



The Promotion of the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church of the United States

**A Report to the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life
by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
at the
International Meeting
“Formation and Promotion of the Laity: Best Practices”
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The Promotion of the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church of the United States

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Collaborating Committees and Subcommittee at the USCCB

Below is a summary report of the work of three committees of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) which have responsibilities directly related to the formation of the lay faithful in the Church and the world:

Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth (LMFLY) is supported by the staff of the Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth.

Committee on Catholic Education (CE) through their **Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (SCEMS)** is supported by the staff of the Secretariat of Catholic Education.

Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis (EC) is supported by the staff of the Secretariat of Evangelization and Catechesis.

These bishops' committees, and their respective staff, work collaboratively on projects related to the promotion of the vocation and mission of the laity and the formation and support of lay ecclesial ministers.

In addition, the formation of the lay faithful is connected in significant ways to the work of the USCCB Committees on Cultural Diversity in the Church, as well as the formation and education components of the mandates of the Committees on the Protection of Children and Youth; Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations; Divine Worship; Domestic Social Development; Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; International Justice and Peace; Migration; Pro-Life Activities; and Religious Liberty.

Various collaborative projects bring these committees, and their respective staffs, together to ensure that the formation of the lay faithful remains a strong priority of the USCCB.



Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

The LMFLY Committee is comprised of several bishops who hold their membership on the committee for a period of three years. Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., Archbishop of Philadelphia, is the current chairman, aided by eight bishops as committee members. Archbishop Chaput can be reached through the Executive Director of the Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth:

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Committee on Catholic Education

Most Reverend John Quinn, Bishop of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota is the current chairman, aided by eight bishops as committee members. The focus of the support for formation of lay leaders and lay ecclesial ministers is served by the Committee on Catholic Education's Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service.

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

Most Reverend Gerald F. Kicanas, Bishop Emeritus of Tucson, is the current chairman of the Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (CEMS). He is aided by six bishop members and five professional lay consultants who liaison between CEMS and the Committees on Catholic Education (CEMS's standing committee); Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations; Cultural Diversity in the Church; Evangelization and Catechesis; and Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth. Bishop Kicanas can be reached through the Assistant Director of Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service:

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Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis

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Committee and Subcommittee Mandate Areas and Work

These and other USCCB committees generally do not provide direct education and formation for laity in the dioceses, outside of more targeted resources on various topics that can be accessed and utilized by the laity through the website, marketing, and other communications. Committees have been tasked with mandates from the body of bishops and assist the bishops at a national level in carrying out those mandates and the USCCB's strategic priorities.

This assistance is realized through direct consultation with diocesan bishops and their staff, collaboration on national symposia and conferences, and meetings with various diocesan staff or national Catholic organizations. Committees also develop pastoral letters, statements, standards, and other resources that may be utilized by diocesan bishops at their discretion and, thereby, by diocesan and parish leaders. In addition, the committees may request that staff develop resources (hard copy and/or e-files) for use in the dioceses.

Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth (LMFLY)

The LMFLY Committee assists the bishops in advancing the vocation and mission of the lay faithful, inclusive of married couples and families, youth, and young adults. The committee has also initially developed guidelines for formation and support of lay ecclesial ministers and works collaboratively with SCEMS in support of lay ecclesial ministry.

The LMFLY mission responsibilities include issues related to laity in the world and the Church, the distinct concerns of women and men, the promotion and protection of marriage and family life among the laity, the promotion of Natural Family Planning, the evangelization of and ministry with youth and young adults.

Key tasks of interest in the formation of the laity in the United States, carried out by the LMFLY Committee include:

- **Communicating and applying the teaching of the Church on the unique character of the vocation and mission of the lay faithful** to engage and transform society according to the plan of God. This is often realized through consultations, meetings, collaborative symposia, and resource development.



