

CANON LAW SOCIETY OF AMERICA

AUTHORIZATION OF LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTERS FOR MINISTRY

REPORT LAY ECCLESIAL MINISTRY (LEM) WORKING GROUP

Introduction

In August 2011, the Collegeville National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry took place in Collegeville, MN on the theme of authorization for lay ecclesial ministry. The Canon Law Society of America (CLSA) was one of the organizations (of about 40) that sponsored/supported the Symposium. When the Collegeville Symposium ended, the organizers made grants available in order to continue the research into Lay Ecclesial Ministry. The CLSA applied for a grant in the fall of 2011, which was awarded in December 2011. The Society received five thousand dollars from the Collegeville Symposium Grant Committee in order to conduct a survey of 20-25 arch/dioceses on the practice of authorization for lay ecclesial ministry. Money was also added from the budget of the CLSA Laity Committee. After the survey, the CLSA proposed to write a report to communicate the findings.

The LEM working group was formed in February 2012. The following are members: Dr. Lynda Robitaille, JCD (Chair), Ms. Zabrina Decker, JCL, Rev. Daniel Smilanic, JCD, and Ms. Susan Mulheron, JCL. Ms. Siobhan Verbeek, JCL and Sr. Sharon Euart, RSM, JCD are consultants to this group. The LEM working group worked through the spring of 2012 on the proposed survey. In May 2012 the group met in Washington and worked with Dr. Mary Gautier of Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) on the survey. The survey instrument was completed in the summer of 2012, and sent out to seventy-five arch/dioceses in September 2012. Forty-five arch/dioceses (60%) responded, which exceeded the target of 20-25. The arch/dioceses which responded were from a good sampling throughout the United States, as well as distributed between rural and urban dioceses.

The survey was structured on the USCCB's 2005 document, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. Language that was used in *Co-Workers* regarding authorization was used in the survey. As the CARA report noted: "Authorization for lay ecclesial ministry is spelled out in the U.S. Bishops' 2005 statement on lay ecclesial ministry ... but no research exists on the implementation of this aspect of lay ecclesial ministry" (p. 4). The focus of this survey and report was to examine how authorization is working in practice, and to compare that practice with the ideal outlined in *Co-Workers* and the *Code of Canon Law*.

In October 2012 CARA sent the CLSA its final report on the survey: Dr. Mary Gautier,

Ph.D, Carolyne Saunders, MA, “Authorization of Lay Ecclesial Ministers for Ministry: A Report for the Canon Law Society of America.” This present report is based on the results of the survey.

Based on the grant the CLSA received from Collegeville, the objective was two (or three) fold: 1) to examine “authorization practice of Lay Ecclesial Ministers in 20-25 arch/dioceses” and 2.a) to publish a “pastoral resource with commentary on the canonical implications/insights/challenges of authorization of Lay Ecclesial Ministers” and also 2.b) to publish “sample forms/agreements” to promote “best practices.” This report completes the first two objectives. Given that no arch/dioceses sent us samples of forms, it is not possible to publish forms or agreements at the present time.

What is the process of authorization for LEMs?

Co-Workers describes authorization for ministry for LEMs as a process consisting of four steps: certification/education, appointment, commissioning, and announcement:

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. Because it involves a formal, public confirmation of the call to ecclesial ministry, the authorization process might be considered the final result of the personal and ecclesial discernment ... (p. 54).

Authorization is the public acknowledgement from the bishop of an LEM’s role. *Co-Workers* highlights the fact that each individual bishop is responsible to determine what steps in the process will be important in his diocese: “Given the varying circumstances of each diocese—its pastoral needs and financial and educational resources—it is important that the diocesan bishop be responsible for determining if and how any authorization should occur in his diocese, in keeping with canon law” (p. 54). Thus, the purpose of the study was to determine whether and how authorization is taking place through a representative survey of U.S. dioceses.

Challenges and benefits of authorizing LEMs

Before considering what is actually happening with authorization, the survey asked respondents what they felt are the greatest benefits and the greatest challenges to authorization. It must be kept in mind that these are responses of individuals, and not necessarily the views of the diocesan bishop.

