

Dear Candidate for Ecclesiastical Endorsement in Institutional Ministry:

In his farewell address to the Church in North America, St. Tikhon offered the following exhortation: *“... Orthodox people must care for the dissemination of the Orthodox faith among the heterodox. Christ the Savior said that those lighting a lamp do not put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house (Matt. 5:15). ... It is our obligation to share our spiritual treasures, our truth, our light and our joy with those who do not have these gifts. And this duty lies not only on pastors and missionaries, but also on lay people, for the Church of Christ, in the wise comparison of St. Paul, is a body, and in the life of the body every member takes part.”*



One of the ways that Orthodox Christians have been increasingly witnessing to their faith in the greater community is through “institutional ministry.” Ordained clergy and parish faithful have been responding to the call to minister to those who are sick and suffering in hospitals and hospices, caring for the needs of the elderly in extended care facilities, and more recently receiving special training for this ministry through Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). The institutional setting remains in many ways a missionary field. This does not mean an arena for proselytizing – preying upon those who are weak and vulnerable to convert them. Rather, through reaching out as persons of faith by being a listening presence, praying, and sharing of faith with those in crisis, both patient and caregiver are transformed through God’s presence.

Like military chaplaincy, institutional chaplains need to be endorsed as pastoral caregivers. Endorsement is a statement that the pastoral caregiver is in good standing within their Faith Tradition and has met certain requirements in order to serve in a specific ministry setting. This is true for those seeking positions in institutional settings, those seeking certification in credentialing bodies, and those seeking training and credentialing to conduct CPE. Additionally, credentialing bodies from time to time request updated endorsement letters.

The Orthodox Church in America is meeting this growing need through a formal process of applying for endorsement through the Office of Institutional Chaplains, in concert with the Office of the Metropolitan, Endorser for military and institutional chaplaincy. The OCA is also recognized by the Commission on Ministry in Specialized Settings (COMISS Network) and Association of Religious Endorsing Bodies (AREB) as a religious endorsing body.

Before downloading the application, please review the following notes:

First of all, endorsement, like ordination, is **site specific**. That means normally you would apply for endorsement at the time of accepting a chaplaincy or supervisory position, or when applying for certification. If necessary, a letter indicating the applicant is in good standing and able to apply for endorsement can be issued in those instances where employers want such verification prior to offering a position. As endorsement is site specific, if you leave the position for which you have been endorsed, you need to request a new letter for subsequent positions. Therefore it is important to keep this department informed of any employment changes in addition to requested periodic updates of your ministry.

Endorsement requirements are such that our chaplains can apply for positions alongside applicants from other faith traditions. Four units of CPE (1600 hours), and a 72 credit theological degree are the current hospital and credentialing body requirements. To seek endorsement, please contact the OCA Director of Institutional Chaplains, download the application form and send along with the requested accompanying documentation. You will be assisted in the application process. The items needed for consideration should normally include information requested on the enclosed application form and:

- Report or recommendation from the candidate's CPE supervisor.
- Pastor's recommendation of lay candidate's functioning in the parish setting, and/or Bishop's recommendation for clergy. The latter should include indication of being in good standing and indication of blessing to engage in institutional chaplaincy.
- Some background information on the candidate: education, CPE training, other ministry service and experience.
- Name and address of the person to whom you report, and if applicable the credentialing body certification is being sought from.
- Laypersons need to also review the Commissioning requirements below.

All of these items should be sent to the Director, who will reviews materials with the candidate and make a recommendation for endorsement. The endorsement letter will be issued by Metropolitan TIKHON. Laypersons need to be **commissioned** in advance of being endorsed. This office has developed a Commissioning Service that can be conducted in your parish and/or by the diocesan bishop. The Commissioning Service sets apart those who are called to institutional chaplaincy just as readers and singers were set apart in the early church. Regular follow-up and contact will be maintained with those who are serving in institutional settings.

As more Orthodox Christians engage in this arena, a stronger witness to our commitment to pastoral caregiving will be experienced by those ministered to, and received in professional ministry communities and credentialing bodies. Truly this will be a sharing of *our spiritual treasures, our truth, our light and our joy* spoken of by St. Tikhon with those in need in our greater community.

Please feel free to contact me with further questions you may have. May God bless your vocational discernment and related steps.

In Christ,

Archpriest Steven Voytovich, D.Min., Director,
Office of Institutional Chaplains
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