- **Sustaining emphasis on the essential importance of the anthropological and theological principles that underlie the authentic teaching of the Church on marriage** as the permanent, faithful and fruitful bond of one man and one woman, through the magisterial teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the papal magisterium, assisted by the truths of right reason available in the natural sciences. This is carried out by pastoral letters and other resources addressed to lay and ordained marriage and family life ministers, and websites for ongoing lay formation on marriage education and enrichment: www.foryourmarriage.org and www.marriageuniqueforareason.org. In addition, LMFLY staff have regular interactions with diocesan directors of marriage and family life, as well as with Catholic marriage organizations.
- **Providing national leadership, consultation and resources for dioceses regarding the response to pastoral and public policy issues that concern marriage and family life** on a state and national level, based on the articulation and application of anthropological and theological principles and assisted by the truths of right reason. The LMFLY Committee and its Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage have developed several educational videos in addition to hard copy resources for formation of the laity.
- **Assisting dioceses through education, training, and other resources to provide services and to maintain standards in the teaching of Natural Family Planning.** The implementation process of the *Standards for Diocesan Natural Family Planning Ministry* has a mentoring component that serves to match peers with peers who can assist in the strengthening of the ministry. A variety of resources have been developed by the LMFLY staff to assist clergy and laity in educating about NFP as a “skill set” to help married couples live God’s plan for married love.
- **Fostering the participation of young people in the life of the Church** through leadership that sustains a comprehensive vision of youth ministry, young adult ministry, and *pastoral juvenil hispana*, with special emphasis on evangelization, the life and dignity of the human person, accompaniment, vocational pathways, a proper understanding of marriage and family life, prayer, sacramental participation, and service to others. This work is carried out by regular interactions with lay and ordained leaders, as well as with national organizations, movements, apostolates, and initiatives focused on the formation and evangelization of youth and young adults. A special resource on accompanying youth and young adults through moments of transition and from one stage



of life to the next, called *Accompanying Young Disciples Along the Way*, is anticipated for a 2018 release.

- **Communicating and convening national groups, ecclesial movements, and diocesan leadership to form and assist the laity in their specific vocation and mission.** Last year, the USCCB hosted a *Convocation of Catholic Leaders*, a nationwide initiative to explore how lay Catholic leaders, as well as those in ordained ministry and consecrated life, can implement Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*. Over 3,000 Catholic leaders participated in this four-day gathering, in addition to thousands more participating online and via television. More details about this national formation event can be found at www.usccb.org/convocation.
- **Cooperating with universities, institutes, and organizations** that address questions of theological anthropology, marriage and family, youth and young adulthood, faith and culture, lay ministry and leadership, and vocations and discipleship.

Committee on Catholic Education (CE)

The Catholic Education Committee provides guidance for the educational mission of the Church in the United States in all its institutional settings. The Committee on Catholic Education guides, directs, and coordinates this task, working closely with the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis. The scope of the committee's work includes Catholic elementary and secondary schools, Catholic colleges and universities, and college campus ministry.

Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (SCEMS)

SCEMS assists the body of bishops in reviewing and approving standards and procedures used by arch/dioceses and national organizations of those in ecclesial ministerial roles on a voluntary basis for the certification of specialized lay ecclesial ministers in leadership roles. SCEMS also works closely with nine national organizations approved to certify specific ecclesial leadership roles in parishes and institutional settings. The **Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers (ACLEM)**, www.lemcertification.org, comprises five of these organizations:

- **Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC)**
- **National Association for Lay Ministry (NALM)**
- **National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM)**
- **National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL)**
- **National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM)**



Other organizations with which SCEMS works closely include:

- **Catholic Campus Ministry Association**
- **National Association of Catholic Chaplains**
- **National Conference of Veterans Affairs Catholic Chaplains**

The Subcommittee also offers consultative services aimed at improving the quality of lay ministry formation programs that are sponsored by arch/dioceses and by academic institutions.

Key tasks of interest in the formation of the lay ecclesial ministers in the United States, carried out by SCEMS include:

- **Reviewing and approving sets of competency-based certification standards and certification procedures** that have been developed for voluntary use in dioceses and national associations for various ministry specializations in such roles as campus minister, parish catechetical leader, youth minister, pastoral associate, director of music ministries, and hospital, prison, and seafarer chaplaincies. See <https://usccb.org/certification>.
- **Promoting the development and application of voluntary certification standards** for specialized ministry that are based on expectations and competencies reflected in the four areas of formation outlined in the USCCB document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (2005); namely, human, intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral formation.
- **Offering consultation to lay ministry formation programs in arch/dioceses and academic institutions** for the purpose of improving the quality and effectiveness of these programs in accord with the guidance offered in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (2005) and other relevant pastoral documents of the USCCB and the universal magisterium. Staff consults with the Association of Graduate Programs in Ministry (AGPIM) each year for updates on progress. See <http://www.graduateprogramsministry.org/>.