Why authorization for LEMs?

When asked what was the greatest benefit of authorization for lay ecclesial ministry, one arch/diocese highlighted: “Authorization can more clearly define the relationship of the lay ecclesial minister to the bishop and therefore give: public acknowledgement of the individual’s competencies, respect for the call and commitment to service of the lay ecclesial minister in the faith community, responsibility to the minister to be a representative of Christ’s mission in the world, and authority to make decisions and act on behalf of the Church.” Different aspects of these were highlighted by a number of the arch/dioceses surveyed, and could be summarized as “Competency. Respect. Accountability.” Another aspect of authorization was explained: “[Authorization] situates LEM in right relationship to ordained ministry within the local Church. Attests to the preparation and formation of the ministers. Provides credibility.” One arch/diocese surveyed concludes: “To date we have no authorization process. However, we are moving in this direction. Greatest benefit: assurance of quality person in the position. Ability to interact with all parish ministers on a diocesan level to bring about solid on-going formation. More job security for the individual minister. A more unified approach to ministry in the diocese.”

Challenges to authorization

What is seen as the greatest challenge when considering the authorization of LEMs? One arch/diocese summarized: “The greatest challenge has been articulating the concept and need for lay ecclesial minister authorization in a manner that is recognized and accepted by pastors, the laity involved and the archbishop.” Another comment on the challenges of authorization of LEMs concerns language: “We have to avoid treating ‘authorization’ of laity as though it were granting a ‘license’ for ecclesial ministry, giving the impression that once assigned a ministry role, the laity somehow have a right to it forever. In our diocese we seldom use the word ‘authorization’ to speak of lay ecclesial ministry ... We use the language of ‘appointment’ because it better calls to mind the needed delegation by the church authority in assigning the lay person to a particular ministry. ‘Authorization’ tends to sound as though the ‘ministerial character’ is a possession of the layperson, rather than an office they undertake at the delegation of a pastor. Anything beyond that is to treat the laity as though their role as ecclesial ministers is as permanent and as consecrated to serving the Church as the role of clergy. Freedom to change focus at will or to move out of ecclesial ministry to engage in a more secular occupation is a prerogative of the laity that religious and clergy seldom have. So the measure of ecclesial ‘authorization’ ought to be proportionate to the often limited permanency of laity in ecclesial ministry, in an appropriate trade-off. It should not be treated the same as ‘consecration’ to religious life or ordination to the clerical state, both of which entail permanency.” As noted above, *Co-Workers* (p. 54) highlights the importance of consistency in language, noting that appointment is one step in the process of authorization.

Other challenges noted include a lack of stability in the authorization of LEMs: “A

change in Bishop may change the way authorization happens/is understood, thus leaving those already authorized in a difficult situation;” how LEMs fit with other pastoral ministers: “Clericalization of the laity ... It co-opts lay people into the hierarchy of the Church ... We see a trend of fewer LEMs being hired and being replaced with volunteer and Permanent Deacons. Authorization is a moot point if there are fewer people being hired. Pastors are more frequently hiring a parishioner with minimal or no qualifications because they feel comfortable with the person;” and finally practicalities of how LEMs are treated: “Lack of understanding of significance of the role. Lack of HR policies on the role. Job security and lack of policies when positions are eliminated for budget reasons.”

Examination of authorization practice of Lay Ecclesial Ministers in surveyed arch/dioceses

Out of seventy-five dioceses surveyed, forty-five responded. One major finding of this survey is that almost 40% of arch/dioceses surveyed do not have a process for the authorization of LEMs. Does this mean that there is no process at all? Or perhaps certain aspects of the process are fulfilled (like certification) but not other aspects (like appointment)? Or perhaps there are no LEMs functioning in the diocese? The fact that there is no process leads one to question whether authorization is done on a case-by-case basis, or whether it is not done at all. What is the role of the LEM in the arch/diocese, and what is the relationship among the arch/bishop, the pastor, other ministers, and the LEM? It would be instructive to study further why there are no processes in some dioceses, and why so many dioceses have no process.

