

Panelist Responses to Attendee Questions

Lay Catholic Chaplaincy Information Night

Zoom Webinar, Oct 22nd, 2020, 7:30-8:30 p.m.

The host and panelists for the information night offered their replies to questions submitted by attendees. We express our deep gratitude to the following panelists:

Elaine Babbish, alumna of the Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies, Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Board Certified Chaplain, and Clinical Chaplain of Ascension Providence Rochester Hospital, MI

Dr. David A. Lichter, Executive Director of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC)

Dr. Beverly M. Beltramo, Board Certified Chaplain and Director of Spiritual Care and Mission Integration for Ascension Michigan Market

1. Who is a chaplain, and what does a day in the life of a chaplain look like?

For general information in reply to this question, see [Choose Chaplaincy webpage on NACC website](#).

- Isn't the title "chaplain" to be reserved to the ordained? Why is this term used in the Catholic Church in the U.S. and deemed acceptable by U.S. bishops?

Dr. Lichter: The title of chaplain in the U.S. is the professional title and an employment category in the United States. The USCCB in 2004 clarified that the NACC does certify for the profession of "chaplain," whether priests, permanent deacons, religious men and women, and lay men and women.

<https://www.nacc.org/vision/most-requested/use-of-title-chaplain-in-pastoral-care-ministry/>

Dr. Gerlach: The official ecclesiastical title used in certification is "lay ecclesial health care minister," just as the non-ordained in other areas of ministry are considered "lay ecclesial ministers." See [Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord](#).

- **What is the typical age-range for chaplaincy? Does that make a big difference in the ministry?**

Dr. Lichter: Many choose chaplaincy as a second career, thus being 45-55 years old is not uncommon. However, others choose chaplaincy as their first career.

Dr. Beltramo: Chaplaincy is most frequently a second career--though there are certainly some who enter the profession in their 20's--and they are wonderful, wonderful chaplains who bring life and creativity and energy to the work! Most of us seem to have had life experiences of journeying beside those experiencing loss to be drawn to this work. In general, most chaplains seem to enter the career in mid-life (40's +).

- **How does a lay chaplain's inability to offer the Sacraments (Reconciliation, Mass, Anointing of the Sick) impact the lay chaplain's mission?**

Dr. Beltramo: - Sacramental ministry is a surprisingly small part of the work. In most settings, even Catholic ones, only a small percentage of patients are practicing Catholics. Nearly all hospitals have good relationships and access to priests, either a priest chaplain is part of the team, or there are arrangements with community priests to be able to provide Sacraments when needed.

Elaine Babbish: My role often connects Catholic patients, family, staff to Sacraments. I assess for sacramental needs such as Sacrament of the Sick, Reconciliation, or Communion and often educate patients and families on how to participate while they are in the hospital and connect them to a Parish if they don't have one to go home to. We have just started Mass in our setting and I am privileged to involve staff as Ministers of the Word or setting up, which is all helpful. Chaplains offer training and continued reflections to the volunteer Eucharistic Ministers.

- **Do chaplains distribute Holy Communion?**

Dr. Beltramo: Usually volunteer Eucharistic ministers provide Communion to Catholic patients, chaplains tend to focus on responding to codes, referrals and end of life ministry. It would be rare for a Catholic chaplain to spend much of their day as a Eucharistic Minister [Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion or "EMHC"]--though when needed, this is something we are very able and willing to provide to Catholic patients in situations when a Eucharistic Minister is unavailable.

Elaine Babbish: I prefer to distribute Communion in my critical areas and not send volunteers there. Often the patients may not be able to (swallow) to receive Communion Sacramentally but I offer Spiritual Communion or it may be appropriate to offer Communion to a loved one that is by their side. Being a Catholic chaplain continues to be a blessing to offer Communion. However, the Eucharistic Ministers are needed to expand our spiritual

presence in the hospital and be able to recognize where a chaplain's attention may be needed.

- **Pandemic: With the current pandemic, are/were chaplains being permitted to meet with patients?**

Dr. Beltramo: Each health system handled this differently. In some settings, chaplains were designated as "non-essential" and were assigned to other roles (screening, administrative tasks) or even furloughed. At Ascension, they were considered essential. They remained at the bedside, caring for staff and patients. Many chaplains worked with donated iPads or other devices to help connect patients to their loved ones when families were unable to visit. All of this was emotionally devastating to clinical staff who had never encountered so much loss. Chaplains focused a great deal of effort and time on caring for the caregivers. At the peak of the outbreak, chaplains (and priests) were not able to enter the rooms of COVID due to a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). Once supplies were available, then chaplains and priests were again able to resume ministry in those rooms--though always very, very carefully.