Particular collaborative efforts of LMFLY and SCEMS together with other offices in the conference include:

- **Quarterly collaborative meetings** convened by SCEMS, of USCCB secretariat staff from the Secretariats of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth (LMFLY), Evangelization and Catechesis (EC), Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations (CCLV), and Cultural Diversity in the Church (CDC). At these meetings, staff review and follow



up on collaborative efforts and projects related to formation of laity and lay ecclesial ministers integrated into their respective secretariats' and the Conference's strategic plans.

- **Study of issues related to lay ecclesial ministry** and providing leadership resources for bishops and dioceses, colleges and universities, and the national associations responsible for the formation and utilization of lay ecclesial ministers. The USCCB held a special national summit on the topic in 2015 for bishops and key lay leaders (see <http://www.usccb.org/lay-ecclesial-ministry-summit.cfm>), which helped to advance the work begun ten years prior with the publication of the document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (USCCB, 2005). SCEMS also recently conducted a survey of the body of bishops on formation and authorization of lay ecclesial ministers and their overall experience of lay ecclesial ministry.

Initial data from the survey indicates a strong general endorsement of the need for lay ecclesial ministers to be well-formed collaborators with other members of the laity, deacons, priests and bishops.

Furthermore SCEMS continues to gather information from individual arch/dioceses and the body of bishops who are especially seeking greater intercultural resources (especially Hispanic / Latino/a based) to build up a cadre of professional lay ecclesial ministers who represent the diverse U.S. church.

- **Collaboration with USCCB committees and offices that bring attention to the perspectives and concerns of other cultural families and people with special pastoral needs.** Of note is a proactive collaboration with the *Fifth National Encuentro on Hispanic Ministry* (2017-2020), which will explore, among other things, the intercultural competency formation of the lay faithful and the engagement and formation of youth, young adults, and families.

Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis (EC)

The committee assists the bishops, both collectively and individually, in fulfilling their role as evangelizers and chief catechists in their dioceses by addressing all aspects of evangelization and catechesis for adults, youth, and children. The committee mandate includes the following areas of responsibility: Evangelization of all persons including outreach to the unchurched and to



inactive Catholics; catechesis for adults, youth, and children; use of the Catechism; world mission awareness education; stewardship awareness education.

Key tasks of interest in the formation of lay ecclesial ministers and the laity in general in the United States, carried out by the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, include:

- **Providing a series of articles, prayers, reflection and retreat opportunities, certificates, etc. to assist parishes and dioceses celebrate catechists, especially on Catechetical Sunday.** Catechetical Sunday is an annual opportunity on the third Sunday in September to reflect on the role that each person plays, by virtue of Baptism, in handing on the faith and being a witness to the Gospel. Catechetical Sunday is an opportunity for all to rededicate themselves to this mission as a community of faith.
- **Offering new and veteran catechists and others a series of annual webinars and videos on various topics related to the ministry through an online Leadership Institute.** The Leadership Institute is sponsored by the National Catholic Educational Association, the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, and the Secretariats of Catholic Education and Evangelization and Catechesis, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- **Developing, over the past several years, a series of documents in support of the vocation and mission of the laity and particularly lay ecclesial ministers in their roles as evangelists and catechists.** Recent documents include: *Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization*, *Disciples Called to Witness*, *God's Gift of Forgiveness: A Pastoral Exhortation on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation*.



Publications

USCCB publications that help guide the pastoral work of formation of the lay faithful in the arch/dioceses, organizations, apostolates, and movements across the United States include, but are not limited to, the following:

Under the leadership of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth:

- *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (USCCB, 2005)
- *Hearing Christ's Call: A Resource for the Formation and Spirituality of Catholic Men* (USCCB Committee on Marriage and Family and Committee on Evangelization, 2002)

Under leadership of Evangelization and Catechesis:

- *Living as Missionary Disciples: A Resource for Evangelization* (USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, 2017)
- *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization* (USCCB, 2012)
- *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCB, 2006)
- *National Directory for Catechesis* (USCCB, 2005)
- *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (USCCB Committee on Evangelization, 1992, rev. 2002)
- *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States* (USCCB, 1999)

Under the leadership of Cultural Diversity in the Church:

- *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers* (USCCB Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, 2014)

In addition, over the past several decades, the USCCB has published several ministry-specific formation resources for marriage and family ministers, youth ministers, young adult



ministers, campus ministers, catechists, Catholic educators, and other lay ministers within the Church, all of which serve as foundational documents in these areas for formation. Most of the resource materials can be found on the USCCB website: www.usccb.org.