Not having a process for authorization leaves LEMs without a consistent or dependable structure. *Co-Workers* calls “Church leaders, ordained and lay, to become more intentional and effective in ordering and integrating lay ecclesial ministers within the ministerial life and structures of our arch/dioceses” (p. 6). One way of ensuring the ordering and integration of LEMs in the life and structure of arch/dioceses is through the process of authorization.

What is important for arch/dioceses surveyed that do have a structure for authorizing LEMs? It is “very important” to arch/dioceses to “ensure adequate ecclesiastical oversight of ministry” (52%), to assure that the LEM has the “proper training and formation” (67%), to give “public validation and support for the LEM” (55%), to give the right to the LEM to “serve in a public ministry in the Church” (48%), and to strengthen “the relationship between the LEM and the arch/diocese” (33%).

Of those arch/dioceses that do have some structure for authorization, some have established an Office of Lay Ecclesial Ministry (42%), while others have named a diocesan official responsible for LEMs (93%). This official is either in charge of lay ministers only, or has a broader competency (bishop, director of faith formation, director adult faith formation, directory of ministry, director of pastoral services, etc.)

What/who is a Lay Ecclesial Minister (LEM)?

The survey focused on parish-based ministries, not diocesan-based ministries. There is a question of who is considered a lay ecclesial minister. *Co-workers* speaks of lay ecclesial ministers as “those men and women whose ecclesial service is characterized by

- *Authorization* of the hierarchy to serve publicly in the local church
- *Leadership* in a particular area of ministry
- *Close mutual collaboration* with the pastoral ministry of bishops, priests and deacons
- *Preparation and formation* appropriate to the level of responsibilities that are assigned to them” (p. 10).

Co-Workers provides examples of parish roles that could be LEMs: “the pastoral associate, parish catechetical leader, youth ministry leader, school principal, and director of liturgy or pastoral music” (p. 11). *Co-Workers* also states: “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” (p. 56).

From the survey, the most common LEMs are religious educators for children/youth and pastoral associates (51%). The least common LEMs are involved in evangelization and bereavement ministry (under 25%). Other LEMs named were: youth ministry (47%), adult faith formation/RCIA (40%), liturgical and/or music ministry (36%), young adult ministry (33%), pastoral care of the sick (27%), and other (36%). In other ‘other’ category are: campus ministers, Catholic school teachers of religion, hospital chaplains, lay matrimonial advocates, parish business administration, outreach coordinator, restorative justice minister.

What is the involvement of the arch/diocese in the process for authorization?

Co-Workers highlights: “While lay ecclesial ministers carry out responsibilities rooted in their baptismal call and gifts, serving publicly in the local church requires authorization by competent authority” (p. 12). *Co-Workers* speaks of the role of the arch/bishop in relation to LEMs: “By reason of his ministry it is the role of the bishop, often through the pastor, to give oversight (*episcopate*) to order these new ministerial relationships within his arch/diocese and to affirm and guide the use of those gifts that lay ecclesial ministers bring—not to extinguish the Spirit, but to test everything and to retain what is good” (p. 23). How does that authorization take place in practice? The first step is to consider the involvement between the arch/diocesan bishop and the LEM, during the process of hiring, as well as during employment, and afterwards.

For many arch/dioceses, the arch/diocese recommends possible LEMs to pastors (67%); but in about half of arch/dioceses (44%), there is no arch/diocesan involvement in the placement of LEMs to parish positions. A few arch/dioceses maintain a central list of authorized LEMs for parishes (29%), and even fewer arch/dioceses are responsible for human resource issues (20%) or placement of LEMs (9%).

Over half of arch/dioceses surveyed provide a grievance process (60%) as well as a

termination process for LEMs (56%). Most arch/dioceses (89%) do not have a process for transferring LEMs from one parish to another.

How does the arch/diocesan bishop communicate with the LEM?

In a majority of arch/dioceses, the arch/bishop communicates with the LEMs through gatherings (58%), as well as at meetings of arch/diocesan councils or commissions (58%). A small percentage of arch/bishops communicate with LEMs through regular one-to-one meetings (7%). Other means of communication between the arch/bishop and the LEM include: consultation at arch/diocesan meetings (33%), meetings during parish visits (31%), individual consultation (29%), newsletters (22%) and other (33%). The ‘other’ category includes: annual commissioning liturgy, emails, meetings with groups of LEMs (youth ministers, directors of religious education, etc.). In some arch/dioceses there is no regular communication between the arch/bishop and the LEMs.

