FAQ on Authorization of Lay Ecclesial Ministers (LEMs)

A. WHERE DOES THE IDEA OF AUTHORIZATION ORIGINATE?


B. WHY DID THE BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES PREPARE THIS DOCUMENT?

1. To affirm lay ecclesial ministers.
2. To synthesize best thinking and practices.
3. To provide a common frame of reference to continue the development of lay ecclesial ministry in accord with the Church's theological and doctrinal traditions.
4. To respond effectively to contemporary pastoral needs and situations as a resource for diocesan bishops and all others responsible for guiding the development of lay ecclesial ministry in the United States.

C. WHAT ARE THE DOCUMENT'S MOST IMPORTANT INSIGHTS OR SUGGESTIONS?

1. Takes a place alongside USCCB's *Program of Priestly Formation* and *National Directory for the Formation, Life and Ministry of Permanent Deacons in the United States* in preparing official Catholic leadership in the United States. Unlike these documents, *Co-Workers* does not propose norms or particular law but is a resource.
2. Guides formation of a lay Catholic from a spiritual call through professional certification to official authorization in Roman Catholic lay ecclesial ministry.
3. Describes Catholic leadership as a united service to God, Church, and society.
4. Respects the diverse roles of bishops, priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers.
5. Asserts that the Holy Spirit calls lay people to official Catholic leadership.
6. Emphasizes collaborative leadership between clerics (bishops, priests, deacons) and lay ecclesial ministers.

D. WHAT IS LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY?

1. *Lay*
   a. A service done by lay persons. The sacramental basis is the sacraments of initiation, not the sacrament of holy orders.
2. *Ecclesial*
   a. Has a place within the community of the Church, whose communion and mission it serves.
   b. Is submitted to the discernment, authorization, and supervision of the hierarchy.
3. *Ministry*
   a. Is the work by which Christians participate in the threefold ministry of Christ, who is priest, prophet, and king and continue his mission and ministry in the world.
E. Why should the average person in the pew care about this document?

The Christian faithful have a right to expect competent and faith-filled ministry from those entrusted by the bishop with the ministry of the Church. Co-Workers sets out how those in lay ecclesial ministry are prepared and authorized to carry out the work of the Church.

F. Who are lay ecclesial ministers?

1. Women and men whose ecclesial service (lay ecclesial ministry) is characterized by:
   a. Preparation and formation appropriate to the level of responsibilities that are assigned to them.
   b. Leadership in a particular area of ministry.
   c. Close mutual collaboration with the pastoral ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons.
   d. Authorization of the hierarchy to serve publicly in the local church.

2. The term is generic—it is not itself a specific position title.

3. It is not used in order to establish a new rank or order among the laity.

4. It is the responsibility of the bishop, or his delegate, in accord with the norms of canon law, to identify the roles that most clearly exemplify lay ecclesial ministry.

5. Application of the term may vary from diocese to diocese.

G. What is involved in formation for lay ecclesial ministry?

1. The same four areas of formation that provide a framework for the formation of deacons and priests provide a framework for lay ecclesial ministers.
   a. Human
   b. Spiritual
   c. Intellectual
   d. Pastoral

2. The publication National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers Serving as Parish Catechetical Leaders, Youth Ministry Leaders, Pastoral Associates, and Parish Life Coordinators addresses these. These standards were approved by the USCCB in November 2011.

H. Does a person need an academic degree to be a lay ecclesial minister?

1. Usually, a master’s degree, or at least a bachelor’s degree, in an appropriate field of study is required.

2. Provision, in some circumstances, can be made for accepting experience in lieu of coursework.

I. What does “authorization” mean?

1. Authorization involves the process by which properly prepared lay men and women are given responsibilities for ecclesial ministry by competent Church authority. It includes the following elements:
   a. Acknowledgment of the competence of an individual for a specific ministerial role (often called “certification”).
      (a) Appointment of an individual to a specific position. In parishes of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, this occurs through the Hiring Handbook.
b. Delineation of the obligations, responsibilities, and authority of that position.

c. Announcement of the appointment to the community that will be served by the lay ecclesial minister.

2. The diocesan bishop is responsible for determining if and how any authorization should occur in his diocese, in keeping with canon law.

J. **WHAT ARE THE “SPECIFIC POSITIONS” IN THE DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH THAT ARE COVERED BY THE AUTHORIZATION PROCESS?**

1. Campus Minster (higher education)
2. Director/Coordinator for Religious Education
3. Director of Music Ministry
4. Elementary/Secondary School Principal
5. Parish Business Manager
6. Parish Life Collaborator
7. Parish Social Minister
8. Pastoral Associate
9. Pastoral Health Care Minster
10. Youth Minister (director)

K. **WHO AUTHORIZES LEMS?**

The bishop or his delegate authorizes. In the Diocese of Bishop, Bishop Zubik has elected to authorize LEMs at the Cathedral.

L. **IS AUTHORIZATION A PROCESS OR A RITUAL ACT?**

The ritual act of authorization is the public acknowledgment from the diocesan bishop that the LEM has completed the process of authorization. It is at once an acknowledgement:

a. of the role of the bishop in ordering ministry within the local Church;

b. that an individual has met all the requirements for authorization;

c. that the individual is a minster of the Church, not merely an employee; and,

d. that the LEM is ultimately accountable to the diocesan bishop.

