization standards for certification. While a diocesan program or national organization may develop standards differently than what is presented here, it would be beneficial for subcommittee approval to either align those standards with the competencies listed here or evaluate how certain standards do not apply, or apply differently, to different ministerial contexts. The Office of Certification is happy to discuss these considerations with programs and organizations upon request.

5.1 Mission

Certification standards for specialized ecclesial ministers shall reflect the mission and identity of the diocese or organization.

5.1.2 The mission and history of the diocese or organization shall be stated, including reference to existing statistics regarding diversity and demographics

5.1.3 The relationship between the mission and bylaws, constitutions, and structure shall be identified.

5.1.4 The responsibilities of officers, subcommittees, committees, and their responsibilities in relation to mission, shall be described.

5.1.5 The ministerial positions or roles for candidates seeking certification shall be defined.

5.1.6 The expectations for the positions or roles shall be articulated.

5.1.7 The Code of Ethics shall reflect the responsibilities for the ministry of those certified.

5.2 Standard One: Human

Ecclesial ministry builds upon the evangelical mission to which all the baptized are called, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel" (Mark 16:15). This proclamation of the Good News requires a witness not only in words, but also in actions, what Pope Francis has called missionary

discipleship.²⁷ It is through the authentic witness of the Catholic Christian in their manner of life and in fidelity to the Church's authoritative teaching and Tradition that the Gospel is best preached. Therefore, all who feel the call to specialized ecclesial ministry must first show themselves to be well-formed and healthy human beings who giving living witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their lives. They especially demonstrate this witness through good and moral living, in accord with the Church's authoritative teaching. To invite men and women to serve the Church in this important work and witness who are not living a life in keeping with the Church's authoritative teaching in these matters is to create contradiction in our work and to sow scandal within the community.

Ecclesial ministers ought to demonstrate the qualities of human maturity needed for fruitful ministry with the People of God. This is true both for the ordained and for the laity. In his apostolic exhortation on priestly formation, *Pastores dabo vobis*, Saint John Paul II wrote that men who are candidates for Holy Orders are to develop their human character and relational abilities so that they can be "a bridge and not an obstacle" for people in their encounter with Jesus Christ.²⁸ Laity in their distinct but complementary role should do likewise. Pope Francis further emphasized the connection between the formation of clergy and laity when he remarked, "If a portion of the people is entrusted to the pastor, it is also true that the priest is entrusted to the people.... In this way the priest is formed: fleeing from both a fleshless spirituality and a worldly effort without God."²⁹ Such developments entail the twofold dynamic of strengthening positive traits that foster ministerial effectiveness and lessening negative traits that hinder it. Accordingly, they ought to strive to deepen their knowledge of self and others, grow from experiences of suffering and challenge, maintain a balanced lifestyle and positive relationships appreciate and value cultural and ethnic diversity and demonstrate human virtues. Cultivating such traits and skills within a Christ-centered community contributes to the development of "a healthy and well-balanced personality, for the sake of both personal growth and ministerial service."³⁰

While the priesthood of the ordained differs from the common priesthood of the faithful "essentially and not only in degree," they are "nonetheless ordered one to another, each in its own way sharing in the one priesthood of Christ."³¹ As such the same human qualities and competencies that the Church would seek to be evidenced in candidates for Holy Orders would be ones that should be found in the lives of those who are seeking certification for specialized ecclesial ministries.

²⁷ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), no. 120.

²⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabo Vobis: I Will Give You Shepherds* (1992), no. 43.

²⁹ Pope Francis, "[Address of the Holy Father to the Congress on the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*](#), October 7, 2017.

³⁰ *Co-Workers*, 36.

³¹ *Lumen gentium*, no. 10

These competencies shall include the following capabilities or growth commitments:³²

5.2.1 Appreciate and affirm the dignity of each human person and demonstrate openness and willingness to encounter the values of persons of diverse cultures, races, and socioeconomic groups.

5.2.2 Identify personal gifts and limitations through self-reflection, personal prayer, collaboration with others, peer feedback, supervisory assessment processes, and/or spiritual companionship.

5.2.3 Engage in continuing lifelong formation through programs or practices of on-going ministerial development and personal growth.

5.2.4 Recognize both the reality of sin with its personal and social consequences and the power of forgiveness and reconciliation to heal persons and relationships.

5.2.5 Recognize the importance of self-care by maintaining a healthy lifestyle and a reasonable balance among the legitimate claims of family, community, personal relationships, and ministry.

5.2.6 Manifest "psychological health, marked by integrity, appropriate interpersonal boundaries, and the ability to honor and safeguard the trust that people place in them as Church ministers."³³

5.2.7 Understand the responsibility inherent in positions of pastoral leadership and be diligent in its responsible exercise in such areas as appropriate boundaries, sexuality, confidentiality, financial accountability, supervision of others, and decision making.

5.2.8 Be mindful and understand the role that family systems and dynamics play in the personal development of the minister.

5.3 Standard Two: Spiritual

Sharing in the common priesthood of all the baptized, an ecclesial minister demonstrates Christian spirituality as foundational to ministry, integrated in service with the People of God, and possessing a sacramental view of the world which recognizes how it can be a vessel of God's presence and transforming grace.

Having encountered the person and message of Jesus Christ, the hunger of the ecclesial minister for union with the Triune God is evident. The result of this hunger is the call to holiness, built on the Word of God, experienced in the liturgy and sacraments, formed through suffering, nurtured in joy, and sustained in community with all the baptized and through the Church as the Mystical Body of

³² The presumption is not that a minister will demonstrate each and all of these characteristics whole and complete at any given time, but rather to recognize these are the competencies that should be demonstrated or acknowledged for ongoing growth when considering a candidate for certification in a specialized role.

³³ *Co-Workers*, 36.

Christ. The minister gives witness to a well-formed spirituality through a rich and diversified prayer life, theological reflection, and action rooted in Catholic teaching. Spiritual formation is grounded in the understanding that “if ministry does not flow from a personal encounter and ongoing relationship with the Lord, then no matter how ‘accomplished’ it may be in its methods and activities, that ministry will lack the vital soul and source needed to bear lasting fruit.”³⁴ Therefore, open to the mystery of God’s love and in touch with the world’s realities, all actions of the ecclesial minister flow from “that fundamental conversion that places God, and not oneself, at the center of one’s life.”³⁵

These competencies shall include the following capabilities or growth commitments:

5.3.1 Embody an integrated spirituality formed by Scripture and liturgical celebration, theological reflection, and active participation in parish life.

5.3.2 Bear witness to the Eucharist as the source and summit of our lives both as individuals and within the Catholic community.

5.3.3 Live a life of liturgical and private prayer that is both formed by and reflective of the breadth and depth of the Catholic spiritual tradition.

5.3.4 Value and demonstrate the integration of the sacred arts, i.e., art, music, and architecture, into liturgical celebrations and communal prayer.

5.3.5 Honor the call to ministry that is rooted in one’s baptism by developing ministerial goals that flow from one’s spirituality and reflect an integration of Gospel values.

5.3.6 Accept and articulate one’s ministerial vocation as coming from God and confirmed by the ecclesial community.

5.3.7 Demonstrate an ability to discern the “signs of the times” and address current realities in the Church and the world in light of the Gospel.

5.3.8 Display an openness to ecumenical prayer, works, and practices that promote Christian unity, and also acknowledging the gifts afforded to humanity from world religions.

5.3.9 Model the spirit of Jesus in one’s life, identify with and promote the global mission of the Church.

³⁴ *Co-Workers*, 6, 36.

³⁵ *Co-Workers*, 38.

5.3.10 Develop a spirituality which is responsive to the diverse cultural expressions of conversion, communion, mission and solidarity.

5.3.11 Utilize new and social media and other technology in a prudent way to foster and develop communal spirituality.

5.4 Standard Three: Intellectual

An ecclesial minister demonstrates understanding of the breadth of Catholic theological and pastoral studies as well as the intellectual skill to use that knowledge in ministry with the People of God from diverse populations and cultures.

“Formation for lay ecclesial ministry is a journey beyond catechesis into theological study.”³⁶ An ecclesial minister’s faith and ministry is formed by the study of the Catholic theological tradition. Based upon this study, a theologically competent minister can articulate and interpret this Catholic theological tradition for diverse individuals and communities. A key dynamic of effective ecclesial ministry is the integration into ministry practices of key teachings and principal theories of pastoral ministry.

These competencies shall include knowledge and/or integration into ministerial practice the following areas:

5.4.1 A theology of revelation as God’s self-disclosure, and interpretation of Scripture and tradition in accord with *Dei Verbum*.

5.4.2 Trinitarian theology, Christology, pneumatology, missiology, theological anthropology, and ecclesiology.

5.4.3 The major events in the history of the Church, especially the Second Vatican Council, and an understanding of how this history informs the life of the Church today, and informs contemporary ministry practice.