Elements in authorization process

Co-Workers highlights three steps in the authorization process: certification, appointment, and announcement. The survey followed these categories.

Certification

There is not always a clear distinction between education/formation and authorization. In some cases authorization takes place as part of the celebration at the end of the person’s education, thus at “a mass to celebrate completion of the required formation program and a public blessing of LEM’s,” or a general “commissioning at the end” of a formation program (responses to open-ended questions). In other cases (as highlighted by *Co-Workers*), certification is a step in the process of authorization. *Co-Workers* explains: “The Church has always required proper preparation of those who exercise a ministry (canons 235 §1, 236, 597 §2). In the same way, *CIC* canon 231 states that ‘lay persons who devote themselves permanently or temporarily to some special service of the Church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly’” (p. 33). The difference in interpretation centers on whether certification/education automatically leads to ministry as a LEM, or whether it is the first step in qualifying for ministry as an LEM. In other words, is graduating from a LEM formation program all that is necessary for ministry? Or, to be formally appointed, does one require something more?

The reality of LEMs and educational preparation for ministry is not straightforward. Only 20% of arch/dioceses require certification for all LEMs. The requirement of certification can often be waived in the face of prior experience (67%), or other qualifications such as “service that predates diocesan policy on certification” (44%), “current enrollment in a formation program” (33%), recommendation by pastor (33%), or “pastoral need” (33%). These numbers highlight different tensions: the difficulty of requiring a certain level of education of all those who will be LEMs, and also that parish-based ministry depends on the pastor and can be situation-based rather than responding to a larger vision.

Co-Workers encourages a strong educational background for LEMs: “Inadequate and faulty formation harms rather than helps the mission of the Church. Usually, a master’s degree, or at least a bachelor’s degree, in an appropriate field of study is preferable” (p. 34). Some arch/dioceses appear to require no more than certification from a non-degreed program. The majority of arch/diocesan-sponsored programs do not offer degrees (77%). Almost half of arch/dioceses offer a degree program with a Catholic college or university (46%), and some offer degrees through seminaries or schools of theology (26%).

Cost of formation/education programs is another consideration for both the LEM and the arch/diocese. Many arch/dioceses (78%) subsidize part of the formation process, although in different ways. No arch/diocese pays the “full cost for formation for lay ecclesial ministry,” although some arch/dioceses do offer scholarships, grants, or loans, and others pay the full cost for Spanish-speaking LEM formation. If the arch/diocese has helped to fund the program, what is the relationship between the LEM and the arch/diocese? That was not studied in this survey.

Most arch/dioceses evaluate the certification of their LEMs on an individual basis and do not participate in national (80%) or regional (91%) certification processes. Over 80% of arch/dioceses will accept a LEM who was certified in another arch/diocese (83%). For most arch/dioceses, certification does not “expire after a given time period” (73%). For those arch/dioceses where certification does expire (27%), the expiration periods vary among 3, 5, 6, 7 years.

Once the initial education is completed, many arch/dioceses offer or require ongoing formation. *Co-Workers* explains: “Ongoing formation, which strengthens ministerial identity as well as enhancing ministerial skills, is not a luxury to be pursued when time and resources allow, but is rather a permanent necessity for every ecclesial minister, lay or ordained. No lay ecclesial minister should feel excused from taking part in it; failure to do so represents neglect of a significant ministerial responsibility” (p. 51). Almost 90% of arch/dioceses offer ongoing formation for their LEMs (87%), yet under half of arch/dioceses require ongoing formation of their LEMs (42%).