Education Training Programs Geared Specifically to the Formation of the Lay Faithful

There are many education and training programs for the formation of the lay faithful, male and female, across the United States of all ages: children, youth, young adults, elderly, and life stages: childhood, young adulthood, single life, married life, and widowhood. Since married life is a common calling of the laity, marriage and family life programs and initiatives also serve the lay faithful.

In the United States, a wide and numerous range of programs and initiatives exist for the formation and support of every age and stage of life for the laity. These lay organizations are sometimes only nationally based and at times also exist internationally. A few organizations also exist within specific regions of the United States.

To provide a “snapshot” of the initiatives in the United States related to the formation of the lay faithful, a few examples are shared below. These are not intended to convey any official endorsement but are illustrative and serve as a representative sample of what is available to the laity in the United States.

Child and Youth Formation:

In the United States, children are between the age of 3-11; youth are defined as ages 12-18 in junior high or high school.

Among the forms of formation to children and youth, various scouting arrangements have developed over the past century, all with the purpose of forming young people as they mature. Within the Catholic Church, each diocesan bishop oversees arrangements with scouting organizations in his diocese.

Young Adult Formation

In the United States, young adults are defined as young people ages 19-39 who are single or married, divorced or widowed, and in college, working, unemployed, incarcerated, or in the military.

National associations to support those who work in ministry with this age group include:

- **National Advisory Team on Young Adult Ministry** serves as a nationwide network, resource group, and consulting body on the issues of young adult ministry and evangelization. This was developed by the USCCB in the wake of the dissolution of the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association (NCYAMA), which served



Catholic leaders across the United States 1982 to 2016. The Advisory Team's mandate from the Committee includes: to provide ongoing input and feedback on young adult ministry to the bishops; to provide pastoral support to parish and diocesan leaders in the field; to develop a national coalition of young adult ministry leaders.

- **National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL)** NCCL grew out of the early Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) movement in this country, with roots going back to 1934. Today, it is the only independent national organization exclusively dedicated to serving the church's catechetical mission in the United States. More than 90% of all dioceses/eparchies are members of NCCL, along with nine diocesan/provincial associations of parish catechetical leaders and Catholic publishing houses. (<https://nccl.org>)
- **National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry (NCCYM)** gathers and forms adults to inspire, strengthen, and nourish those who accompany young people as they encounter and follow Jesus Christ. (<https://www.nccym.info/>)
- **National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM)** supports and strengthens those who accompany young people as they encounter and follow Jesus Christ. The mission is grounded in the U.S. Bishops' document, *Renewing the Vision (RTV)*. RTV gives a solid foundation for a comprehensive youth ministry, a roadmap, and a vision that allows each diocese and NFCYM to animate ministry to the young church. (<http://www.nfcym.org>)

*Pastoral Juvenil

In Latino cultures, "jóvenes" are young people ages approximately 16-30 and ministry with them is called "pastoral juvenil".

- **National Catholic Network de Pastoral Juvenil Hispana (La RED)** is an inclusive association of Roman Catholic Church organizations and pastoral ministers committed to the evangelization, holistic development, ongoing support and formation of Hispanic youth and young adults in the United States. La RED promotes the articulation of its members at the national and regional levels. (<http://www.laredpjh.org/>)



Adult Formation

There are countless of formation opportunities across the country for the lay faithful, including diocesan initiatives and programming, parish religious education and faith formation programs, and Catholic schools and universities. Moreover, specific programs and organizations exist to assist young people as they navigate vocational discernment to marriage, religious life, the priesthood, or the call to another form of consecration. These programs can range from spiritual direction, to pre-marriage formation, and to Catholic dating counsel and connection opportunities and support groups for Catholics who are divorced or separated. Please see foryourmarriage.org for a list of services and programs that assist young people in every stage of their discernment to marriage and beyond their wedding day.