5.4.4 The liturgy and rites of the Church, liturgical theology, worship, and sacraments and traditions of liturgical spirituality.

5.4.5 A theology of the moral life, especially including Catholic social teaching, attentive to relationship with God, neighbor and the earth.

5.4.6 A theology of pastoral ministry as well as guiding principles for the practice of ministry in support of the pastoral dimension of formation and its competencies.

³⁶ *Co-Workers*, 43.

5.4.7 The history and theology of Catholic spiritual traditions and their influence on contemporary prayer and ministerial practices.

5.4.8 A foundational understanding of canon law and its role in the life of the Church.

5.4.9 The principles for ecumenism and interfaith engagement and their ministerial practice, so as to be able to publicly represent Catholic belief/practice in respectful dialogue, engagement and collaboration with other Christians and those of other faith traditions.

5.4.10 A foundational understanding of the humanities and the social sciences and the impact personal, social and cultural formation have on spiritual and theological development.

5.4.11 Intercultural communication and linguistic/cultural skills, appropriate to the ecclesial minister's cultural and ministerial context.

5.5 Standard Four: Pastoral

An ecclesial minister demonstrates a range of leadership and pastoral skills needed for functioning effectively in ministry for the whole People of God. As a response to their baptismal call, ecclesial ministers accept the grace of leadership and manifest a range of skills and pastoral gifts which allow them to function effectively in ministry. In their role as evangelizers, they operate in a parochial setting which has various dimensions—faith formation, worship, cultural diversity, community life, social justice, and apostolic service. They are effective listeners who foster respect and offer compassionate care within varied family, community, and cultural settings. In the spirit of the Gospel, they serve others as companions on the journey of faith. These ministers demonstrate good stewardship, work collaboratively with other lay and ordained ministers, and exhibit human resource and management skills. They have an ability to discern and nurture the gifts of all the baptized in order to build the Kingdom of God. Lastly, these ministers embrace a professional code of ethics worthy of Catholic ministry and abide by civil and Church law. “Pastoral formation cultivates the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that directly pertain to effective functioning in the ministry setting and that also pertain to pastoral administration that supports direct ministry.”³⁷

These competencies shall include the following capabilities or growth commitments:

5.5.1 Evidence a pastoral charity which seeks the salvation and sanctification of those they serve.

5.5.2 Enculturation of the Gospel through critical reflection of their own culture, fostering unity in diversity by utilizing human, spiritual, theological, and pastoral approaches proper to each culture.

³⁷ *Co-Workers*, 47.

- 5.5.3** Implementation of the principles and processes of evangelization and faith formation as outlined in national and universal Church documents.
- 5.5.4** Understanding contemporary communication technology and assess the best ways to employ it for proclamation of the Gospel.
- 5.5.5** Utilizing leadership skills of collaboration, visioning, planning, communication, decision-making, delegation, time and conflict management to work effectively with others.
- 5.5.6** Development of capabilities in the area of group leadership and supervision and utilization of the benefits of effective ministerial supervision - seeking supervision oneself and providing supervision to employees and volunteers.
- 5.5.7** Seeking ongoing opportunities to improve knowledge, attitudes, and skills that directly pertain to effective functioning in the ministry setting, especially from an intercultural perspective
- 5.5.8** Development, nurturing, and participation in the prayer life of the community in which one serves.

6.0 Fees

The following fees are for the services of the USCCB Subcommittee to diocesan / state or regional Catholic Conference programs³⁸ and other organizations seeking approval of certification standards. Diocesan and Catholic Conference programs and organizations each follow a different fee structure as noted below. Please make sure you are viewing the fees appropriate for your program / organization. Directors may request adjusted fees for cause in writing to the USCCB Office per Section 6.3 below.

All payments are by check or money order (or by other electronic means when available). Mailed payments are sent to:

USCCB
Office of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service
3211 Fourth Street NE
Washington, DC 20017

6.1 Fees for a Diocesan Office / Catholic Conference

6.1.1 *Filing Fee*

For Diocesan Offices: The filing fee is a non-refundable \$350 for a diocesan office that seeks to have certification standards and procedures approved by the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (USCCB Subcommittee). The director of the diocesan office must send the filing fee to the USCCB Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service office (USCCB Office) after completing the online application form, submitting a letter of approval from the local ordinary, and printing out an invoice for the filing fee.

For State Catholic Conferences: The filing fee is a non-refundable \$550 for a state or regional Catholic Conference that oversees the submission of certification standards and procedures for the certification of specialized ecclesial ministers. The lead agent who is facilitating the collaborative project for a Catholic Conference sends the filing fee to the USCCB Office after completing the online application form, submitting a letter of approval from the individual bishop members of the Conference, and printing out an invoice for the filing fee.

6.1.2 *Subcommittee Review Fees*

The fee is \$350 for the initial USCCB Subcommittee review of certification standards and procedures and for the seven-year re-approval. It is assessed via invoice when final documentation is submitted.

³⁸ For purposes of this *Handbook*, the regional / state Catholic Conference fees also applies to dioceses who are not part of the same regional Conference applying for joint approval of standards.

Payment is due in the USCCB Office no later than 60 days after the invoice is received.

6.1.3 Annual Fees

Annual fees provide income support for the Office of Certification and the Subcommittee in its national resourcing and promotion efforts related to ministry formation and certification.

The annual fee is \$350 for each diocesan office certifying specialized ministers.

Annual fees are waived during the re-approval year, though a review fee for documentation is charged.

In the first quarter of the year, invoices are sent for annual fees. Payment is due in the USCCB Office within 30 days. The office is assessed one-half the annual fee when initial approval is granted during a spring meeting of the Subcommittee. Fees are assessed even if in a given year the diocese has not certified specialized ministers.

6.1.4 Preparatory In-Person Meeting Fees

The fee is travel + expenses for a diocesan office if a preparatory in-person meeting is requested. For online or phone meetings, there is no fee.

When the preparatory meeting is completed, and expense reports are received from those from the Office or Subcommittee who participated, an invoice is sent for any travel and expenses not already covered by the site while the meeting was in progress. Payment is due within 30 days.

6.1.5 Consultation and Workshop Fees

No fee is charged for consultation or workshops provided by the USCCB Subcommittee when the consultation or workshop is in-person. Transportation, meals, and lodging are to be covered by the diocese or office extending the invitation in lieu of a fee.

For formal virtual presentations, larger consultations or workshops, a stipend of \$250 is requested, but may be reduced upon request. The stipend pays for the professional expertise of the Director and office staff. If a joint presentation with other consultants or workshop leaders, this fee may be increased to cover their professional services.

No consultation or workshop fee is assessed when the Office of Certification makes the request of a diocese or organization to present.

6.1.6 Late Fees

A late fee of \$75 is charged to the diocesan office when the annual fee, requested report, or assessment for in-person meetings, virtual conferences, or documentation review is not received by the due date, and \$75 for every month thereafter until the fee is paid in full. A grace period of 30 days is allowed before late fees are assessed.

6.2 Fees for an Organization of Specialized Ministers with Certification Standards and Procedures Approved by the USCCB Subcommittee

6.2.1 Filing Fee

The filing fee is a non-refundable \$350 for organizations of specialized ministers that seeks to have certification standards and procedures approved by the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (USCCB Subcommittee) to open a file. After completing the online application form, submitting a letter of approval and printing out the invoice, the executive director or chair of the board of directors of the organization sends the filing fee to the USCCB Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service Office (USCCB Office).

6.2.2 Subcommittee Review Fees

The fee is \$350 for the initial USCCB Subcommittee review of certification standards and procedures and for the seven-year re-approval. It is assessed via invoice when final documentation is submitted.

Payment is due in the USCCB Office no later than 60 days after the invoice is received.

6.2.3 Annual Fees

Annual fees provide income support for the Office of Certification and the Subcommittee in its national resourcing and promotion efforts related to ministry formation and certification.

The annual fee for organizations with at-large membership is based on the number of members in the organization during a calendar year. Fees are assessed by entire membership in the organization, referring to individuals registered in the organization's records, rather than institutional / diocesan memberships. Degrees of membership (e.g. Associate Membership / Friends) are not considered when assessing fees. When organizations do not have individual members, adaptations to the below fee structure are made based on evaluation in coordination with the Office of Certification.

Annual fees are assessed beginning with the initial approval for the certification standards, or certification standards and procedures, once approved by the USCCB. Fees are assessed even if, in a given year, organizations have not certified specialized ministers. Organizations are assessed one-half the annual fee when initial approval is granted during a spring meeting of the USCCB Subcommittee:

The annual fee breakdown based on membership is as follows:

- \$200 for organizations with 100 members or fewer.
- \$275 for organizations with 101 to 150 members.
- \$450 for organizations with 151 to 200 members.
- \$575 for organizations with 201 to 300 members.

