

A Beginning Again

A Case - and a Place - for the Ministry of Endorsement

*The connective tissue between those who send, those who are sent,
and those who receive.*

For a long time, the ministry of endorsement—the Church’s authorization of clergy for service in institutional settings—did not need to be explained in order to function.

It was sustained in relationships—between bishops and clergy, between the Church and the institutions it served, and among those who knew the work well enough to maintain it. Authorization was granted, responsibilities were understood, and the Church’s presence in these settings continued with little need for extended clarification. The work held together because the people responsible for it understood how it was meant to function.

That is no longer enough.

The change is not the result of failure. The ministry of endorsement continues to be exercised faithfully, and with consistency and care. Clergy are still sent. Institutions still rely on the Church’s authorization. Bishops and church leaders continue to exercise oversight. In that sense, nothing essential has broken.

What has changed is the context in which this work now operates.

The work itself did not begin as a ministry. It began as a practical and technical response to a specific wartime need—one that required the Church to participate in the authorization of clergy for service in military chaplaincy, where the armed forces required the Church to assume responsibility for credentialing those who would serve as its representatives. In its earliest form, it functioned as a process, developed to meet external requirements and to ensure that those who served did so with recognized standing.

In that formative period, this work fell within the responsibility of the bishops themselves. The act of authorizing clergy for service in these settings was not separate from the exercise of episcopal oversight. It was part of it.

Over time, as that work came to be organized within the life of the Church, it took on a different character. What had been a necessary function in extraordinary circumstances became a sustained responsibility. Relationships formed between those who sent, those who were sent, and those who received them. The work expanded beyond authorization to include representation, accountability, and care. In that sense, it developed into a ministry.

That development did not eliminate the process. It gave it meaning.

As the structure of the work continued to change, the shift was not only organizational but conceptual. What had been understood as a ministry grounded in relationship, accountability, and pastoral care increasingly came to be treated as an administrative process. The work itself did not diminish, but its character was less clearly named and less consistently recognized as a distinct expression of the Church's ministry.

This is not a reversal, but it is a shift.

And it is part of what defines the present moment.

For much of its life, the ministry of endorsement has been sustained not by formal description or codified explanation, but by lived practice.

Those responsible for the work learned it by doing it. Relationships were established and maintained over time. Expectations were not always written or formally defined, but they were widely understood among those closest to the ministry. Bishops exercised their authority with an awareness of how endorsement functioned. Church leaders engaged institutions with a shared understanding of what the Church was representing. Clergy entering these settings were formed within systems that, while not always fully described, were nonetheless consistent.

In this way, the ministry was sustained through institutional memory and professional trust.

That memory did more than preserve information. It held together a network of relationships—between those who send, those who are sent, and those who receive them. It allowed the Church's presence in institutional settings to remain steady even as individual leaders changed and specific contexts evolved.

This way of sustaining the ministry proved resilient.

It allowed endorsement to function with reliability without requiring constant explanation. External partners came to trust the Church's role. Clergy experienced continuity of authorization and support. The work did not need to be repeatedly defined because it was consistently practiced.

But this way of sustaining the ministry has limits.

Institutional memory depends on continuity—of leadership, of relationships, and of structure, as well as shared assumptions about how responsibility is exercised. When those conditions are stable, much can remain implicit. When they begin to shift, what was

once understood becomes harder to communicate, especially to those who did not inherit the same experience of the work.

That limit is now being reached.

The institutional settings in which endorsed clergy serve have become more complex, requiring clearer definitions of authority, accountability, and responsibility. At the same time, the Church itself is changing. Leadership turns more quickly. Structures are being reconsidered. Conversations about regionalization are raising questions that were previously addressed through shared understanding but now require intentional consideration.

In this environment, reliance on institutional memory alone is no longer sufficient.

This is not a moment of crisis.

It is a moment of maturity.

If the ministry of endorsement is to be more clearly grounded, it is necessary to say plainly what it is—and to name it with the precision the work itself requires.

In practice, this work is more fully understood as **ecclesiastical endorsement**.

That term is not incidental. It is the language used in the institutional settings where this ministry operates to describe a relationship that is not merely procedural, but accountable. It names the Church's act of authorizing clergy to serve in settings beyond its direct control, and it establishes the responsibilities that accompany that authorization over time.

Ecclesiastical endorsement is not simply a step in a process.

It is a defined relationship.

It binds together those who send, those who are sent, and the Church that stands behind them. It requires that authorization be visible, that accountability be sustained, and that the Church's presence in these settings be both recognizable and credible to those who receive it.

Because this relationship is ongoing and accountable, it requires an office—not merely a place or an administrative function—not simply a sign on a door—but a locus of responsibility within the Church's life. In this sense, "office" refers to a recognized and ordered responsibility through which the Church carries specific obligations on its own behalf. Ecclesiastical endorsement is sustained through such an office, which bears responsibility for authorizing, maintaining, and representing this relationship over time.

This relationship is inseparable from the Church's exercise of episcopacy—the authority to send. In appointing clergy to these settings, bishops do more than authorize; they extend the Church's ministry into places where it must be sustained over time. That act of sending creates an ongoing responsibility—one that cannot be sustained by the moment of appointment alone.

Ecclesiastical endorsement is the means by which that responsibility is sustained. It serves as the connective tissue between those who send, those who are sent, and those who receive them, ensuring that the Church's authority is not only exercised, but sustained and made accountable in the life of the ministry.

To speak of endorsement in this way is not to introduce something new.

It is to name more clearly what the Church is already doing.

The present moment is not the first time the Church has needed to give clearer attention to this ministry.

At earlier points, as the organizational stature of this work was reduced within the Church's structure—from commission to division to section and office—the Church sought to compensate through more explicit Disciplinary language. Responsibilities were defined more carefully. Expectations were more clearly stated. The work did not become less important; it required clearer direction in order to be sustained.

What is different now is that both have thinned.

The structural visibility of the work has diminished, and the clarity of the language that once described and directed it has diminished as well. The Discipline now holds less guidance for this ministry than it once did, even as the settings in which it operates have become more complex and more demanding.

The work continues, but it is being sustained with less shared clarity than it once had.

That is the present condition.

If this ministry is to be sustained under present conditions, greater clarity is no longer optional.

The work itself continues. Clergy are still sent. Institutions still rely on the Church's authorization. Relationships remain central to how the ministry is exercised.

But the environment in which that work must now be understood has changed.

Where continuity once provided shared understanding, it can no longer be assumed. Where shared experience once filled the gaps, it is no longer widely held. Where structure once gave visible support, it is now less apparent and less clearly connected to the responsibilities the work requires.

In that setting, the ministry cannot depend on being implicitly understood.

It must be named more clearly—what it is, what it requires, and how it is sustained. It must also be clearly located within the Church’s structures, where responsibility for the work is explicitly assigned and maintained.

This is not a matter of preference.
It is a matter of accountability.

Without clearer grounding, the work becomes harder to explain, harder to support, and harder to carry forward across changing leadership and evolving structures. The relationships at the center of the ministry remain essential, but they cannot carry the full weight of the work without a shared understanding of what those relationships are meant to sustain.

Clarity does not replace practice.

It makes practice intelligible.

It allows those responsible for the ministry to act with a common understanding of what is being done in their name and how that responsibility is to be maintained over time. It also strengthens the Church’s credibility in the institutional settings where this work is exercised.

The need, then, is not to create a new ministry.

It is to give clearer grounding to one that already exists.

This essay has not attempted to resolve the structural questions that follow.

It has sought to name why they can no longer be left unspoken.

Michael T. “Terry” Bradfield
Winchester, Virginia
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