Examples of regional formation includes:

- **Dallas Ministry Conference**, hosted annually by the University of Dallas in cooperation with the Diocese of Dallas, brings together over 5,000 participants, primarily from Texas and other states in the South and Southwest United States.
(<https://udallas.edu/dmc/index.php>)
- **Mid-Atlantic Congress**, hosted annually by the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Association of Catholic Publishers, brings together several thousand Catholics, primarily from the mid-Atlantic region of the United States (<http://www.midatlanticcongress.org>)
- **Los Angeles Religious Education Congress**, hosted annually by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in collaboration with surrounding dioceses, brings together over 25,000 Catholics, primarily from the U.S. West Coast (<http://recongress.org/>)

Finally, there exist a number of Catholic programs and institutions in the United States that seek to eradicate certain dangers that can affect negatively the wellbeing of the laity. These include programs to assist victims of domestic sexual violence and abuse, alcohol and substance abuse, and pornography abuse.



Best Practices for the Education and Formation of Lay Ecclesial Ministers: Voluntary Common Certification Standards

While there are many significant resources which contribute to what has surfaced as ‘best practices’ for the education and formation of lay ecclesial ministers in the United States over the last decade, these developments have all emerged from application of the pathways to, formation, and authorization of lay ecclesial ministers outlined in the 2005 document from the USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*. That document itself represents a synthesis of emerging practices within the development of lay ministry in our country over the last 50 years.

This document is accessible in English here: <http://bit.ly/coworkers-vineyard>. *La versión en español está disponible aquí:* <http://bit.ly/colaboradores-vina>

The work of the Subcommittee for Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service (SCEMS), established in 2011 and its predecessor body the Commission on Certification and Accreditation (CCA) (2005-11) focused on assisting with the development of voluntary common certification standards based on four competencies noted in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard* which all lay ecclesial ministers should possess. Indeed, these competencies indicate the same formational outcomes expected of ordained ministers in four key areas:

- **Human formation**, which seeks to develop the lay ecclesial minister’s human qualities and character, fostering a healthy and well-balanced personality, for the sake of both personal growth and ministerial service;
- **Spiritual formation**, which aims to arouse and animate true hunger for holiness, desire for union with and growth in love of God and neighbor in life and ministry, and the practices of prayer and spirituality that foster these developments;
- **Intellectual formation**, which seeks to develop the lay ecclesial minister’s understanding and appreciation of the Catholic faith and theological tradition, drawing upon multiple disciplines of study;
- **Pastoral formation**, which seeks to cultivate the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that directly pertain to effective functioning in the ministry setting and to pastoral administration that supports direct ministry.

In addition to these four areas of competence articulated by *Co-Workers*, a fifth, alluded to in that text has grown increasingly important in the diverse U.S. church, namely, **intercultural competence**. This area highlights the need for lay ecclesial ministers to both learn about and engage in linguistic and cultural study, as well as engage directly with, various cultural and



subcultural ethnic communities within the U.S. church, especially Spanish-speaking/Hispanic/Latino(a), Vietnamese, Korean, and South Asian/Pacific Rim cultures. The process of doing so provides new pastoral and theological ‘lenses’ through which ministry in these cultural contexts can be most efficacious.

Additionally, significant needs have arisen to assure that competencies for lay ecclesial ministers from these cultures and subcultures reflect appropriate adaptations and applications of the four core competencies noted above. It remains an ongoing opportunity to hone best practices in this area. Initial engagements between the SCEMS and the Committee on Cultural Diversity within the bishop’s conference have been fruitful in this regard.

A specific document which can provide examples of how best practices for assessing the competencies for lay ecclesial ministers identified in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard* is the *National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers*, administered by the Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers. The current standards include certification for such positions as:

- Diocesan Directors of Worship;
- Parish Life Coordinator, i.e. those who serve as lay leaders in a parish in the absence of a full-time ordained presbyter or deacon;
- Pastoral Associate, i.e. lay members of a pastoral team in a parish or other Catholic community;
- Director of Music Ministries in a parish or other Catholic community;
- Parish Catechetical Leader
- Youth Ministry Leader, including *Pastoral Juvenil Hispana*, at both the parish and diocesan levels.

The standards are available to download and review here: <http://bit.ly/lemcertification>.

At the September 2018 meeting of the SCEMS, these standards were substantially updated to include additional certification standards for the following positions:

- Parish Director of Liturgy
- Parish Business Manager
- Parish Director of Evangelization
- High School Campus Ministry Leader



These updated standards must go through a final editorial review by the Alliance before publication, which should occur within the next calendar year.