Elaine Babbish: Now with enough PPE, we are able to visit the patients with a COVID diagnosis. This is so helpful to the Nursing Staff. We needed to depend on the Nurses initially to take in our prayer cards or hold the phone or computer so patient's could hear prayer. That being said we had a chance to bond with the medical staff because of the pandemic. They shared with me that my presence was helpful to keep up the momentum of their constant difficult care.

- **What's the most rewarding part of chaplaincy? On the flipside, what's the hardest?**

Dr. Beltramo: Though I am no longer at the bedside, I spent many years there. For me, the most rewarding part was seeing the courage and grace that people found. I was always in awe at that and it offered me hope that if (when) I encountered something truly awful in my own life, I would find that same unexpected strength and grace. It truly changed me--and changed my faith-- in a profound way. The thing which I found/find most difficult is the awareness of my own profound helplessness in the midst of tragedy. I SO want to help, to heal, to make things better--but there are things no human being can fix--and to try, sometimes is to fail to honor the pain. Instead, we have to simply stand helpless, to bear witness and be present to the pain and anguish. It can ask a great deal of us.

Elaine Babbish: The most rewarding aspect of hospital ministry to me, is seeing God's presence everywhere (i.e., patients, medical staff, people that cook or clean or the administrators). I walk and pray with them and create opportunities for them to minister. We have a mission team of associates from various services in the hospital that meet to plan activities that support our Catholic Hospital values. The hardest part recently was to have to follow the rules when families could not be with their sick loved ones in the hospital. This

was a collective pain where the staff would not let patients die alone. Dr. Beltramo's wonderful words of the realization we cannot "fix" a situation or person but we stay with them to "bear witness" of suffering and to trust God is close and present. This is where the blessing is.

2. What are the requirements for certification, and what is the application process?

For general information in reply to this question, see [Choose Chaplaincy webpage on NACC website](#).

- **What is required for certification?**

Dr. Lichter: One needs to be a Catholic in good standing, be able to receive the endorsement from one's ordinary (diocesan bishop). The NACC handles that process by asking of you a letter of recommendation from one's pastor, then sends a request letter to one's ordinary explaining what endorsement means. One also needs a graduate degree in an area of theology, and 4 units (1600 hours total) of clinical pastoral education. Finally one prepares materials for submission, and meets with a peer group for an interview.

- **Can someone be a chaplain without being certified?**

Dr. Beltramo: We (Ascension) require a minimum of one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and enrollment in a graduate level degree program to be hired as a contingent (PRN/as needed) chaplain. That said, we strongly prefer more education. To be hired as a full-time chaplain, both Ascension and Trinity require someone to be "certification eligible" (i.e. to have met all the requirements for certification) and then to earn their certification within two years of hire (or risk loss of employment). Each health system sets their own requirements around this and some hospices and nursing homes have lesser requirements as well.

- **What is the application process? How do I apply?**

Dr. Lichter: Please go to <https://www.nacc.org/certification/board-certified-chaplain/initial-certification-materials/> for this information.

- **How does certification work for those of us in healthcare that do not work in a Catholic health system?**

Dr. Beltramo: Each health system sets their own requirements, but nearly all now have very similar requirements to Ascension and Trinity.

3. What education do I need before being certified as a chaplain?

For information in reply to this question, see

<https://www.nacc.org/certification/board-certified-chaplain/faq/#Education>.

- **Is there a chaplaincy degree program at SHMS and what does that look like?**

Dr. Gerlach: Sacred Heart provides two robust master's level theology degrees: the Master of Arts in Theology (MA) and the Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies (MAPS). Typically, students who pursue chaplaincy choose the MAPS path since it is more oriented to pastoral care. Students may register for IS 897 Clinical Pastoral Education for 4 credits while completing 4 units of CPE.

- **Does the undergraduate Certificate in Catholic Theology (CCT) and prior Lay Ecclesial Ministry (LEM) certification qualify for chaplaincy, or is a *graduate* degree required for certification?**

Dr. Lichter: A graduate degree in theology is required. However, if one has a graduate degree in a field that might complement chaplaincy, one can inquire with NACC to see if an equivalency can be pursued.
<https://www.nacc.org/certification/board-certified-chaplain/graduate-degree-equivalency/>.

- **What about those who have a graduate degree in a different field (for example law, business, or public policy), plus an undergraduate certificate in Catholic Theology from an accredited institution? Is that sufficient to apply for certification in chaplaincy?**

Dr. Lichter: One can apply for a graduate degree equivalency, to see if the other graduate degree plus one's theology preparation can meet the requirements.

- **What do you learn in the MAPS degree that prepares you for chaplaincy?**

Elaine Babbish: MAPS is a great degree for chaplain ministry. I actually took CPE while I was in the Maps program and it worked well for me. I saw a connection of what I learned in

seminary get expressed in ministry. It was so regular that I compared it to breathing in formation and breathing out ministry. All the classes ie Philosophy, Cultural care, Spirituality, Sacred Scripture, Ethics and Pastoral Care...all of them contribute to chaplain care so that each idea or path of communication is integrated with formation to be a guide or help someone reframe hope and recognize grace.