- \$725 for organizations with 301 to 400 members.
- For organizations with more than 400 members, the annual fee is \$725 for the first 400 members and \$100 for each additional 100 members or part of 100 members.

Fee structure may be considered for adjustment based on a written request from the organization with an explanation on the reason for the adjustment as noted in Section 6.3 below.

Annual fees are waived during the re-approval year, though a review fee for documentation is charged.

In the first quarter of the year, the USCCB Office sends an invoice for the annual fee to the director. Payment is due within 30 days.

6.2.4 Consultation and Workshop Fees

No fee is charged for consultation or workshops provided by the USCCB Subcommittee when the consultation or workshop is in-person. Transportation, meals, and lodging are to be covered by the diocese or office extending the invitation in lieu of a fee.

For formal virtual presentations, larger consultations or workshops, a stipend of \$250 is requested, but may be reduced upon request. The stipend pays for the professional expertise of the Director and office staff. If a joint presentation with other consultants or workshop leaders, this fee may be increased to cover their professional services.

No consultation or workshop fee is assessed when the Office of Certification makes the request of a diocese or organization to present.

6.2.5 Late Fees

A late fee of \$75 is charged to the diocesan office when the annual fee, requested report, or assessment for in-person meetings, virtual conferences, or documentation review is not received by the due date, and \$75 for every month thereafter until the fee is paid in full. A grace period of 30 days is allowed before late fees are assessed.

6.3 Adjustment of Fees

6.3.1 Requests for Adjustment of Fees

The USCCB Subcommittee must receive all requests for adjustment of fees in writing (e.g. email) from the diocesan program director or the executive director, along with a rationale for the requested fee adjustment based on the criteria outlined in 6.3.2 below. Written requests shall be received in time for consideration during regularly scheduled USCCB Subcommittee meetings. Please consult with the Office of Certification to identify such times. Such fees would include fees for opening a certification file, fees for certification documentation reviews, annual fees,

consultation fees, and late fees. The USCCB Subcommittee's determination for an adjustment of established fees shall be based on a review and vote by the members of the Subcommittee.

6.3.2 Criteria for Adjustment of Fees

The USCCB Subcommittee establishes criteria for the adjustment of fees subject to a vote of approval by the members of the Subcommittee. Criteria shall include such considerations as the following:

- proven financial need
- the number of members and membership structures of an organization
- Catholic population and size of a diocese
- the reduction of an organization's or diocesan office's budget and/or staff
- the number of ecclesial ministers certified by an organization or diocesan office
- the time and effort of the USCCB Subcommittee and staff for reviewing documentation for the approval of certification standards and procedures
- a sliding fee scale based on the per capita assessment of the Catholic population of dioceses
- other criteria established by the USCCB Subcommittee in its sole discretion.

6.4 Extensions

6.4.1 Requests for Extension of Payment of Fees or Submission of Periodic Reports

If diocesan or national organization directors communicate in writing with the staff of the USCCB Office regarding the reason for a delay in submitting their periodic reports or submitting a payment for any of the fees listed in the fee schedule, the late fee may be waived. Directors shall also notify the staff of the date by which their late report or payment will be received in the USCCB Office.

7.0 Policies and Procedures of the USCCB Subcommittee

The USCCB Subcommittee determines the policies and procedures for the approval of diocesan and organization certification standards and procedures and reserves the right to make revisions following the directives of the USCCB publications and the development of lay ecclesial ministry in the Church.

7.1 Certification Standards and Procedures for a Specialized Ministry

The USCCB Subcommittee grants approval of certification standards and procedures only for those who exercise a specialized ministry in a diocese or national organization, such as a catechetical leader, pastoral life coordinator, business manager, or youth ministry leader, etc.

The USCCB Subcommittee does not grant approval for the certification standards and procedures for an “ecclesial minister,” in a generic sense. Local ordinaries or national organizations determine which of the specialized ministers in their diocese or national organization are designated as ecclesial ministers.

7.2 Revision of this *Certification Approval Handbook*

The USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service reserves the right to revise, supplement, change, or rescind any policies or portion of the *Handbook* from time to time as it deems appropriate, in its sole and absolute discretion. A regular formal evaluation process by the USCCB Subcommittee will occur when deemed necessary by the subcommittee.

7.3 Listing of Approved Programs and Organizations and Those Preparing for Approval on the USCCB website

National organizations and diocesan offices with USCCB Subcommittee-approved certification standards or certification standards and procedures are listed online on the USCCB [website](#).

7.4 Location of the USCCB Office of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service

The USCCB Office of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service is located in Washington, D.C. All correspondence and shipments are to be sent to

USCCB
Office of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service
3211 Fourth Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20017-1194
Phone: (202) 541-3349. | Email: certification@usccb.org | Website: usccb.org/certification

Appendix 1: Glossary

This glossary contains working definitions used in USCCB subcommittee and other publications. It is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive but can be a guidance for common usage of terms in ministry formation and certification. In some instances, to clarify related terms, the glossary makes use of grids, included at the end of the section. For the most up-to-date version of the glossary, please visit <https://usecb.org/certification>.

accreditation: See [Glossary Grid #1](#) on accreditation, certification and approval.

accreditation body: See [Glossary Grid #1](#) on accreditation, certification and approval.

advisory committee: A committee composed of members both internal and external to a program that consults regularly with the program director regarding all aspects of the program and assists in the development of the program according to agreed upon standards. Professional consultation committees function in the same manner.

Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers (the Alliance): The organization seeks to affirm and promote lay ecclesial ministry in parishes and dioceses throughout the United States. The Alliance is comprised of five national Catholic ministry organizations working collaboratively to produce common standards for lay ecclesial minister formation and to implement and promote the certification of lay ecclesial ministers in specific leadership roles. The Alliance partners include the [Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions](#) (FDLC), [In Word and Witness](#), [National Association for Lay Ministry](#) (NALM), [National Association of Pastoral Musicians](#) (NPM), and [National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry](#) (NFCYM). The USCCB Subcommittee first approved its certification standards in 2011 and reapproved expanded and updated certification standards in 2018. (See the Alliance website at www.lemcertification.org.)

annual fee: Each approved organization or diocese pays an annual fee.

application: This online form that is part of the process of establishing a relationship with the Subcommittee. Upon contacting the USCCB Office staff stating that the diocesan office or national organization is seeking approval for its certification standards and procedures from the USCCB Subcommittee, the USCCB Office staff will send the director or executive director an application for online completion, correspondence about the fee schedule, a *Certification Approval Handbook*, and other related items.

After reviewing this *Certification Approval Handbook*, the director or executive director shall complete the application form. The form asks for a PDF version of a letter or memo of approval from either the local ordinary or Board of Directors. The director or executive director shall also send the original copy of this letter to the USCCB Office. For more details see [section 3.0](#) in the *Certification Approval Handbook*.

approval: See [Glossary Grid #1](#) on accreditation, certification and approval.

ACPE The Standard for Spiritual Care and Education (ACPE): The ACPE is a national multi-faith organization of CPE certified educators and ministers. Its mission is to foster experience-based theological education that combines the practice of pastoral care with qualified supervision and peer-group reflection and that is grounded in a person-centered approach to religious ministry. The ACPE Accreditation Subcommittee accredits ACPE centers, and the ACPE Certification Subcommittee certifies CPE supervisors.

authorization: See [Glossary Grid #2](#) on endorsement, appointment, authorization and commissioning.

Catholic Campus Ministry Association (CCMA): A professional organization whose mission is to foster the professional and theological growth of Catholic campus ministers and to promote the mission of the Church in higher education. The USCCB Subcommittee first approved its certification standards and procedures in 1992, and most recently, in 2019.

certificate: A written statement that a participant has completed a program or course of studies through attendance, participation, and successful completion of program requirements. Receiving a certificate of completion of a program is not the same thing as being recognized as certified by a diocesan ministry formation program or national ministry organization. See certification below.

certification: See [Glossary Grid #1](#) on accreditation, certification and approval.

chaplains: Canon Law (Canons 564-572) restricts the title “chaplain” to ordained priests. In 1997, several Congregations of the Holy See issued an Instruction, “On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests.” This Instruction was given approval by Pope John Paul II and further specified that it is unlawful for non-ordained faithful to assume the title of “chaplain.” However, in the United States, hiring institutions (health care, prison, and other specialized institutions) will only employ “chaplains” who are board certified and hold this professional credential for spiritual care services. Catholic women religious, religious brothers and lay faithful, who have met standards or competencies of Catholic chaplaincy associations approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops through its Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service and who have been acknowledged or endorsed by their own local bishop, are also essential representatives of the Church. These ministers help maintain a Catholic presence in most such institutions, assure adherence to the “Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services,” ensure the availability of the sacraments to Catholics, and provide direction and comfort to physicians, staff, and family members of the sick, dying and incarcerated.

