

## **SUMMARY OF FORMATION DIALOGUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The reflection and dialogue on area of formation began with a panel presentation:

- Todd Graff (Diocese of Winona) noted that the context of LEM formation is shaped by life commitments as well as by ministry and formation. The content ought to reflect the local church while being anchored in the universal church.
- Alejandro Siller-González (MACC) focused on the Hispanic cultures and encouraged awareness of the social constructs, “Who is diverse?” “Who are foreigners?”
- Bill Cahoy, Ph.D. (Dean, SJU) referred to Canon 231 in his presentation on how lay ministers need and deserve adequate education if there is to be sustained excellence. “We should not demand what we do not support.” Support includes money and mutual accountability. LEM positions are leadership roles that require knowledge, skill, and personal formation.

The dialogues in part focused on the tension experienced between the desire for adequate formation based on national or regional standards and the need for broad availability and accessibility of formation programs. Subsequent recommendations related to formation focused on the following four themes.

**Formation of LEMs for a Culturally Diverse Church:** Recommendations related to diversity received the strongest endorsement. At the same time, the need for national certification standards was expressed. LEM formation programs should take into consideration both the personal and contextual diversity of persons called to lay ecclesial ministry and the diversity of the local churches for which they are being prepared.

Generated recommendations focused upon the following specific issues and actions:

- Awareness of family systems, cultural perspectives and worldviews, intercultural skills for ministerial relationships, and language proficiency appropriate to the local church.
- Encouragement of dioceses to partner with educational institutions, ministry formation, and certification programs to provide alternate formation pathways.
- Identification of common competencies in seminary and LEM formation programs in order to bring students together in order to enhance future working relationships.
- Urgency regarding the need for dioceses and parishes to provide the best possible LEM formation, according to their means.

**Financial Support:** Financial support for LEM formation was identified as a critical issue across the table discussions. Generated recommendations focused upon the following specific issues and actions:

- Creation of strategies for dioceses and parishes regarding the sharing of the cost of adequate and appropriate formation, which are essential for sustained excellence in ministry.
- Development of strategies to provide funding for lay ministry formation in ways similar to the financial support systems available for ordained formation.
- Continuing formation for LEMs on intellectual, spiritual, personal and pastoral levels was also identified as an important aspect of formation to be addressed by

parishes, dioceses, and Catholic institutions, with some voicing the need to develop sabbatical policies for LEMs.

**Alternative Forms of Formation:** Dialogue on LEM formation focused on the need to recognize different levels of preparedness for education and formation, as well as consider life experience as part of formation. Generated recommendations focused upon the following specific issues and actions:

- Revision of the USCCB accreditation processes and standards was endorsed strongly.
- Encouragement of formation programs to consider the family dynamics of their lay students in program design, cost, and time requirements.
- Examination of best practices was recommended for all types of formation.

**Availability and Accessibility:** Availability and accessibility of LEM formation programs through various modalities and a variety of contexts was a focal point of the dialogue. Additionally, the need for accessible formation resources, shared financial support, and the use of technology were frequently mentioned as means to expand availability to more people, especially those in rural areas and communities with limited financial resources. Generated recommendations focused upon the following specific issues and actions:

- Opportunities for formation in ministry should be affordable and flexible in order to respond to the cultural, economic, and geographic realities in the U.S. Catholic Church.
- Development of strategies for regular feedback by parishes/dioceses within the formation process.