



NEWS

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USCCB Subcommittee Approves Certification Competencies for Catholic Correctional Chaplains

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WASHINGTON - During its September meeting, the [Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service](#) of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) approved new comprehensive certification standards and procedures for Catholic prison ministry. The formation and certification competencies that were approved capped a five-year process of collaborative and synodal engagement among multiple bishops, USCCB offices, seasoned Catholic prison chaplains, theologians, experts in pastoral care, and stakeholders across the country.

The competencies, submitted and jointly administered by the [National Association of Catholic Chaplains](#) (NACC) and the [Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition](#) (CPMC), will assist bishops, diocesan ministry formation leaders, national organizations and groups as they train lay ecclesial ministers, ordained deacons, and priests serving pastoral care roles throughout the criminal justice system, including the role of Certified Catholic Correctional Chaplain.

“Throughout his papacy, Pope Francis has emphasized the need for the Church to care for those on the margins of our society,” said Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas, bishop emeritus of Tucson, and chairman of the USCCB’s Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service. “Those who are incarcerated or in detention facilities - as well as their families - deserve access to well-prepared Catholic laity and clergy who can provide for their spiritual needs, and, where appropriate, assist with their rehabilitation and re-entry into society,” he said. “An important aspect of this ministry is also the ability to provide pastoral care to victims and their families, correctional officers and staff. It must also include advocacy for a more just criminal justice system. These approved competencies offer a more comprehensive approach to all aspects of Catholic prison ministries,” he added.

The competencies establish a first-of-their-kind developmental model in Catholic prison ministries. They have been crafted to support integral formation for Catholics who wish to minister and journey with incarcerated persons or groups, as well as those affected by incarceration in any way. They are based upon the four dimensions of comprehensive formation for lay ecclesial ministers presented in the 2005 USCCB statement, [Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord](#), and include specialized competencies that are unique to pastoral care in jails, prisons, immigration detention facilities, etc. The practices outlined in the competencies are also guided by the USCCB statement issued in 2000, [Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice](#), in which the bishops identified several important facets of these ministries, including:

- Dedicated pastoral care for incarcerated persons and their families, as well as for victims of crime and their families, and for those who have been affected by immigrant detention

- Meaningful efforts to assist those in prison with a myriad of personal and social issues confronting them - including addiction, mental illness, and navigating the system of re-entry into society after serving their sentence.
- Innovative efforts aimed at making the current prison system more just and restorative, especially through building awareness of the whole community's benefit when these systems operate on the basis of care for the person and for the common good

The competencies have been approved for use over the next seven years. This milestone marks the end of a period of dedicated effort on the part of multiple stakeholders. Initially spurred in 2016 by requests from the Holy See's Congregation for Clergy and the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, the subcommittee sponsored a survey of diocesan Catholic prison ministries. The results of the survey demonstrated a nationwide need for formation, resources, support, and networking around prison ministries. This led to a national gathering sponsored by the USCCB and multiple Catholic organizations and prison chaplains, which forged a group which became the CPMC. To date those who have participated in CPMC events, online forums, and webinars have included Catholic prison ministers from 116 (arch)dioceses covering 42 states, along with 3 Canadian dioceses.

CPMC's work was further enhanced in 2020, when it gained fiscal sponsorship by the NACC. Together they offer dioceses, parishes and other organizations a cohort-based adaptive model of formation including three pathways: a foundational formation for Catholic prison ministries volunteers with little or no prior background, an intensive formation in a specific area of prison ministries, and a professional certification as a Certified Catholic Correctional Chaplain.

To introduce and update bishops and diocesan leaders about the new competencies and how they may be applied at the local and regional levels, the USCCB's subcommittee, CPMC and NACC will host virtual workshops this fall. Additionally, CPMC continues to offer many resources via its website - catholicprisonministries.org.

The USCCB's Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service 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.

For more information visit <https://www.usccb.org/certification>.

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