To retain and affirm this very important ministry, while also being faithful to the letter and spirit of Canon Law and the 1997 Instruction, the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) separates out "acknowledgement or endorsement for ministry" from the "certification by

the profession." This distinction enables NACC to be faithful to Canon Law, and, at the same time, meet the requirements for certification. The NACC requests of the local ordinary a letter of acknowledgement/endorsement for the candidate for certification which is a prerequisite for certification. The NACC then issues a certificate for "the profession" as a legally separate 501(c) 3. The certificate, no longer with the inclusion of the phrase "and by the authority of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,." instead includes the statement "according to the NACC Standards and Procedures approved by the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service."³⁹ As is theologically and canonically appropriate, the bishop of the local Church may choose to commission and authorize as "lay ecclesial pastoral care ministers" those who have obtained the professional certification to do those things which the hiring institutions entrust to certified chaplains, regardless of religion or ecclesiastical standing within a given faith.

clinical pastoral education (CPE) program: A program of ministry formation for chaplains and for others considering a pastoral care ministry administered in a clinical setting under the supervision of a CPE certified educator. It offers students a structured system of components, including a unified curriculum, a student learning contract, participation in peer groups, and the practice of ministry in a supervised context with formal reporting of this ministry, theological reflection on ministry, a multidisciplinary approach, and an evaluation of the achievement of learning contract goals. The CPE program consists of 4 units and occurs within a specified time frame. 400 hours comprises each CPE unit, during which participants strive for personal growth and professional competence as chaplains and ministers of pastoral care. The USCCB Subcommittee no longer accredits CPE programs.

commendation: Acknowledgment that an individual, group, program or program aspect deserves special recognition.

commissioning: See [Glossary Grid #2](#) on endorsement, appointment, authorization and commissioning.

competence: The demonstrated and proven ability of candidates for certification to meet certification standards approved by the USCCB Subcommittee.

³⁹ For a more detailed explanation of the initial efforts to clarify the distinction between ordained chaplains and lay ministers functioning in that role in the U.S., see [Appendix 4](#) for a copy of the May 7, 2004 letter of Bishop Melczek. (then Episcopal Liaison to the NACC) to the U.S. Bishops and reprinted with permission of NACC. Note that while Bishop Melczek's letter stated that the NACC could both certify chaplains through its certification process and issue a certificate by the authority of the USCCB, in point of fact, the NACC could *not* do both. Rather the NACC expected the local ordinary to endorse the chaplaincy which NACC certified. Since 2004, local ordinaries now endorse "lay ecclesial health care ministers." This endorsement is now a prerequisite for certification by NACC. For additional information on the current NACC policy regarding episcopal endorsement, see [Appendix 5](#), "NACC and the need for Ecclesial Endorsement for Board Certified Members: What does endorsement mean and what is expected of the local ordinary?"

competencies (core or specialized): Knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, values, and/or traits required to be eligible for certification in four major areas: [human](#), [spiritual](#), [intellectual](#), and [pastoral](#). Core competencies are foundational and common to all specialized ministries. Specialized competencies are unique to a particular specialized ministry.

competency: The requisite attainment of a level of proficiency associated with specific knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, values, and/or traits for a specialized ministry.

consultation: A review of standards and procedures used for certification by a diocese or national organization or of programs of formation offered by dioceses or academic institutions. The purpose of such a discussion is to improve the quality and effectiveness by sharing best practices and guidance in accord with *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* or other relevant pastoral documents, concerns and priorities of the USCCB and the universal magisterium. A request for a consultation may be made to the USCCB Office as an informal discussion, conference call, or meeting. The more formal review is a review of standards and procedures and includes a [review](#) team.

Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord ([Co-Workers](#) | [Colaboradores](#)): A resource for diocesan bishops and for all others who are responsible for guiding the development of lay ecclesial ministry in the United States. Developed by the Committee on the Laity of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, this document was approved by the full body of bishops at its November 2005 General Meeting. It provides a common frame of reference for ensuring that the development of lay ecclesial ministry continues in ways that are faithful to the Church's theological and doctrinal tradition and that responds to contemporary pastoral needs and situations. It suggests concepts, goals, strategies, resources, and ideas to consider. It invites local adaptation, application, and implementation to achieve consistency where possible and to encourage diversity where appropriate. It is the foundational, though not exclusive, basis upon which existing standards for certification for specialized ministry for lay ministers are based.

cultural diversity: The Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service affirms diversity of culture as a gift to the church and a value to be promoted on its own merits, and especially in light of the intercultural context of the Church in the United States. The USCCB Subcommittee seeks information through a biennial reports or other means from dioceses and organizations whose standards and procedures have been approved, regarding the gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of diocesan staff, committee or board members, and the general population or membership served. This information can be best collected from the dioceses or organizations themselves by surveying or engaging certified leaders or members. The Subcommittee may also offer a general anonymous survey of leadership and members. It is important that leaders understand that they are being asked these questions with a goal of tracking efforts to better reflect the actual diversity of the Church being served. *See also* "[intercultural competency](#)."

dimensions of formation: See "[four dimensions of formation](#)."

endorsement: See [Glossary Grid #2](#) on endorsement, appointment, authorization and commissioning.

equivalency: The documented and demonstrated ability to evidence in other ways the diocesan or organizational requirements, when one or more expected prerequisites are not able to be met, to be eligible for certification

evaluation: A formal and planned process after an assessment for determining whether accreditation standards have been met by all components of the program, as well as recognition of the strengths and limitations of the program.

Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC): A national organization composed primarily of members of diocesan liturgical subcommittees, worship offices, and/or the equivalent diocesan liturgical structures. These diocesan liturgical personnel, appointed by their bishops, have responsibility for the promotion of the liturgical life of their dioceses. The organization is a partner of the [Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers](#). The USCCB Subcommittee first approved its certification standards and procedures in 2011 and reapproved revised and expanded certification standards and procedures in 2018.

four dimensions of formation: The four dimensions of formation—[human](#), [spiritual](#), [intellectual](#), and [pastoral](#)—that provide a framework for the formation of deacons and priests and for lay ecclesial ministers, and which are reference in [Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord](#).⁴⁰

guidelines: Suggestions for contents, procedures, and policies in developing, maintaining, or evaluating programs.

human formation: One of the [four dimensions of formation](#). Human formation seeks to develop the lay ecclesial minister’s human qualities and character by fostering a healthy and well-balanced personality for the sake of both personal growth and ministerial service. These qualities are critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary for the ministers to become apt instruments of God’s love and compassion.⁴¹

indicator: Something that constitutes an “effective” demonstration of a particular skill. Each skill within the core skills section has a set of competency indicators. To be competent, one should

⁴⁰ See Co-Workers, p. 34; John Paul II, [On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day](#) [Pastores Dabo Vobis]; [Program of Priestly Formation](#), National [Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States](#), and National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers on the [website](#) for the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers.

⁴¹ Cf. *Co-Workers*, 34,36.

demonstrate many but not necessarily all of the indicators for each competency. Indicators not demonstrated represent areas for growth.

intellectual formation: One of the [four dimensions of formation](#). Intellectual formation seeks to develop the lay ecclesial minister's adequate knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the Catholic faith, which is rooted in God's revelation and embodied in the living tradition of the Church. It consists chiefly of study of the sacred sciences but draws also on a wider range of other disciplines: philosophy, literature and the arts, psychology, sociology, counseling, medical ethics, culture and language studies, business administration, leadership and organizational development, law, etc. Although the sacred sciences are a primary focus, study of the other disciplines are valuable and relevant to effective ministry.⁴²

intercultural competency: A goal for ministry leaders set by the USCCB Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church is to increase their capacity to welcome, receive, and encourage all emerging cultural groups to assume their leadership role in the Church. The five learning modules of the guidelines on [Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers](#) include formation in the following areas:⁴³

1. Frame issues of diversity in terms of the Church's identity and mission to evangelize.
2. Seek an understanding of culture and how it works.
3. Develop intercultural communication skills in pastoral settings.
4. Expand one's knowledge of the obstacles that impede effective intercultural relations.
5. Foster ecclesial integration rather than assimilation in Church settings, with a spirituality of reconciliation and mission.

[In Word & Witness](#) (formerly NCCL): A professional organization for catechetical leaders that provides networking, resources, and training opportunities for its members and those engaged in catechetical ministry. The organization is a partner of the [Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers](#). The USCCB Subcommittee approved its certification standards in 2011 and reapproved revised and expanded certification standards and procedures in 2018.

justice issues: A comprehensive concept that encompasses aspects of moral action and policy in promotion of the common good and the preservation of proper rights and responsibilities of people

⁴² Cf. *Co-Workers*, 47.

