

IHMs in Action



Sister Angela (Marie Benjamin) Hibbard, IHM, has a unique place within the Archdiocese of Detroit. For the last four years, she has chaired the Archdiocesan Certification Review Board.

Sister Angela is a full-time pastoral associate at Gesu Parish in Detroit. Her ministry with the review board is a volunteer position.

The board oversees the certification process for pastoral ministers and provides consultation services for those applying for certification in the areas of liturgical ministry, pastoral ministry, Christian service/social ministry or pastoral musician.

The Archdiocese of Detroit was one of the first in the country to offer certification. Standards are based on those developed by the National Association of Lay Ministers. Candidates who are approved achieve provisional, basic, intermediate or full certification depending on their qualifications and experience.

"A candidate submits an application and materials that establish competence in a given area," says Sister Angela. "A three-person interview team reviews the material, talks to the candidate and makes a recommendation about certification to the Archdiocesan Office for Pastoral Ministries."

The Certification Review Board is composed of between 11 and 15 members appointed by the archdiocesan director of Parish Life Services.

"The composition is complex because of the variety of specialized areas," Sister Angela explains. "Members must have demonstrated knowledge within the different ministerial areas."

One of the goals of certification is to provide local and national recognition for the archdiocesan standards for pastoral ministry. It also yields personal benefits.

"Once someone begins the process of certification, it becomes an impetus to improve," observes Sister Angela. "People push themselves to be better and continue their education to enhance their experience. Applicants for certification look at all the elements important to the individual ministries, and they tend to become more self-aware as a result."

Sister Angela sees both challenges and rewards in this volunteer ministry.

"It's difficult when candidates expect a certain level of certification and they don't receive it," she says. "It's almost always because they haven't been properly mentored through pastoral experience and education."

"The biggest reward is that I get a different vision of 'church' by seeing the dedication of people who want certification. Often they work for very little pay for the love of God and for God's people. Meeting people who aren't aware of how great they really are and of the incredible work they do – that's a real blessing."