



Frequently Asked Questions

Lay Ecclesial Ministry Formation Program- Diocese of Salt Lake City

- 1. What does the term *lay ecclesial minister* mean? Is this a new rank or order in the Catholic Church?** In the 1990's the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) began using the terminology to describe a large number of lay persons, who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and in answer to their call given in the Sacraments of Initiation, developed their gifts and talents and offered their services to the Church. In this context, *lay* means service is offered by lay persons. Their service is *ecclesial* because it "has a place within the community of the Church, whose communion and mission it serves, and because it is submitted to the discernment, authorization, and supervision of the hierarchy" (*Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, 11. USCCB 2005). They are known as *ministers* because their work participates in the work of Christ, who is priest, prophet and king. Lay ministry should not be confused with ordained ministry. LEMs are *authorized* by the hierarchy to serve the local church in a particular area of ministry. They *collaborate* closely with the bishop, priests, and deacons and they are intentionally *prepared and formed* for leadership service in particular ministries within the diocese. Lay ministers do not necessarily commit themselves to lifelong service to the Church as do the ordained.
- 2. How is the LEM Formation Program different from the Deacon Candidate Program?** In the Diocese of Salt Lake City, the preparation of lay ecclesial ministers and diaconal candidates both feature carefully planned experiences in four areas: intellectual study, spiritual development, human formation, and pastoral skills. The diocesan LEM program meets certification standards of the National Association for Lay Ministers (NALM) and is offered over a three to four year sequence. Deacon candidates commit to four years in preparation for their ministry. The LEM program is based upon the recommendations offered in *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. The diaconal curriculum and formation activities meet standards established through the USCCB's document: *The National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*. LEM participants who complete all program requirements are presented for certification by the Bishop. Their certification is renewed through continuing

education credits. The diaconate preparation process prepares and assesses men for ordination, a lifelong commitment. Following ordination, deacons are required by Canon Law to participate in continuing formation activities each year.

- 3. I think this LEM program might be right for me. How do I know if the Holy Spirit is calling me in this direction?** Through the Sacraments of Initiation, all followers of Christ are called to holiness. For lay persons, the call means that we act in ways to bring the Gospel message to the world by fulfilling our particular work in the world. Some of us are called to serve as leaders within the Church. According to *Lumen Gentium*, this calling is to be encouraged by the hierarchy. In 1998, the Congregation for the Clergy noted; “Sharing in the function of Christ, priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active part of their own in the life and activity of the church. Their activity within the church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect.” If you believe you are being called to lay ecclesial ministry, complete the application. If you are accepted into the formation program, you will interact with a number of people who will help you discern if the LEM Formation Program is a proper fit. When applicants are accepted into the program, they select spiritual directors who assist in the discernment process. Program members reflect and pray with each other. They complete self-assessment surveys. The vocation to lay ecclesial ministry vocation unfolds over time.

- 4. What is involved in the intellectual formation?** LEM Participants devote time for study in a program that is designed for the needs of adult learners. The diocese maintains a partnership with the Satellite Theological Study Program through the University of Notre Dame’s Office For Church Life. Complete information about STEP’s online classes is available at www.step.nd.edu. The STEP classes are presented in online format, so participants utilize computer-based learning. Throughout the program, there are required reading assignments and written reflections. Period assessments offered by the program director help participants track their progress. Several short courses are taught by local instructors. The Diocese also partners with the Congar Institute for Ministry Development whose Resource Persons teach during study days, offer prayer experiences, and collaborate in other formation activities.

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