Appointment

Appointment is the most canonical, technical step in the authorization process. *Co-Workers* recalls that LEMs “are authorized by ecclesiastical authorities to carry out certain ministerial responsibilities in public service of the local church” (p. 54). Appointment to a position is the step in the authorization process, which includes “a delineation of the obligations, responsibilities, and authority of that position (and length of term, if specified)” (p. 54). As *Co-Workers* encourages: “It is important that the diocesan bishop be responsible for determining if and how any authorization should occur in his diocese, in keeping with canon law” (p. 54). *Co-Workers* speaks further of the role of the arch/bishop in the authorization of LEMs:

Entrusted with the pastoral care of all within his diocese, the diocesan bishop

oversees all catechetical (*CIC* canon 386), liturgical (canon 387), and apostolic works (canon 394) carried out in the diocese, and he enjoys the authority necessary to meet these responsibilities (canon 381). In this capacity he ensures the suitability of candidates to take on roles that are critical to the proper care of souls. He may do so directly (for example, the office of pastor [canon 524]) or through others (for example, teachers of religion [canon 805]).

Just as the diocesan bishop oversees the preparation of priests and deacons of the diocese, he is rightly attentive to the proper preparation 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. (p. 55)

From the survey, this technical part of the authorization process is the least utilized. Only 5% of arch/dioceses said that “most or all” of their parish LEMs have an official appointment from the arch/bishop. Only 12% of arch/dioceses said that “most or all” parish LEMs have a contract for their position, and only 2% have a set term of appointment. Only 19% of arch/dioceses said that “most or all” parish LEMs have a “written job description.” 12% have a “periodic, written evaluation of their ministry.”

Perhaps one reason that there is often no official appointment is because many LEMs are volunteers. However, it is the ministry, not whether it is paid, that requires the authorization. From the survey, 29% of LEMs are mainly volunteers, and 21% serve mostly in a part-time paid ministry position. Very few LEMs serve in a full-time paid ministry position (4% say ‘many or most’ and 2% say ‘most or all’).

Many or most parish LEMs are hired by the pastor (51%), and only very few (5%) are hired by the arch/bishop or another arch/diocesan official (12%). In the hiring process, the arch/bishop or his delegate interviews only 27% of parish LEMs, while the pastor interviews 80%. Other aspects of the hiring process that are used are: “verification of safe environment training” (91%), “criminal background check” (89%), “formal interview by pastor” (80%), “investigation of previous employment” (67%), “arch/diocesan review of the applicant’s qualifications” (29%), “formal interview with arch/bishop or delegate” (27%), “formal letter of appointment from arch/bishop or delegate” (20%), “formal letter of appointment from pastor” (20%), “oath or profession of faith” (11%), “letter from pastor to arch/bishop proposing the LEM for authorization” (9%).

Co-Workers explains: “The appointment of a person to a specific position should be done in writing (required for ecclesiastical offices [*CIC* canon 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 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]). Legal counsel should be consulted with respect to the drafting of written contracts and/or any proposed term of appointment” (p. 57).

Approximately 20% of LEMs receive a “letter of appointment” which usually includes: “relevant employment and personnel policies (67%), “terms of appointment” (67%), and the “rights and obligations attached to the position” (60%). Less than half the time the letter includes “limits on the exercise of authority” (43%).

Announcement (including commissioning ceremonies)

The final step in the authorization process is to announce the appointment of the LEM to the community. *Co-Workers* explains: “The means used to announce an appointment to lay ecclesial ministry can follow the procedures used in announcing other similar personnel changes within the diocese. In most circumstances, publication of the appointment in the diocesan newspaper, clergy newsletter, or parish bulletin or newsletter may be all that is needed, so long as such an announcement provides a clear statement of the role, responsibilities, and authority of the newly appointed lay ecclesial minister” (p. 58). Part of announcing the appointment can include “public prayer and ritual” “highlighting the new relationships that the person is beginning in the life of the community. Models for this already exist in the commissioning ceremony for catechists” (p. 59).

Announcements regarding LEM appointments are most often made through: parish bulletin (81%), parish website (53%) or parish social media (24%), arch/diocesan newspaper (49%), arch/diocesan website (24%) or arch/diocesan social media (7%), arch/diocesan clergy newsletter (20%), letter or visit from arch/bishop to parish (11%); 18% of arch/dioceses use other means, including commissioning ceremonies, and/or no formal announcements.