M. **IS AUTHORIZATION THE SAME AS GRANTING A LICENSE, GIVING THE RECIPIENT THE RIGHT TO A ROLE?**

Authorization is an ecclesial moment, not a human resources or licensing moment. Appointment is always a necessary element of authorization since lay ministry requires delegation by church authority. Unlike ordination (bishops, priest and deacons) or consecration (those in religious life), authorization does not grant permanency. Authorization ceases when an individual is no longer appointed to a position.

N. **IS AUTHORIZATION REPEATED?**

Authorization is repeated each time a LEM is appointed (e.g., by a pastor) to a new ministerial role or in a different parish.

O. **ARE DEACONS CONSIDERED LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTERS? ARE RELIGIOUS BROTHERS AND SISTERS CONSIDERED LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTERS?**

1. Deacons, who received the sacrament of holy orders, are among the ordained, not lay, ministers of the Church.
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2. Religious brothers and sisters can and do perform lay ecclesial ministry. However, consecrated persons participate in ecclesial ministry by their own title, according to the nature of their institute.

3. However, in order to carry out a specific role (e.g., elementary school principal, youth minister, director of religious education, etc.), the deacon or member of consecrated life must have the necessary and proper preparation and formation for that ministry.

P. WHAT ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTERS AND ORDAINED MINISTERS?

1. They differ essentially. Yet, the ordained priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful are ordered to one another and thus are intimately related.

2. Lay ecclesial ministers and those ordained seek to develop collaboration with each other that is mutually life-giving and respectful, a wonderful witness to the one communion and mission that binds all disciples together in Christ.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>The process by which a formation program is recognized as meeting established standards.</td>
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<td>Acknowledgment of Competence</td>
<td>The phrase used by the Bishops for what is often called “Certification” (see below).</td>
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<td>Announcement of Appointment</td>
<td>The public recognition that an individual has been given a ministerial position with a specific delineation of responsibilities (see “Commissioning” below).</td>
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<td>Appointment</td>
<td>Written indication that a person has been given a specific position. When an appointment is to an ecclesiastical office, it must be made in writing and the rights of obligations of the appointee should be made clear in the act of appointment or by some other means.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>The means by which competence is evaluated relative to established standards.</td>
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<td>Authorization</td>
<td>“The process by which properly prepared lay men and women are given responsibilities for ecclesial ministry by competent ecclesiastical 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.” Co-Workers, pg. 54</td>
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<td>Bishop, role of</td>
<td>“Just as the diocesan bishop oversees the preparation of priests and deacons of the diocese, he is rightly attentive to the proper preparations of the growing number of lay women and men who minister in the Church. This oversight includes attention to the selection of those who will serve and their adequate preparation. His authorization demonstrates to the community in which they serve that their work has his confidence and support.” Co-Workers, pg. 55</td>
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<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Formal statement that an individual has completed and fulfilled the requirements of a course of study and has reached a certain level of competence.</td>
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<td><strong>Certification</strong></td>
<td>Process that documents an individual’s attainment of a specified level of competence (see “Acknowledgement of Competence” above).</td>
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<td><strong>Certification Standards</strong></td>
<td>Published standards of competency that must be achieved and demonstrated in order to receive certification.</td>
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<td><strong>Commissioning</strong></td>
<td>The public recognition that an individual has been appointed to a ministerial position with a specific delineation of responsibilities (see “Announcement of Appointment” above).</td>
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<td><strong>Competency</strong></td>
<td>Some knowledge, skill or ability that demonstrates that a person is well-qualified and capable of discharging a duty or performing a task.</td>
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<td><strong>Conferral</strong></td>
<td>Ministry given in a stable manner for a spiritual purpose.</td>
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<td><strong>Delegation</strong></td>
<td>Being empowered by someone in authority to act on behalf of the person who delegates (e.g. the district coordinators are delegates of the regional vicars).</td>
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<td><strong>Delineation of Obligations</strong></td>
<td>Spelling out the key duties and responsibilities of a position.</td>
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<td><strong>Determination of Suitability</strong></td>
<td>Process by which it is ascertained if a person, their canonical status in the Church (e.g., fully initiated, practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church), and their level of formation and competence are fitting and appropriate to hold a specific ministerial position.</td>
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<td><strong>Discernment of a Call</strong></td>
<td>“Among the baptized, all of whom are called to serve the mission of the Church, some experience a further specific call to lay ecclesial ministry…a process that requires prayer, dialogue, and evaluation.” <em>Co-Workers</em>, pg. 29</td>
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<td><strong>Entrusting</strong></td>
<td>Term used for those who hold an office, for example, the bishop is entrusted with a diocese, a pastor with a parish.</td>
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<td><strong>Indicators</strong></td>
<td>Specific, concrete and measurable behaviors or accomplishments that demonstrate that competencies have been acquired.</td>
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<td><strong>Installation</strong></td>
<td>A juridical and a liturgical act whereby a man becomes a lector or an acolyte, typically as part of the process of moving toward ordination to the diaconate or ministerial priesthood.</td>
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<td><strong>Proficiency</strong></td>
<td>When an individual demonstrates that he or she has mastered a required competency.</td>
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