



National Deacon Directors Edition

Guidance for National Use and Adaptation

by Deacon Ernest T. Martinez, Director of Deacons, Archdiocese of Denver

This document may be adapted for use by dioceses nationwide. While rooted in the lived experience of the Archdiocese of Denver and Diocese of Colorado Springs, the challenges addressed herein; stress, trauma exposure, suicide risk, and vocational sustainability, are universal across ordained ministry.

National Deacon Directors and diocesan leaders are encouraged to:

- Utilize this framework as a model for clergy peer support initiatives
- Adapt training language to local contexts while preserving core principles
- Engage episcopal leadership early to ensure cultural and structural support
- The integration of clinical excellence with Catholic theology presented here offers a replicable, faithful approach to clergy care at the national level.

STANDING UP A C.O.R. (CLERGY OUTREACH & RESILIENCE) PROGRAM

A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CATHOLIC CLERGY PEER SUPPORT AND CARE

The growing emotional, spiritual, and psychological strain upon clergy today has revealed the urgent need for authentic accompaniment, fraternity, and resiliency support within the Church. Priests and Deacons regularly carry the burdens of grief, trauma exposure, isolation, crisis ministry, family stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue — often while serving others without structured support for themselves.

The C.O.R. model (CLERGY OUTREACH & RESILIENCY) adapts proven first responder peer support principles — particularly those utilized within the Denver Police Department and other public safety agencies — into a faithful Catholic framework rooted in fraternity, pastoral care, and Catholic anthropology.

This initiative integrates:

- Evidence-based peer support practices
- Catholic theology
- Sacred Scripture



- Canon Law
- Resiliency training
- Clergy fraternity and accompaniment

As Pope Leo XIV recently taught, authentic fraternity protects against “the illness of loneliness,” reminding the Church that brothers and sisters must “support each other in hardship.”

I. BEGIN WITH EPISCOPAL LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Successful clergy peer support must begin with visible support from:

- The Bishop/Archbishop
- Vicars General and for Clergy
- Diaconate Leadership

The initiative should be presented as:

- Clergy accompaniment
- Preventative pastoral care
- Fraternity and resiliency support

Foundational Anchors:

- Canon Law 281 & 384
- FRATELLI TUTTI
- National Directories for the Formation of Deacons & Priests, respectively
- Galatians 6:2 — “Bear one another’s burdens”

Without episcopal trust and encouragement, clergy participation will remain limited.

II. BUILD A SMALL TRUSTED TEAM

Start with a carefully selected foundational team:

- Senior Priest
- Senior Deacon
- Clinically trained Catholic professional
- Experienced peer support personnel
- Diocesan leadership representative

The most important qualities are:

- Trustworthiness



- Confidentiality
- Emotional maturity
- Calm presence
- Deep fidelity to the

III. ESTABLISH CLEAR MISSION AND BOUNDARIES

The program must clearly define what it is — and what it is not.

C.O.R. is...

- Confidential peer support
- Clergy accompaniment
- Crisis stabilization
- Fraternity and resiliency

C.O.R. is not ...

- Formal counseling
- Canonical investigation
- Personnel evaluation
- Therapy

Confidentiality standards are essential, except in cases involving:

- Harm to self
- Harm to others
- Mandatory reporting obligations

IV. UTILIZE EVIDENCE-BASED PEER SUPPORT TRAINING

Drawing from first responder peer support models, clergy peer support training should include:

- Active listening
- Suicide awareness/intervention
- Trauma awareness
- Burnout recognition
- Compassion fatigue
- Crisis stabilization
- Moral injury
- Family systems stress



Helpful Frameworks:

- B-FIIT assessment model
- Brain-in-crisis understanding
- M.O.R.E.P.I.E.S. listening tools

These approaches help clergy recognize emotional overload while offering practical peer accompaniment.

V. INTEGRATE CATHOLIC THEOLOGY THROUGHOUT

What makes C.O.R. unique is the integration of clinical excellence with Catholic theology.

Key themes include:

- Christ the Servant
- Paschal spirituality
- Redemptive suffering
- Human dignity
- Priestly and diaconal fraternity
- Hope in Christ

Scriptural Foundations:

- John 15:12 — “Love one another as I have loved you.”
- Romans 12:15
- Psalm 34:18
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–4

Pope Leo XIV recently emphasized that authentic Christian fraternity restores humanity’s vocation through mutual support, unity, and sacrificial love.

VI. DEVELOP ONGOING RESILIENCY AND FRATERNITY STRUCTURES

Peer support is not only for crisis moments.

Healthy clergy care includes:

- Regular fraternity gatherings
- Wellness check-ins
- Retreat integration
- Continuing formation
- Mentoring integration



- Spiritual direction encouragement
- Family support resources

The goal is to normalize accompaniment before crisis develops.

VII. CREATE REFERRAL PARTNERSHIPS

Peer supporters must understand their limitations.

Develop relationships with:

- Catholic therapists
- Trauma specialists
- Spiritual directors
- Retreat centers
- Emergency mental health providers

Peer support walks with the individual; clinicians provide treatment when necessary.

VIII. SUSTAINABILITY AND NATIONAL APPLICATION

The C.O.R. framework offers dioceses a scalable, replicable national model for clergy care.

National Deacon Directors and diocesan leaders are encouraged to:

- Utilize this framework as a model for clergy peer support initiatives
- Adapt language and training to local diocesan culture
- Engage episcopal leadership early
- Preserve core principles of confidentiality, fraternity, and Catholic identity

The integration of evidence-based resiliency principles with Catholic theology provides a faithful and sustainable response to the growing emotional and spiritual burdens carried by clergy today.

As Pope Leo XIV reminded the Church:

“Brothers and sisters support each other in hardship.”



Conclusion:

The Nicoletti–Flater certification training we use in our Archdiocese marks a decisive step forward in how the Church cares for those who serve. It affirms that competence and compassion are not competing values, but complementary virtues. When clergy are equipped to understand stress and trauma-within themselves and others-they are better able to stand at the crossroads of human suffering with steadiness and hope.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4, RSV-2CE)

In this light, the training is not merely a certification, but a pastoral investment-one that strengthens the heart of clergy ministry for the sake of the Gospel and the people entrusted to our care.

The Nicoletti–Flater certification training marks a decisive step forward in how the Church cares for those who serve. It affirms that competence and compassion are not competing values, but complementary virtues. When clergy are equipped to understand stress and trauma-within themselves and others-they are better able to stand at the crossroads of human suffering with steadiness and hope.