4. What are “CPEs,” and how do I earn them without quitting my job or school?

For general information in reply to this question, see [Choose Chaplaincy webpage](#) on NACC website.

- **What are CPEs?**

Dr. Beltramo: Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is a specialized training which chaplains must take. One unit of CPE is a total of 360 hours, about 240 hours spent working as a chaplain in a clinical setting + about 120 hours spent in a small group “class”. A unit is usually spread out over 20 weeks (though some might be longer or shorter). Certification requires four units. Just like physicians, a first unit is typically an unpaid internship, but many settings now offer a full-time paid residency. Distance learning (a virtual group class time and local in person clinical placement) is an option which is becoming more common due to the scarcity of CPE programs.

- **Is it possible to work on completing CPEs while working on completing a graduate theology degree? Or does the degree need to be completed before taking on the clinical pastoral education?**

Dr. Beltramo: Yes! Some programs do require you to complete the degree before CPE, many do not. I think it works well to take your first unit of CPE while you are working on your degree. Then focus on completing your degree (perhaps even while doing some PRN or per diem chaplain work). Then once you near completion of the degree, look for a CPE residency.

- **How do I get more info about the extended CPE option, since I work full-time and would need to spread CPE out more?**

Dr. Beltramo: There are a few possibilities: (1) contact ACPE.edu which is the organization which oversees and accredits CPE programs all across the country and they may be able to

refer you to a program, (2) contact either Beaumont or St Joseph Ann Arbor which both have programs to see if they might be able to offer the flexible hours you might need or, (3) feel free to contact me directly, Ascension may be able to place you in a distance learning program and arrange for your clinical hours to work around your working hours.

5. What types of positions are available, and what is the compensation like?

For general information in reply to this question, see

<https://www.nacc.org/about-nacc/choose-chaplaincy/#1565980283229-509969a4-a046>.

- **Are there part-time positions available and/or volunteer positions?**

Dr. Beltramo: There is always a need for spiritual care volunteers in hospitals, nursing homes, or prisons. These roles are different from the role of the chaplain and do not require the same level of training or education. In health care there is nearly always a need for part-time chaplains--though a minimum of one unit of CPE and enrollment in a graduate level degree program is required.

- **Can I keep my job for now and do this part-time?**

Dr. Beltramo: Definitely!

- **What if you're not looking for chaplaincy as a 'career' but as a temporary way to continue pastoral work in an assisted living/memory care facility?**

Dr. Beltramo: Reach out to them--there is a great need in these settings. If you are looking for employment, they may still require CPE or other training, but if you simply want to volunteer, most will welcome you with open arms (though right now, with COVID, volunteer programs have temporarily been put on hold.)

- **Does retirement continue from Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) to this ministry? If I worked in the parish, will my years of service be included with this ministry?**

Dr. Beltramo: Not usually. You would be considered an employee of the organization you work for (nursing home, hospital, health system, etc). That said, benefits and retirement plans through health care are usually quite solid.

6. What are the requirements for certification, and what is the application process?

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- **How does certification work for those of us in healthcare that do not work in a Catholic Health System?**

Dr. Beltramo: Each health system sets their own requirements, but nearly all now have very similar requirements to Ascension and Trinity.

7. What chaplaincy roles exist outside the healthcare setting, and how are they certified?

- **What are non-healthcare settings in which chaplains serve?**

Dr. Lichter: NACC members identify themselves as working in settings such as parishes, prison/jail ministries, parishes, religious communities, mental health settings, and academic settings.

- **Do funeral homes ever need the services of a chaplain?**

Dr. Beltramo: Locally, I am not aware of any funeral homes which employ chaplains--though I believe a few may employ part-time bereavement coordinators who work with grieving families.

- **What about the military chaplaincy? How do I get information on the VA aspect?**

Dr. Lichter: Only priests are able to serve as Catholic chaplains in military settings. NACC certified VA chaplains. One can visit <http://www.ncvacc.net/>.

- **Are police/military/prison chaplains also certified under the same board? Or what organizations certify them?**

Dr. Lichter: Most police chaplains would not be certified. Police or fire chaplains are usually a local pastor or clergy member who volunteers to serve as the police chaplain. Most do not have formal training for this particular role, other than seminary. Police and fire chaplains are only very rarely paid positions.

- **Are college campus chaplains certified by the NACC too?**

Dr. Lichter: No, they would be certified by Catholic Campus Ministry Association <https://www.ccmanetwork.org/>.

Questions from our Canadian Friends....

- **Is there a corresponding certifying body in Canada (like NACC)?**

Dr. Lichter: The Canadian Association for Spiritual Care certifies: <https://spiritualcare.ca/>