

SUMMARY OF AUTHORIZATION DIALOGUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A critical aspect of the National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry was the exploration of the authorization of lay ecclesial ministers. *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* defines authorization as “the process by which properly prepared lay men and women are given responsibilities for ecclesial ministry by competent church authority (p. 54).” A thorough examination of the process of authorization presented in the Co-Workers document was explored in three symposium papers. The papers presented for consideration by symposium participants included papers written and presented by:

- Susan K. Wood, SCL, Ph.D. on a *Theology of Authorization*;
- Rev. Paul Golden, CM, JCD on *Canon Law and Authorization of Lay Ecclesial Ministers*;
- Charlotte McCorquodale, Ph.D. and Sean Reynolds, M.A. on *Current Models of Lay Ecclesial Ministry Authorization*.

Discussion groups examine the issue of certification of lay ecclesial ministers from the perspectives of 1) diocesan certification administrators within the Minnesota Catholic Education Association (MCEA) Certification process, 2) certified lay ecclesial ministers and, 3) national organizations who certify or who are considering certification for their members. Finally, a Bishop’s Panel explored the issue of authorization. Panel participants included:

- Bishop Richard E. Pates, Archdiocese of St. Paul,
- Bishop Gregory M. Aymond, Diocese of Austin,
- Very Rev. Michael J. Heppner, Vicar General, Diocese of Winona.

Symposium participants reached consensus on the need for additional theological reflection, study and dialogue on the action of authorizing lay ecclesial ministers. Theological reflection on the issue needs to include how the call to ministry is rooted in baptism and the role of the Bishop as authorizing agent. It was concluded by participants that our current theologies of ministry and vocation need to be expanded to be inclusive of authorized lay ecclesial ministers. Subsequent recommendations related to authorization focused on the following three themes.

Theological Reflection: These national leaders identified the need at all levels of the Church, to engage in a systematic process of dialogue and study that clarifies the meaning of authorization and effective practices. This should take into account Canon Law, the lived reality of the Church, and the theology and concepts within *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. Generated recommendations focused upon the following specific issues and actions:

- Development of graduated certification standards which allow for local variations and access by diverse populations,
- Clarification of the relationship between certification and authorization,
- Definitions of terminology related to the action of authorization,
- Exploration of canonical implications of authorizing lay ecclesial ministers,
- Classification of ministries which require authorization,
- Identification of proper agent(s) of authorization by clarifying the role of parish community, pastor, and bishop, and

- Identification of best practices related to certification at diocesan, regional, and national levels.

Additional Dialogue on Authorization: In over 20 recommendations made by symposium participants, the need for further dialogue on this issue became evident.

Generated recommendations focused upon the following specific issues and actions:

- Engagement of the USCCB, theologians, canon lawyers, ordained ministers, lay ecclesial ministers, and national organizations in the dialogue to develop structures that support the consistent authorization of lay ecclesial ministers with sensitivity to diversity.
- Encouragement of national organizations to work together in certification processes. Encouragement of state and regional conferences of Bishops to consider joint certification efforts such as the MCEA model.

Official Ritual(s) Related to Authorization of LEMS: Finally, the participants expressed a desire for an official ritual for use in the dioceses of the United States for public commissioning and authorization of lay ecclesial ministers. Complementary rites of sending and announcement for use in parishes should also be developed.