In 40% of arch/dioceses surveyed, “there is no commissioning ceremony.” Where there is a commissioning ceremony, 29% of arch/dioceses hold it at the cathedral, 13% hold it at the parish where the LEM will be serving, and 18% hold it in other places (for example, at another parish). When the commissioning ceremony takes place varies: whether at the time of hiring for a specific position (7%), after certification (31%), or in an annual commissioning ceremony (31%).

If there is a commissioning ceremony, almost half the time the arch/bishop presides (47%), or the pastor presides (18%), or another arch/diocesan official (vicar/ delegate/coordinator) presides (13%).

Commentary on the canonical implications/insights/challenges of authorization of Lay Ecclesial Ministers

As noted above, almost 40% of arch/dioceses surveyed do not have a process for the authorization of LEMs. Given the public service they are rendering in the Church, it would seem essential for arch/bishops to determine: what roles are considered LEMs in the arch/diocese, what education is needed to fulfill such roles, and what the authorization process will be. Expectations that are clearly indicated would create stability of positions, as well as help provide for the needs of the faithful.

The survey reveals a lack of consistency among the dioceses in the manner in which LEMS are being authorized. Further, the appointment processes appear to be largely informal in nature. And, despite the hope to explore more fully the relationship between the arch/diocesan bishop and LEMs, the predominant authorization processes still appear to be very much a local (parish) reality (as previous national studies had indicated). How can the relationship between the arch/bishop and the LEM be enhanced? How can a parish-based LEM be considered part of the arch/diocesan ministry and not just the parish ministry?

In addition, there is still opportunity for growth: for example, for transfer processes between parishes and dioceses, grievance processes, education of pastors on the importance of formal authorization, the canonical expectation of being attentive to civil law requirements (canon 1286), and education on the appropriate terminology related to authorization.

The survey confirms that the majority of US arch/dioceses surveyed take seriously the canonical requirement for appropriate formation for LEMs. This is clear both in the value that arch/dioceses place on formation, and also in their willingness to commit financial resources of the arch/diocese to subsidize the formation of lay persons. However, a large number of arch/dioceses do not require LEMs to have degrees.

The survey also reveals that there is not always a distinction made between formation and appointment. Thus, some arch/dioceses commission or recognize a person as a LEM once the formation/education is complete, without distinguishing the separate step of appointing someone to a ministry.

The most canonical part of the process of authorization is appointment. Appointment should be done in writing, and should state the expected responsibilities of the position, as well as the LEM's rights and obligations. Although this is encouraged in *Co-Workers*, it is not regularly fulfilled. Without this step, there is no clarity for the LEM about his/her role, nor for the arch/bishop, pastor, or community about what to expect from the LEM. Announcing the appointment helps to give clarity and stability to the LEM's role.

Reflections on establishing offices for LEMs

Co-Workers opens its explanation of authorization with the words, "Some [members of

the lay Christian faithful] are entrusted with *certain offices* and roles connected to the ministry of the ordained pastors” (p. 54). The concept of an ecclesiastical office is a familiar entity of canon law, defined as “any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical ordinance to be exercised for a spiritual purpose” (canon 145 §1). The work of an active LEM would certainly seem to fit this definition, yet the survey did not indicate that LEM positions were being considered as ecclesiastical offices.

Co-Workers’ explanation of authorization bears a striking resemblance to provision of an ecclesiastical office, but without recognizing it as such. For example, *Co-Workers* recognizes the first step in the authorization process as identification of roles that are essential for pastoral care of the community (p. 56). This is similar to the objective stability of ecclesiastical offices (constitution in a stable manner), in that there is recognition of a need to be filled by a qualified person, which transcends the gifts of a particular individual. This is an important point to be addressed regarding authorization: the position is not created in response to the gifts or calling of a specific person, but the need for the position is recognized and a qualified person is sought for an appointment. When the position is vacant, there is a need to find another qualified person. *Co-Workers* seems to envision that LEMs would fill positions to which a lay person would be especially qualified, not simply to stand in for a cleric when there is a shortage.