⁴³ The Catholic Church's concern with diversity is not just a practical matter but something integral to the Church's very identity and mission. Proficiency in matters of culture and intercultural relations is an essential feature of the ongoing process of conversion by which the Gospel becomes life for people. For more about the guidelines for intercultural competency, the content of the training, and resources, visit the [webpage](#) for the USCCB Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church.

and groups within a society. Justice issues are often considered in light of realities which threaten the common good and the rights of others.

lay ecclesial minister: As described in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Lay Ministry Subcommittee report entitled *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: State of the Questions*, a lay ecclesial minister is a fully initiated lay member of the Christian faithful, including vowed religious, who responds to the empowerment and gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism and Confirmation to participate in ministry. The lay ecclesial minister has prepared him/herself through a process of prayer discernment and has received the necessary formation, education, and training to function competently within a given area of ministry. They intentionally bring personal competencies and gifts to serve in the Church's mission through a specific ministry of ecclesial leadership, and do so with community recognition and support. Furthermore, lay ecclesial ministers are entrusted with a formal and public role in ministry, or have had an office conferred by competent ecclesiastical authority. Additional hallmarks of a lay ecclesial minister include having been installed in a ministry through the authority of the bishop or his representative, perhaps using a public ritual and someone who commits to performing the duties of a ministry in a stable manner and/or who is a paid staff person (full-time or part-time) or a volunteer with responsibility and the necessary authority for institutional leadership in a particular area of ministry.⁴⁴

Leadership Institute: The [Diocesan Educational/Catechetical Leadership Institute](#) was begun in 1997 as a 5-day orientation program for new or nearly new diocesan leaders. In 2010, the Leadership Institute became an online program which expanded in 2011. In 2012, the online Leadership Institute expanded again. It is offered free of charge to all interested individuals. It is sponsored by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), Departments of Chief Administrators of Catholic Education and Religious Education, the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL), and the USCCB Secretariats of Catholic Education and of Evangelization and Catechesis, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Due the fact that the informative sessions offered by the Leadership Institute are of value to any Catholic minister in a leadership role, the Subcommittee on Certification asks each organization or diocesan office whose standards and procedures for certification are approved to report on how the leadership institute has been used to assist with initial or ongoing formation.

limitation: A statement in a self-study or a report of a site liaison that indicates that an organization or diocesan office needs to address a standard, criterion, guideline, process, policy, or procedure to improve the program.

ministerial priesthood: The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, "each in its own proper way, in the one

⁴⁴ Cf. USCCB Subcommittee on Lay Ministry, *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: The State of the Questions* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1999), 7-8. Cf. also, *Co-Workers*, 10.

priesthood of Christ.” While being “ordered one to another,” they differ in essence.⁴⁵ While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit—the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. It is a mission of service in the likeness of Jesus who came to serve and not be served. The ministerial priesthood is a privileged means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church in prolonging his mission throughout time. For this reason, it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the Sacrament of Holy Orders.⁴⁶

The characteristics that differentiate the ministerial priesthood of bishops and priests from the common priesthood of the faithful may be summarized in the following fashion: (1) the ministerial priesthood is rooted in the apostolic succession and vested with the faculty and the responsibility of acting in the person of Christ, the Head and the Shepherd⁴⁷ and (2) it is a priesthood that renders its sacred ministers servants of Christ and of the Church by means of authoritative proclamation of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments, and the pastoral direction of the faithful. In other words, the ministerial priesthood continues the mission received by the Apostles from Christ. For these reasons, the formation for seminarians is distinct from that of candidates for lay ecclesial ministry. In the same way, the lay ecclesial minister necessitates a program of formation proper to his or her form of ministry or service in the Church. Nevertheless, the formation of both seminarians and lay ecclesial ministers, while distinct, is rooted in the common four dimensions of formation. See “*four dimensions of formation*” above.

ministry formation program: A program to assist the participants with understanding their gifts, call, role, and mission in the Church and in the world, and with developing skills to respond to the call. Components of a program include a mission, goals, and objectives based on the authoritative teaching of Vatican II and the teaching and guidelines found in post-conciliar documents, the needs of the local Church; a curriculum based on the program’s mission and its goals and objectives that integrate the four areas (pillars) of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. It also requires a program director who administers the program; instructional faculty who assist in the formation process; and sufficient resources for the program to operate according to its mission.

National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC): The NACC, as a national association of certified Catholic chaplains, CPE certified educators, and other pastoral care ministers, aspires to be

⁴⁵ See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], no. 10, in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996).

⁴⁶ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000), nos. 1542, 1547.

⁴⁷ Pope John Paul II, *On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day* [*Pastores Dabo Vobis*], no. 4.

the forum for dialogue between the Catholic Church and chaplaincy in responding to new realities and the initiation of continual renewal and transformation of the practice of chaplaincy.

National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM): A professional organization that supports, educates, and advocates for lay ministers and promotes the development of lay ministry in the Catholic Church. The organization is a partner of the [Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers](#). The USCCB Subcommittee approved its certification standards in 2011 and reapproved revised and expanded certification standards and procedures in 2018.

National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM): An organization of diocesan, regional, and national structures encompassing the United States and its territories that strives to raise awareness of and foster the ongoing development of ministry to, with, by, and for youth. The organization is a partner of the [Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers](#). The USCCB Subcommittee first approved its certification standards in 2011 and reapproved revised and expanded certification standards and procedures in 2018.

National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM): A membership organization composed primarily of musicians, musician-liturgists, clergy, and other leaders of prayer. NPM is devoted to serving the life and mission of the Church by fostering the art of musical liturgy in Catholic worshiping communities. The organization is a partner of the [Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers](#). The USCCB Subcommittee approved standards and procedures in 2011 and reapproved revised and expanded certification standards and procedures in 2018.

ongoing formation: The ongoing program of academic studies, days of reflection or retreat, lectures, readings, workshops, and other activities that enhances the competencies of specialized ministers. Ongoing formation is often understood as continuing education. This formation should integrate a candidate's self-evaluation and growth plan for each of the [four dimensions](#) of *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*: [human](#), [spiritual](#), [intellectual](#), and [pastoral](#).

organization: A national professional organization of specialized ecclesial ministers or an organizational structure in a region or state Catholic conference that submits certification standards or certification standards and procedures to the USCCB Subcommittee for approval.

pastoral formation: One of the [four dimensions of formation](#). Pastoral formation cultivates the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that directly pertain to effective functioning in the ministry setting and that also pertain to pastoral administration that supports direct ministry.⁴⁸

peer reviewer / peer review: See "[reviewer / review](#)."

⁴⁸ *Co-Workers*, 47.

periodic report: Each organization or diocese whose standards and procedures have been approved prepares a periodic report for the subcommittee often due at the mid-point of an approval cycle. This report highlights and provides reasons for any changes in structure, procedures, process, or persons involved in certification as well as challenges faced, and lessons learned. Of particular importance is information on how the process has been enhanced to reflect the four pillars described in [Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord](#) and how resources created by the USCCB to assist them in formation of candidates have been used.

periodic review cycle: A period of seven years during which an organization or diocesan office strives to fulfill the recommendations of the last periodic review and to respond to changing needs of the local Church and participants.

policy: A set of rules and/or directions in a designated area congruent with standards, procedures, and guidelines by which decisions are made.

preparatory meeting: An in-person or online meeting which serves to evaluate and coach an organization or diocesan office. Such a meeting takes place prior to the peer review team's [review](#) of documentation. The peer review team's evaluation includes a distillation of these meetings, interviews, findings and the documentation submitted. These meetings and those reports contribute to the overall report to the USCCB Subcommittee in the initial approval review process.

procedure: A set of mandatory steps to be followed in a regular and defined order for the accomplishment of a designated purpose.

recommendation: An advisory course of action for improvement included in a peer review committee report and/or USCCB Subcommittee notification of decision letter.

renewal of certification: A process through which candidates certified by the diocese or organization demonstrates their commitment to maintain and enhance the competencies called for by certification standards and requirements. Renewal of certification takes place after a period of time designated by the organization or diocesan office. See also See [Glossary Grid #1](#) on accreditation, certification and approval.

report: An oral or written presentation to discuss findings and other details regarding a program's process and activities related to ministry formation and certification which can assist the program and the subcommittee in its awareness of, and response to, programmatic needs.

review: The formal process of assessment or examination of all components of an organization or diocesan office to recognize strengths and limitation and to evaluate whether the organization or office is in compliance with USCCB Subcommittee recommendations.

reviewer: A reviewer appointed by the USCCB Subcommittee who meets established criteria and meets virtually or in-person with organization or diocesan office to advise and consult with those

involved in the certification process. A reviewer is part of team charged with developing a presentation or report to the USCCB Office, and what is observed in the review of the site

role of bishop: See [Glossary Grid #2](#) on endorsement, appointment, authorization and commissioning.

self-study process: A period of time within which an organization or diocesan office director and a certification commission/committee carefully examine all the components of the office for compliance with USCCB Subcommittee standards, recommendations, policies, and procedures; identify the strengths and limitations; and make recommendations for improving quality.