Finally, even as we acknowledge the value of these common standards and the elevation of life-long learning and formation for lay ecclesial ministers via these standards, we remain aware of several factors which invite further reflection and opportunities for growth in the U.S. church:

- Certification Standards from the USCCB are voluntary; dioceses may pursue their own approaches independently. Due to the large number of dioceses in the U.S. and the variety of potential implementations of lay ministry formation, the common certification standards have not been as well adopted as we hope, even as many bishops and dioceses see a value in such standards.
- Degree-granting institution of theology and ministry continue to integrate the common certification standards as a basis for course syllabi, incorporating the goals of certification in lay ministers' professional training. It is hoped such efforts will foster an awareness of certification as 'integral' to lay ecclesial ministry preparation and not as an 'ancillary' process
- Concepts of 'best practices' and 'standards' reflect a particular cultural orientation to 'leadership'; other cultural experiences highlight experiences which need incorporation into the standards: 'mentoring', 'life-long learning', etc., and these must be given more concrete expression within the common standards
- Lay ministry continues to be a burdensome financial sacrifice for too many. The large majority of lay ministers (most of whom are women) have reported that receiving certification sometimes actually has the opposite of its intended effect by making the lay minister 'too skilled' to be afforded by parishes faced with shrinking budgets. We are confronted by the paradoxical situation that the more well-prepared a lay ecclesial minister is, the less employable they may be in the actual places where their ministry is most needed!



A Potentially Defining Moment: The Role of the Laity Responding to a Church in Crisis

The crisis of the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable persons, and the potential cover up of that abuse, recently re-emerged in the U.S. Catholic Church and is continuing to take on growing international significance. The breach of trust and safety, as well as the scandal caused by these terrible crimes, has once again heightened a sense of division in the church between the laity and clergy. As a moral and systematic catastrophe, its impact is still being felt.

The role of a well-formed laity has been identified as an essential moral and institutional dimension of addressing this crisis. Many ecclesial statements about a systemic way of addressing the abuse of power at the heart of the crisis have focused on the necessity of the laity in implementing a solution. These statements include: the August statement from the independent lay-led National Review Board, tasked with overseeing the proper implementation of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, several statements by USCCB President Cardinal DiNardo, and Pope Francis himself in his “Letter to the People of God.”

In particular, the role of lay ecclesial ministers in such possible systemic responses is vital. The 2005 USCCB statement *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, quoting *Lumen Gentium* indicates the particular capabilities of lay ecclesial ministers, who are gifted with “a special grace by which the Holy Spirit ‘makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the church’” (p. 18). *Co-Workers* also highlights the importance of “an explicit relationship of mutual accountability to and collaboration with the Church hierarchy” (p. 25).

The requirements for the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* have been essential to the formation of lay ecclesial ministers. They are trained in proactive measures to prevent abuse and processes to respond to those who commit abuse. With the recognition that further processes must be implemented to address abuse of power and responsibility at the highest levels of the church, these particular capabilities which lay ecclesial ministers can bring, and their particular relationship of mutual accountability to the hierarchy, represent a source of additional creative and dedicated expertise and competencies in pastoral care and leadership that can be sourced to address the scope and depth of the current crisis.

As we continue to observe the fallout of current revelations of past and present abuse and abuse of power, the awareness of the role the laity will be called to play in its resolution will be attentively observed, encouraged and acted upon.



Other Select Relevant Topics and Themes to be Addressed When Forming the Laity

A basic question is what can be done to insure a satisfactory cadre of well trained and competent leaders for service? The numbers of well-trained leaders at the diocesan, and parish levels are shrinking due to retirement and staff reductions, even as the number of Catholics continues to grow.

The scope of formation opportunities points towards key topics that have come up time and again. The topics below have been organized below in relationship to the four standards for formation offered by the USCCB document, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (2005).

