

## **“Excuse Me—Could You Point Me to the Office of Endorsement?”**

### **A Relational Ministry Hidden in Administrative Form**

*Where a ministry is placed shapes the ministry it becomes.*

There are some ministries in the life of the church that are easy to see.

They have pulpits. They have congregations. They have visible rhythms—preaching, teaching, pastoral care—that we readily recognize as “ministry.”

And then there are ministries that are harder to see—not because they are less important, but because they are structured in ways that obscure what they actually are.

The ministry of endorsement is one of those.

At first glance, endorsement appears administrative. It is housed in an office. It processes applications. It certifies clergy for service in settings beyond the local church—military chaplaincy, healthcare, federal service, and other institutional roles. It operates within denominational structures, currently situated within the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and it engages formal requirements tied to credentialing, accountability, and institutional compliance.

All of that is true.

But it is not the whole truth.

Because what looks like administration on the surface is, in practice, a dense network of relationships—relationships that must be formed, sustained, interpreted, and, at times, repaired.

Endorsement lives at the intersection of three enduring connections.

First, it relates to the church’s sending authority—the bishops, both individually and collectively through the Council of Bishops. These are the ones who appoint, who authorize, who send clergy into ministry in the name of the Church. Endorsement does not replace that authority; it depends on it. But it must remain in active, trusted conversation with it, because the act of sending does not end at the moment of appointment.

Second, it relates to the clergy themselves—those who sense a call to serve beyond the local church. These are not clergy who have left the Church; they are clergy who carry the Church into places the Church cannot otherwise go. Their accountability remains

ecclesial. Their identity remains ministerial. And their need for connection—to the Church that sent them—is ongoing.

Third, it relates to the institutions that receive them—military commands, hospitals, federal agencies, and other public or private systems that recognize the value of religious leadership within their structures. These institutions are not extensions of the Church. They are partners, each with their own mission, constraints, and expectations. The relationship must be credible, intelligible, and sustained over time.

Endorsement stands in the middle of all three.

It is the hinge.

And like any hinge, its importance is easy to overlook—right up until the moment it fails.

When it functions well, the movement is seamless. Clergy are sent, received, and supported. Institutions trust the Church's voice. Bishops remain connected to those they have appointed. The system holds.

But when the relational work of endorsement is reduced to process—when it is treated primarily as a transactional or administrative function—the strain begins to show. Communication thins. Trust erodes. Clergy can become isolated. Institutions begin to interpret the absence of relationship as the absence of accountability. And bishops, removed from the day-to-day realities of these ministries, lose visibility into the very work they have authorized.

None of this happens suddenly.

It happens quietly, gradually, and structurally.

Which raises a necessary question for the present moment.

As the Church re-envision its structures—asking where authority resides, how connection is maintained, and how ministry is organized—it is time to give serious consideration to the **office of the ministry of endorsement** itself.

Not simply where it is housed.

But what it is.

If endorsement is, in fact, a relational ministry—one that connects bishops, clergy, and institutions—then its placement within the Church's structure cannot be incidental. It must be positioned where those relationships can be actively sustained.

Where can it remain in close and credible relationship with the bishops who send?

Where can it speak clearly and consistently to the institutions it engages?

Where can it exercise a genuine pastoral responsibility for the clergy it supports—not as a secondary concern, but as a primary one?

These are not administrative questions.

They are ecclesiological ones.

But there is one more clarification that must be made if the picture is to be complete.

The pastoral work of endorsement does not reside in the office alone.

But neither is it diffuse.

The office remains the locus of responsibility. It gives the ministry of endorsement its form, its continuity, and its accountability within the life of the Church. Without it, the relationships that sustain this work do not organize themselves.

What extends beyond the office is not the *authority* of endorsement, but its *expression*.

That expression is often carried in the actions of the Church's leaders and members—when bishops remain attentive to those they have sent, when denominational leaders cross institutional boundaries to maintain connection, and when others, sometimes without formal charge, choose not merely to acknowledge an endorsed minister, but to reach them.

These actions do not replace the work of the office.

They are made possible by it.

They draw their meaning from it.

And when they occur, they do more than convey personal concern. They become recognizable as acts of the Church itself—extensions of a relationship that the office of endorsement has established, ordered, and sustained.

This is an important distinction.

Because without a clearly defined and properly situated office, these acts risk becoming isolated gestures—well-intended, but disconnected from the larger ministry they are meant to embody.

But when the office is strong—when it is relationally situated, structurally clear, and actively engaged—these same acts become part of a coherent whole.

They reinforce what endorsement is meant to ensure:

That the Church does not simply send its ministers into the world.

It remains present with them.

This has direct implications for where and how this office must be situated within the Church's emerging structure if it is to fulfill the ministry it already bears.

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