self-study report: A report written by an organization or diocesan office director and certification commission/committee stating the results of the self-study process and the office's compliance with USCCB Subcommittee recommendations. The report also includes a description of the strengths, limitations, noncompliance with standards, and recommendations to improve or change the office.

spiritual formation: One of the four dimensions of formation. Spiritual formation aims to arouse and animate the hunger for holiness, desire for union with the Father through Christ in the Spirit, daily growing in love of God and neighbor in life and ministry, and the practices of prayer and spirituality that foster these attitudes and dispositions. It promotes and strengthens that fundamental conversion that places God, and not oneself, at the center of one's life. Openness to this ongoing conversion is a prerequisite for fruitful spiritual formation.⁴⁹

sponsor: The authority that partially or totally finances a ministry formation program so that it can operate.

statistical report: a collection of basic data related to certification and membership from certified dioceses and organizations collected periodically for documentation and fee assessment purposes.

standards: Criteria established by which the competence of ministers is assessed and evaluated for certification. Each of the four dimensions of formation—human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral—is to be addressed in development of these criteria.⁵⁰

statement of approval: A statement given to dioceses and organizations whose standards and procedures for certification have been approved. The statement lists their name, the name of the role or roles approved the year they were approved, and the year their approval ends. See also [Glossary Grid #1](#) on accreditation, certification and approval.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Co-Workers*, 38.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Co-Workers*, 34.

synodal: From the Greek word “synod,” meaning “to walk together,” this term, in an ecclesial context, refers to processes, structures, conversations or other engagements in the life of the church which are based on the participatory nature of the church as the People of God in communion. This participatory role is based on the nature of co-responsibility of all the faithful for the life of the church, and the charisms or gifts given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to all the church’s members and to the church as a whole. It is expressed under the guidance and leadership of the authoritative magisterium of the church. In exercising synodality, the church is “called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one’s calling, with the authority conferred by Christ on the College of Bishops headed by the Pope. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit.”⁵¹

The nature of how synodality is exercised varies with ecclesial context. In regard to the processes described in this *Handbook*, it refers to the procedures established for evaluating certification standards for approval in a way which encourages dialogue and genuine engagement on the part of members of the USCCB Subcommittee and the Office of Certification together with the representatives and leaders of organizations and dioceses with approved standards, or those which are seeking to develop standards. It also refers to the approach taken regarding consultations on ministry formation when these are requested. The purpose is not only to ensure a good practice with respect to dialogue and the promotion of a collegial process, but to use such engagements as an opportunity for the participants to discern together the work of the Holy Spirit: “The ... members of the People of God who take part in [synodal assemblies] are responding to the summons of the Lord, listening as a community to what the Spirit is saying to the Church through the Word of God which resonates in their situation, and interpreting the signs of the times with the eyes of faith. In the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God’s will.”⁵²

USCCB Subcommittee: The term used for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service). The USCCB Subcommittee has a mandate from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to establish, review, and approve standards and procedures to be used on a voluntary basis by dioceses and national organizations for their certification of ecclesial ministers. It also offers consultative services aimed at improving the quality of lay ministry formation programs that are sponsored by dioceses and academic institutions. The USCCB Subcommittee is the successor body to the prior USCCB Commission on Certification and Accreditation, which ended operations in 2011. See [Appendix 3](#).

⁵¹ International Theological Commission, “[Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church](#),” no. 67. March 2, 2018.

⁵² *Ibid.*, no. 68.

USCCB Subcommittee-approved: See [Glossary Grid #1](#) on accreditation, certification and approval.

Glossary Grid #1: Distinctions between Accreditation, Certification and Approval

This grid has been developed to help clarify terms often associated with recognition of accomplishments related to ministry formation. These terms have specific meanings in the context of the USCCB Subcommittee and should not be used interchangeably. This grid clarifies the definition, who is responsible for it, and how the USCCB Subcommittee relates to the process.

<i>TERM</i>	<i>DEFINITION</i>	<i>WHO DOES IT?</i>	<i>HOW USCCB SUBCOMMITTEE RELATES TO IT</i>
accreditation	The public status granted an institution or program by an authorized national or regional accrediting agency that assures the public that the institution or program is in compliance with accreditation standards. Examples include: the accreditation of academic programs associated with colleges, universities, and schools of various types.	Typically, institutions who monitor and administrate credentialing of schools and programs within schools accredit those schools or programs to ensure public confidence and awareness of their compliance with academic or similar standards. This accrediting agency’s determination is often constitutive of the recognition of the school or program as an appropriate location for learning in the areas accredited. An example of an accrediting body for theological schools is the Association for Theological Studies (ATS). Examples: The Middle States Commission on Higher Education accredits Saint Bonaventure	The USCCB Subcommittee does not accredit any school, program or process. This is due to its nature – and that of the USCCB as a whole – as a body which does not perform the functions necessary to ensure accreditation. Instead, the USCCB Subcommittee does offer consultation , upon request, to lay ministry formation programs and academic institutions for the purpose of improving the quality and effectiveness of these programs in accord with the guidance offered by <i>Co-</i>

<i>TERM</i>	<i>DEFINITION</i>	<i>WHO DOES IT?</i>	<i>HOW USCCB SUBCOMMITTEE RELATES TO IT</i>
		University to grant academic degrees; ATS accredits the Oblate School of Theology to grant academic degrees.	<i>Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord</i> and by other relevant pastoral documents of the USCCB and the universal Magisterium. This consultation may, in turn, have an impact on the accreditation process which these programs and academic institutions pursue independently as part of their academic credentialing process.
certification	Certification is a formal, often renewable, process by which competency in a particular area of knowledge or capability is recognized. In formation for ministry, a candidate's competency in a specialized ministry is regularly evaluated and acknowledged by an authorized committee of an organization, diocesan or similar program. That competency is based on established criteria and standards. Candidates who receive certification are judged to have adequately demonstrated that they have met	Certification for roles in ecclesial ministry is accomplished by an appropriately authorized committee of an organization, diocese or program in accord with established standards determined by a competent authority. Certification is not granted for the general category of "lay ecclesial ministry" or "lay ecclesial minister," but for particular	The USCCB Subcommittee does not certify organizations or individuals. It does offer consultation and resourcing for those dioceses, Catholic conferences or ministry organizations which voluntarily submit their certification standards and procedures for review by the subcommittee.

<i>TERM</i>	<i>DEFINITION</i>	<i>WHO DOES IT?</i>	<i>HOW USCCB SUBCOMMITTEE RELATES TO IT</i>
	the standards and competencies of the diocese, organization or program. They are granted formal recognition of certification for a stipulated period of time before a renewal of certification is due.	ministerial roles based on those established standards. Examples: A psychologist is certified in a particular area / role in the field (e.g. rehabilitation psychology). The Catholic Campus Ministry Association certifies a person for the role of professional Catholic campus minister; the Diocese of San Bernardino certifies a person for the role of Charity & Justice Coordinator.	<i>Upon request</i> , the subcommittee offers guidance for the development of certification standards based on the <i>National Certification Standards for Ecclesial Ministry</i> based on those produced by the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers and other approved diocesan programs and ministry organizations.
approval	Approval is the means by which some information or activity is acknowledged to be good and valuable for its intended purpose based on an established framework of what is expected. In the context of	Approval of a program of certification for roles in ecclesial ministry for a diocese may be granted by a competent ecclesial authority (e.g. a bishop and/or a	The USCCB Subcommittee approves voluntarily submitted certification standards and procedures for (1) dioceses and diocesan

<i>TERM</i>	<i>DEFINITION</i>	<i>WHO DOES IT?</i>	<i>HOW USCCB SUBCOMMITTEE RELATES TO IT</i>
	<p>formation and certification for roles in ecclesial ministry, approval refers to the granting of this status as a means of identifying a program as expressing or emulating ‘best practices’ in the preparation, formation, and certification of ecclesial ministers.</p>	<p>bishops conference) or his delegate. For institutes for consecrated life, this approval could be granted by provincials or provincial councils.</p> <p>For ministry organizations which offer certification, approval is typically sought by an appropriate ecclesial authority (e.g. a bishop, a conference of bishops, a provincial or provincial conference, etc.)</p> <p>Examples: The National Institute of Standards Technology approves a cybersecurity framework as meeting best practices for U.S.-based cyber technology; The Pennsylvania Dept. of Education approves a program framework for Grades 7-12.</p> <p>The Archbishop of New York approves a program of study for Pastoral Life Coordinators for his diocese. The USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service approves the</p>	<p>offices, (2) national organizations of specialized ministers listed in <i>The Official Catholic Directory</i>, and (3) national organizations sponsored by state Catholic conferences.</p> <p>Diocesan offices, national organizations of ecclesial ministers, and state Catholic conferences with approved certification standards and procedures are listed in the <i>USCCB Subcommittee Directory</i>, which is available on the USCCB website.</p>

<i>TERM</i>	<i>DEFINITION</i>	<i>WHO DOES IT?</i>	<i>HOW USCCB SUBCOMMITTEE RELATES TO IT</i>
		standards and procedures for certification of the Archdiocese of Detroit.	