Many of these topics were raised at the USCCB *Convocation of Catholic Leaders* in Orlando (July 1-4, 2017). Topics that were among the most relevant to the bishops and delegates included:

Human Formation Issues/Concerns

- Understanding the transition from youth to young adulthood
- Reaching wounded families: those struggling with brokenness
- The feminine genius: the role of women in the Church

Intellectual Formation Issues/Concerns

*How can laity be trained to become more effective models and agents of new evangelization, and conversion? What might “basic formation” look like? What are some possible benchmarks for an effective formation? Our National Directory for Catechesis states what are needed are “an enthusiastic re-evangelization or new evangelization, ‘basic catechesis,’ and ‘permanent catechesis centered around continual conversion,’ that make evangelizers of those who have been evangelized” (p. 51). It is hoped that the work that has been done on outlining formation needs in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* and developing common standards and competencies for lay ecclesial ministers in leadership roles (for example: <http://www.lmcertification.org/>) will help us to formulate better answers to these questions.*

- Catechesis: forming young people in the joy of the Gospel
- Growing by attraction: evangelization through the beauty of the Word of God
- Communicating the Church’s vision of the human person and human sexuality
- Faith, reason, and science: learning and teaching the “why?” and “how?”



- Sharing Christ's story, sharing our story: effective witness and communication
- Understanding basic principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Spiritual Formation Issues/Concerns

What can be done to encourage lay leaders to better cooperate with God's graces in facilitating a deepening encounter with Christ leading to metanoia and to participation in the life of the Church? A strong cultural leaning towards individualism challenges many American Catholic laity to struggle with emphasizing the role of the Church in leading a life of intentional missionary discipleship.

- Discerning vocations, charisms, and gifts for mission in the Church and society

Pastoral Formation Issues/Concerns

What might be done to better assist lay leaders in the Church in evangelizing and bringing people to conversion? Within the Church's mission of evangelization to all, there is an urgent need to re-evangelize a large segment of the Catholic people who, though baptized, have not experienced a personal conversion to Christ leading to metanoia and to participation in the life of the Church. This is evident in younger generations for whom sound doctrinal catechesis has not necessarily led to a Christian life or to the practice of the Faith.

- The rise of the "nones" (Catholic and other young people who no longer identify or do not affiliate with a religion/faith) and understanding inactive and disconnected Catholics
- The state of the family and human sexuality: struggles and opportunities
- The state of Catholic education and catechesis in the United States
- The landscape of parish life and Catholic ministry today
- The Catholic landscape at colleges and universities
- Who's on the peripheries in our local parishes and communities?
- Living in the margins in our country and the world: a Church for the poor that is poor
- Youth on the margins: understanding those struggling with depression, suicide, gangs, and discrimination
- The marginalization of motherhood: a growing periphery
- Leadership formation and lay ministry in the work of missionary discipleship

Additionally, topics on the environment, violence and abuse, healthcare, the engagement of Hispanic/Latino Catholics, social media, addressing racism, business leadership, civil



dialogue, same-sex attraction, and sacramental moments of return were also well-received by Convocation delegates – thus pointing towards a desire for formation in these areas.

A desire among the lay faithful for Scripture study and for connections between faith and everyday life is also manifest. Apostolates grounded religious communities have noted that the laity are increasingly interested in various charisms and spiritualities (e.g., Jesuit, Franciscan, Dominican, etc.), as the need for intentional prayer and silence are expressed, especially among those in urban environments whose pace of life is more hectic and busy.

The formation of the lay faithful is a concern of all the bishops and the various ministries of the Church across the United States. USCCB staff is available to follow up with any further information as may be helpful.



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

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MANDATE FOR THE SUBCOMMITTEE

The subcommittee assists the bishops in reviewing and approving certification standards and procedures to be used on a voluntary basis by arch/dioceses 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 arch/dioceses and by academic institutions.

KEY MISSION RELATIONSHIPS

1. With other committees, sub-committees, task forces, and offices of the USCCB, especially the Committees who have representatives. (See Members).
2. With bishops, Church institutions and leadership personnel of national ministry associations, Academic institutions and diocesan offices.

WHO IS ON THE SUBCOMMITTEE?

Chair

From Committee on Catholic Education

Most Reverend Gerald Kicanas

Bishop Emeritus of Tucson

Members

From Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations:

Most Reverend Earl Boyea

Bishop of Lansing

From Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church:

Most Reverend Arturo Cepeda

Auxiliary Bishop of Archdiocese of Detroit

From the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis:

Most Reverend Alfred Hughes

Archbishop Emeritus of New Orleans

From the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

Most Reverend George Rassas

Auxiliary Bishop of Archdiocese of Chicago

From the Communications Committee

Most Reverend Robert Reed

Auxiliary Bishop of Archdiocese of Boston

Consultants

Linda Couri, MSW, LCSW

Director- Institute for Lay Formation, Chicago, IL

Dr. C. Vanessa White

*Assistant Professor Spirituality/Ministry
Director – MAPS and MA in Specialized Ministries-
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL*

David A. Lichter, D. Min.