As described by *Co-Workers*, authorization is to be considered a process involving acknowledgment of the competence of the LEM and certification, appointment to a specific position, and announcement of the appointment to the community (p. 54). While the details offered by *Co-Workers* may seem a bit daunting to implement, canonically these steps of the process can be considered within the realm of provision of an ecclesiastical office. Acknowledgment of the competence of the candidate fulfills the requirement of canon 149 §1 and 228 §1 (the person must be suitable), appointment is the constitution and conferral of a specific office according to canons 145-146, and announcement is similar to putting the provision of office in writing (as required by canon 156).

Co-Workers notes that those lay faithful entrusted with certain offices “are authorized by ecclesiastical authorities to carry out certain ministerial responsibilities in public service of the local church” (p. 54). Authorization is referred to as “the *process by which properly prepared lay men and women are given responsibilities for ecclesial ministry by competent Church authority*,” a definition that establishes a clear connection between authorization and the conferral of a specific function or office (p. 54). Authorization, therefore, is not to be considered a general license to minister publicly on behalf of the Church, but rather a recognition by ecclesiastical authority that the person has been found suitable and then entrusted with specific responsibilities or positions by competent authority, again, very similar to what happens in the provision of an ecclesiastical office in the sense of canon 145. It would follow that authorization ceases when the LEM no longer holds the office. This distinction may offer some clarity both to LEMs and ecclesiastical authority as to the results and limitations of authorization.

An explicit recognition of a LEM position as an ecclesiastical office could aid in the

development of an authorization process in several ways. Recognition of the work as an ecclesiastical office would clarify the rights and obligations of both the authority providing the office and the authorized minister. Recognition of a position as an ecclesiastical office would clarify the role of ecclesiastical authority in relationship to the minister, as the authority's intervention would be required for the provision of the office. Working within the parameters of an ecclesiastical office allows the use of existing canonical structures to ensure fundamental safeguards, such as the requirement that provision of an office is to be put in writing (canon 156), that officeholders must be in communion with the Church and have the suitable skills for ministry (canon 149 §1), and provide norms governing the loss of the office, such as resignation or removal. (*Co-Workers* regrettably does not address how authorization or appointment to a position ceases.) Recognition as an ecclesiastical office could help clarify that the basis of authorization is a restatement of the law rather than an innovation. As stated in canon 228 §1, "Lay persons who are found suitable are qualified to be admitted by the sacred pastors to those ecclesiastical offices and functions which they are able to exercise according to the precepts of the law." This canon affirms the ability of LEMs to be appointed to ecclesiastical offices, except for those requiring holy orders or entailing full care of souls (canon 150). Provision and loss of ecclesiastical offices are governed by the laws on administrative acts therefore LEMs who are aggrieved by a decision of ecclesiastical authority have a foundation on which to pursue hierarchical recourse. Clarity regarding the provision and loss of the office will assist a LEM in legitimate vindication and defense of his or her rights in an ecclesiastical forum (canon 221 §1).

In an arch/diocese, the bishop is free to (and indeed, must) establish the parameters of the office when it is constituted (canon 145 §2). Constitution of an office to meet a particular spiritual need and the stability of office that may come with it provides the good of assurance to the community that the spiritual need will continue to be met, and a reasonable stability for the officeholder, which is not to be a source of apprehension for bishops. Moreover, the bishop has discretion regarding the level of stability when the appointment is made. While those appointed for an indefinite period of time as well as those appointed for a definite period of time cannot be removed prior to when the time has lapsed except for a grave cause (canon 193 §§1-2), the office may also be conferred at the "prudent discretion" of the competent authority, in which case the person may be removed by the same authority for a *just cause* (canon 193 §3).

The CARA report *Authorization for Lay Ecclesial Ministers for Ministry. A Report for the Canon Law Society of America* provides many issues for consideration and discussion. In the conclusion from *Co-Workers*, the call to continue this discussion is made clear: "We are blessed indeed to have such gifted and generous co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord to which we have all been called. Let us continue to work together as a 'community of people united in Christ and guided by the holy Spirit in [our] pilgrimage toward the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message for all humanity'" (p. 67, GS, no.1).

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