Glossary Grid #2: Distinctions - Endorsement, Appointment, Commissioning and Authorization

This grid was developed to clarify activities which are delineations of the role of the bishop or local Ordinary with respect to recognizing competency and leadership activity of ecclesial ministers with respect to certain leadership roles in the life of the church. It is not exhaustive but descriptive of a number of ways in which Ordinaries have exercised this function in various dioceses. Language referring to the bishop / diocese in the information below can also include provincial leadership in religious communities and institutes for consecrated life. The terms presented are merely descriptive and do not reflect “levels” of achievement in recognition. They are simply delineated ways in which such recognition by bishops have developed in pastoral practice, or as indicated in ecclesial documents.

For additional information, please see Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, pp. 54-60.

endorsement	appointment	commissioning	authorization
<p>The formal recognition by the bishop or by the bishop’s delegate in the diocese of the ecclesial minister’s good standing in the Church, residence and/or place of ministry, and of the certifying body’s authorization to certify that minister.</p> <p>An endorsement conveys two messages. First of all, it implicitly is an affirmation of the process that informs the bishop or his delegate that a minister’s call and preparation align with the ministerial competencies and expectations set by the certifying body.</p>	<p>The formal designation by the bishop or the bishop’s delegate in the diocese assigning an ecclesial minister to a specific position that includes its rights, obligations, responsibilities and authority, usually for a particular period of time.</p> <p>The appointment of a person to a specific position should be done in writing (required for ecclesiastical offices [cf. Code of Canon Law § 156]) and should include the rights and obligations attached to the position or office, any limits on the exercise of authority (e.g., budget reviews, prior</p>	<p>A liturgical rite or prayer service that highlights the new relationship of the ecclesial minister in the life of his/her community as a result of the minister’s role.</p> <p>Public prayer and ritual can be significant for the lay ecclesial minister and for the community, highlighting the new role being undertaken and the relationship the lay ecclesial minister has with the bishop and/or his delegate.</p> <p>Commissioning can be said to be a public liturgical</p>	<p>An ecclesial action which formally and publicly affirms a lay ecclesial minister’s activity and leadership in the name of the Church and of the local bishop and his delegate. Such authorization frequently includes all the aspects of endorsement, appointment and commissioning.</p> <p>It is this set of action in its entirety which <i>Co-Workers</i> recommended for lay ecclesial ministers and others in a ministry</p>

endorsement	appointment	commissioning	authorization
<p>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. When considering endorsement of an ecclesial minister, a bishop may rely on the recommendation of the person’s pastor, program director, or ministry organization leader. Endorsement encourages the hope that the bishop himself and the minister will establish a professional rapport and an affirming ministerial relationship, possibly including appointment, commissioning or authorization.</p> <p>Though not envisioned in the <i>Co-Workers</i> document, this dimension of a bishop’s role has developed based on pastoral need.</p>	<p>permission for certain actions), relevant employment and personnel policies, any limitations on the term of the appointment, and—perhaps most importantly—any special delegation to perform functions proper to the ordained (e.g., baptizing outside of emergencies [canon 861 §2] and witnessing the exchange of matrimonial consent [canon 1112§1]104). Canonical and/or legal counsel should be consulted with respect to the drafting of written contracts and/or any proposed term of appointment.</p> <p>Appointment is discussed in <i>Co-Workers</i>, pp. 57-58.</p>	<p>celebration of acknowledgement, endorsement and/or appointment.</p> <p>See also <i>Co-Workers</i>, p. 54.</p>	<p>leadership role that has a professional relationship to the ministry of the bishop and/or his delegate.</p> <p>See also <i>Co-Workers</i>, pp. 54-56.</p>

Appendix 2: Sample Codes of Ethics Statements from Members of the Alliance for Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers

National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM) – Revised 2018

This Code of Ethics is for members of the National Association for Lay Ministry engaged in pastoral ministry or lay pastoral leadership in the Catholic Church. The term “Pastoral Minister” herein refers to those engaged as ministerial leaders (employed or volunteer) as well as those engaged in administration. It is expected to be shared with other staff and posted in a prominent place in the parish. Pastoral Ministers are expected to live a life authentically reflecting Catholic moral and social teaching principles. They foster the values in this code of ethics in all aspects of their lives both personal and ministerial.

1. Pastoral ministers strive to manage their lives in a healthy way, paying particular attention to nutrition, exercise, leisure and the need for peer ministerial support.
2. Pastoral ministers are aware of their sacred calling as servants of God. They maintain membership in an ecclesial body and are faithful in matters of doctrine while remaining true to their own conscience and the people they serve.
3. Pastoral ministers participate in the Church’s sacramental life and ongoing spiritual growth opportunities, such as retreats, individual and group prayer, and reading.
4. Pastoral ministers regularly participate in ongoing continuing education experiences, both formal and informal, in order to maintain and build upon their theological and professional competence.
5. Pastoral ministers respond to all people without regard for gender, creed, national origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic status, political beliefs, or disability because they recognize the common dignity of each person.
6. Pastoral ministers act to ensure that all persons have access to the resources, services, and opportunities they require with special regard for disadvantaged or oppressed groups or persons.
7. Pastoral ministers strive for heightened awareness of ecumenical, interfaith, gender, cultural, and ecological issues in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church.
8. Pastoral ministers fully inform those they serve as to the purpose and nature of their ministerial activities as well as their level of training and competence, making appropriate referrals when in the best interest of the person with whom they are working.
9. Pastoral ministers know that those served have a right to see all pastoral records concerning them.
10. Pastoral ministers do not accept or offer gifts which involve expectations that would extend, curtail, or alter the service provided.
11. Pastoral ministers do not exploit a dispute between a colleague and employers to obtain a position or otherwise advance their interest.
12. Pastoral ministers respect the work of their colleagues and use appropriate channels to express differences when deemed necessary.
13. Pastoral ministers understand the responsibility for and limitations of confidentiality, maintaining the confidentiality of information received, especially when requested by the person or required by

the circumstances, unless written permission is given to share the privileged information. Exceptions may be made. Some examples would be: when they judge that physical harm would come to the person or to third parties; when they are required by law to report; or when they judge that consultation with working professionals is necessary for the improvement of the service offered. In the latter case all names and any identifying circumstances are changed.

14. Pastoral ministers retain all notes and records of pastoral interaction/intervention in a locked, safe place and dispose of same, as appropriate, to protect confidentiality.
15. Pastoral ministers do not release information to third parties without the expressed consent of those served or the order of a court with competent jurisdiction.
16. Pastoral ministers are willing to carry out the policies and purposes of the hiring body; however, when occasion warrants the minister may offer alternative perspectives for the benefit of those served.
17. Pastoral ministers report inappropriate conduct by a colleague in ministry to appropriate church/civil authorities in order to protect others from harm.
18. Pastoral ministers distinguish clearly between statements and actions they make as individuals, as representatives of the community of faith, and as pastoral professionals.
19. Pastoral ministers are aware that they have considerable personal power because of their ministerial position. Therefore, pastoral ministers are particularly aware of the need for clear, appropriate and healthy physical, sexual, intellectual, emotional and spiritual boundaries. Pastoral ministers fully comply and act in accord with the USCCB statement *Charter for Protection of Children and Young People* (according to the latest revision).
20. Pastoral ministers are aware of and make every effort to resist the influences and pressures which result from unavoidable, overlapping relationships as they may interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment.

I have read and understand the above code of ethics and commit to uphold this code in my ministry.

Name: _____

Date: _____

National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry – Revised 2018

The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) has developed the following code of ethics for youth ministry leaders. The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry recommends that youth ministry leaders adopt this code by signing, dating, and placing it in their personnel file. This code of ethics is intended for youth ministry leaders regardless of employment status within the Church. While this code may be used in conjunction with existing diocesan policies, protocols, or codes, it is not intended to supersede them.

Professional Ethical Obligations

1. Ministerial Role

- a. Youth ministry leaders work collaboratively with the pastor (and/or other supervisors) and associates in ministry.
- b. Youth ministry leaders faithfully represent the teachings of the Catholic Church with integrity in word and action.
- c. Youth ministry leaders are competent and receive education and training commensurate with their role(s) and responsibilities (*Code of Canon Law*, § 231).
- d. Youth ministry leaders respect the diversity of spiritualities in the faith community and will not make their personal form of spirituality normative.

2. Inclusion

- a. Youth ministry leaders recognize the dignity of each person and refrain from behaviors or words that are disrespectful of anyone or any group.
- b. Youth ministry leaders serve all people without regard to gender, creed, national origin, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic status, immigration status, or political beliefs.
- c. Youth ministry leaders ensure that all persons have access to the resources, services, and opportunities they require with particular regard for persons with special needs or disabilities.