*Executive Director- National Association of Catholic
Chaplains, Milwaukee, WI*

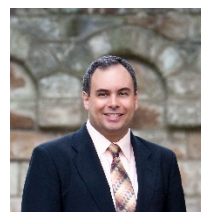
Sr. Teresa Montes Lara, OP, D. Min.

*Director of Hispanic Institute
Jesuit School of Theology- Santa Clara University, CA*

Fr. Wayne Cavalier, OP, PhD

*Executive Director - Congar Institute
DMin Program Director/ Assistant Professor- Oblate
School of Theology, San Antonio, TX*

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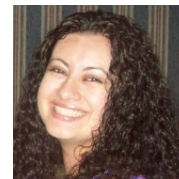
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The work is guided by *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. This USCCB document (2005) continues to offer the framework and major categories for formation.

Website: www.usccb.org/certification





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 (Code of Canon Law, 231 #1; Co-Workers, p.33).

1. HOW IS THE USCCB INVOLVED IN CERTIFICATION?

- ✓ See the mandate of the subcommittee.
- ✓ Note this is important to bishops as it has been brought directly back into the conference as part of the structure itself and important enough that the subcommittee has representatives from other major committees in the conference to encourage wide involvement, collaboration and awareness
- ✓ In addition to the public website (see other side) there is a membership website for arch/dioceses and organizations who are either submitting their standards and procedures for certification or who have been already approved.

2. WHY SHOULD YOU CONSIDER EITHER...

✓ PROMOTING IT?

Certification supports building a culture of competence in ecclesial ministry and service and helps raise the bar for competence, faithful and professional ministry with the people of God.

✓ OR BEING CERTIFIED YOURSELF?

- + A chance to be affirmed and lifted up in your ministry and to have your ministry professionally acknowledged by an outside authority.
- + An opportunity for you to affirm your commitment to a specific ministry in the Church.
- + A professional identity within your field and a connection with the national ministerial organization that supports your chosen field.
- + An occasion to be an agent of change and contributor to the development and strengthening of your chosen field.

3. CLARITY AROUND THE LANGUAGE

- ✓ **Accreditation** (something done for academic and formation programs) and no longer done by the bishops.)
- ✓ **Certification** (something done for individuals).
- ✓ **Authorization** (something that a local bishop or his delegate does for the individual to be able to function in a specific role in a diocese.)

4. WHO DOES WHAT IN THE PROCESS?

- **Arch/dioceses or national organizations** listed in the Official Catholic Directory and who have non-profit status voluntarily submit their standards and procedures for the roles they wish to certify to the USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service
- **This Subcommittee** of the USCCB Committee on Catholic Education reviews and approves the standards and procedures used to certify for a specific period of time.
 - ✓ During that period the arch/diocese or organization can use the seal and statement from the conference on their website, publications and certificates to indicate that the process has been approved.
 - ✓ Each year the organization provides a report to the subcommittee to indicate the status of the process, what they have learned and any changes made as well as challenges faced.
 - ✓ The subcommittee in turn responds with a letter of commendations, recommendations regarding best practices or further changes, or a request for further information.
 - ✓ This review process and ongoing interaction provide an opportunity to embody the concerns and priorities for ministry of the bishops of the United States.

5. WHO ACTUALLY CERTIFIES?

- ✓ Either **the individual national organization or the arch/diocese** certifies using the approved standards and procedures. See the subcommittee's website for a list of what arch/dioceses and organizations are approved.
- ✓ In addition, for those who serve in parish roles there is an **Alliance for the Certification of Lay Ecclesial Ministers (ACLEM)**. This partnership of five national ministry organizations has common and specific standards that are approved by the subcommittee. For more on this go to www.lcmcertainment.org

6. WHO AUTHORIZES?

Note: Authorization is distinct from certification.

- ✓ **Authorization** is what the bishop or his delegate does when hiring, or acknowledging that someone can function in a specific role in a parish or diocese.