3. Accountability

- a. Youth ministry leaders are accountable to the pastor or other duly appointed representative, under the authority of the (arch)diocesan (arch)bishop.
- b. Youth ministry leaders are called to serve the faith community, carrying out their ministerial functions “conscientiously, zealously, and diligently” (*Code of Canon Law*, § 231).

c. Youth ministry leaders exercise responsible stewardship of resources while holding themselves to the highest standards of integrity regarding the fiscal matters placed in their trust.

d. Youth ministry leaders, upon suspecting or learning of abuse of a minor, must notify the civil authorities, as well as church leadership responsible for this topic, in accordance with civil and ecclesial law.

4. Confidentiality

a. Youth ministry leaders respect confidentiality, yet are not held to confidentiality in the same way as ordained ministers and licensed, certified counselors.

b. Youth ministry leaders adhere to civil and ecclesial law concerning the reporting of neglect, abuse, or when physical harm could come to the person or to a third party.

c. Youth ministry leaders support the rights and roles of parents while ministering to the needs and concerns of their children.

5. Conduct

a. Youth ministry leaders know that they have considerable personal power because of their ministerial position. Therefore, they will sustain respectful ministerial relationships, avoiding manipulation and other abuses of power.

b. Youth ministry leaders maintain appropriate professional boundaries (e.g., physical, sexual, spiritual, relational, and emotional). Romantic, dating, or sexual relationships between a youth ministry leader and any youth are inappropriate and unethical.

c. Youth ministry leaders shall exhibit the highest ethical standards and personal integrity reflective of the Gospel and will avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

d. Youth ministry leaders may not use alcohol while supervising youth, may never use illicit substances, and may never provide alcohol or illicit substances to youth.

e. Youth ministry leaders will use social media in an appropriate manner to ensure transparency and to maintain professional boundaries in communication.

6. Referrals and Intervention

a. Youth ministry leaders know the signs of neglect and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

b. Youth ministry leaders know their limitations with respect to paraprofessional counseling and make appropriate referrals.

7. Parish/Diocesan Policies

a. Youth ministry leaders know of and comply with all applicable parish, organizational, and/or diocesan policies with special attention to sexual misconduct, safe environment, social media and technology use, risk management, safety, transportation, parental permission, and medical emergency policies.

Name: _____ Dated: _____

Appendix 3: History of the Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service

In 1982, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Commission on Certification and Accreditation (USCCB/CCA) was established under a mandate by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB). In 1983, it was incorporated as a programmatic accrediting agency to accredit clinical pastoral education and ministry formation programs and approve certification standards and procedures. In the beginning, the USCCB/CCA accredited clinical pastoral education programs. Beginning in 1993, the commission started reviewing the certification standards and procedures of specialized ecclesial ministers submitted by national organizations and diocesan offices. In 1995, it began to accredit ministry formation programs. In 2004, the commission approved the first statewide certification standards and procedures, which were submitted by the Minnesota Catholic Education Association for the certification of catechetical and youth ministry leaders in six dioceses in the State of Minnesota.

In 2008, the president of the USCCB, appointed Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond to chair a special task force to inquire into the nature, purpose, functions, and relationships of the USCCB/CCA and to make recommendations to the USCCB Committee on Priorities and Plans with the intent of aligning the it more closely with the implementation of the USCCB strategic planning and reorganization process. In 2010 the final report noted, among other recommendations,⁵³ that the USCCB/CCA:

- Be aligned more closely with the mission of the USCCB and more closely related to its strategic plan and the work of the USCCB committees.
- National office be relocated to Washington D.C. (USCCB headquarters)
- Twofold mandate concerning accreditation and certification be revised and refocused to emphasize approving specialized ministry certification standards to be used by national ministry associations and by dioceses in certifying individuals.

In December 2011, the USCCB/CCA voted to dissolve. The current Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (USCCB Subcommittee) was then established with an office to be located at the USCCB Headquarters in Washington. The USCCB Subcommittee would have representation from five committees of the Conference and was mandated to focus on the role of approving the standards and procedures for the certification of ecclesial ministers in both institutional (for example, chaplains and campus ministers) and parish (for example, directors of religious education [DREs] and youth ministers) settings.

⁵³ A full copy of this *Report of the Special Task Force on the USCCB Commission on Certification and Accreditation* is available from the Office of Certification at the USCCB. Please contact us at certification@usccb.org for additional information.

Appendix 4: Letter from Bishop Dale Melczek Regarding the Use of the Term “Chaplains” in Reference to Lay Ecclesial Ministers – May 7, 2004

The letter below, authored by Bishop Dale Melczek in his role as then-episcopal moderator for the National Association of Catholic Chaplains sought to chart a path for use of the title of “chaplain” as it pertains to ordained priests and deacons, and how the term is used within the profession of chaplaincy with respect to board certification. For additional context, see “[chaplains](#)” in the Glossary above.



Bishop of Gary

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May 7, 2004

Your Eminence/Excellency:

For many years, the USCCB and the National Association of Catholic Chaplains have attempted to resolve the dilemma regarding the title “chaplain.” In the United States, hiring institutions (health care, prison, and other specialized institutions) will only employ “chaplains” who are board certified and hold this professional credential for spiritual care services. Canon Law (Canons 564-572) restricts the title “chaplain” to ordained priests. The 1997 Interdicasterial Instruction, “On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests,” approved in *forma specifica* by Pope John Paul II, further specified that it is unlawful for non-ordained faithful to assume the title of “chaplain.” Our efforts to obtain a rescript for an exception in the United States have been unsuccessful.

The witness and ministry of Catholic women religious and lay faithful, who have met standards approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops through its Commission on Certification and Accreditation and who have been endorsed by their own local bishop, are essential to the Church’s outreach to the sick and dying in our hospitals and long-term facilities. They are also essential representatives of the Church in most institutions today for maintaining a Catholic presence, for assuring adherence to the “Ethical and Religious Guidelines,” and for providing direction and comfort to physicians, staff, and family members of the sick and dying.

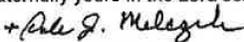
To retain this very important ministry and to be faithful to the letter and spirit of Canon Law and the 1997 Instruction, the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) will separate out “endorsement for ministry” from the “certification by the profession.” Currently, the NACC, in the name of the USCCB, does both.

Under this new arrangement, the NACC will:

- submit the NACC standards for periodic review by the USCCB/Commission on Certification and Accreditation and prepare an annual report to the same as is currently done; and
- request the endorsement for “lay ecclesial health care ministry” rather than for “chaplain” by the local Ordinary or his delegate.

The National Association of Catholic Chaplains will issue a certificate for “the profession” as a legally separate 501(C)3 no longer with the reading “and by the authority of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.” As is theologically and canonically appropriate, the bishop of the local Church may choose to commission as “lay ecclesial health care ministers” those who have obtained the professional certification to do those things which the hiring institutions entrust to certified chaplains regardless of religion or ecclesiastical standing within a given faith.

This accommodation was discussed at the September 2003 USCCB Administrative Board meeting and at the March 13, 2004 meeting of the NACC Board of Directors and Committee on Certification. This solution enables the Church to continue to benefit from the oversight and ministry of the 3,300 members of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (87 percent of whom are women religious or lay faithful) and it also allows those members to retain employment in and remuneration from the hiring institution. The Church is truly blessed with the compassionate and competent ministry which they extend to our faithful who are sick and dying in hospitals and long-term facilities, and also to those who are incarcerated.

Fraternally yours in the Lord Jesus,

Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek
Bishop of Gary
Episcopal Liaison to the NACC

Appendix 5: NACC and the need for Ecclesial Endorsement for Board Certified Members: What does endorsement mean and what is expected of the local ordinary? (2019)

The following document is provided by the National Association of Catholic Chaplains to offer additional clarification on the role of episcopal endorsement or acknowledgement of board-certified chaplains, including ordained chaplains and those lay persons who are certified for roles in chaplaincy. For additional context, see “[chaplains](#)” in the Glossary above.



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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 the back side of this document) that asked bishops to endorse lay people who are being considered for certification as lay ecclesial health care ministers, 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 is an affirmation of the NACC process that informs you that a person’s preparation aligns with the ministerial competencies and expectations of the NACC Certification Competencies and Procedures to serve in the Profession of Chaplain that are approved by USCCB Subcommittee for Certification of Ecclesial Ministry and Service.

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, when considering whether to endorse a lay person, you rely on the recommendation of the person’s pastor or priest in active ministry. We hope, when possible, you will be able to meet personally with him/her.

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 you, as ordinary, put in place. NACC also recognizes that each (arch) diocese has its own requirements for ministers regarding completion of Safe Environment Training. Therefore, we defer to your expectations for our NACC members related to the completion of Safe Environment education required by your diocese. Your endorsement assures the NACC that your Safe Environment Training requirement has been met.

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.