

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Project Report
Lilly Endowment Inc.
February 2005 – January 2006

Christian Reformed Church in North America
“Creating a Culture of Pastoral Excellence”

Project Activities

Following are the major activities we have undertaken in the past year. They are grouped under our five areas of programming.

1. Promotion and Teaching

- 2005 – Designed and placed six advertisements concerning the project in Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) related publications
- 2005 – Sent informational packets on the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) project to newly ordained pastors
- February and June 2005 – SPE/Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) course, *The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry*, offered in Orlando, Florida and Grand Rapids, Michigan respectively – 26 students attended
- February 2005 and January 2006 - Commissioned two articles on the CRCNA-SPE project that were published in CRCNA-related publications
- March 2005 - Bulletin inserts sent to every Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada and US – 1,023 churches
- March and September 2005 – Wrote to churches informing them that their pastors are members of a peer learning (PL) group
- March 2005 – September 2005 – Commissioned five articles on the pastoral vocation that were published in CRCNA-related publications
- March 2005 – January 2006 – Four articles written by staff about the CRCNA-SPE project that were published in CRCNA-related publications
- April 2005 – Presentation concerning SPE given at CRC Home Missions Conference
- May 2005 – Article, “How Congregations Can Sustain Pastoral Excellence” by Duane Kelderman (member of Lilly Implementation Team), posted on Duke Divinity School’s SPE website and in newsletter
- May – December 2005 – Four articles written by non-staff about the CRCNA-SPE project that were published in CRCNA-related publications
- August 2005 - Emailed pastors in PL groups to encourage others to participate
- September 2005 - Postcards sent to all pastors encouraging participation in PL groups
- December 2005 - Letter sent to all councils whose pastor attended the PL group coordinators’ meeting in November
- December 2005 – Article, “Shall We Dance” by Tony Meyer (PL group member) posted on Duke Divinity School’s SPE website and in newsletter
- January 2006 - Flyers sent to US classes (regional judicatory) promoting National Clergy Renewal Grants

2. Mentoring

- 2005 – Mentors assigned to new pastors within six months of their ordination or installation as a CRC pastor

- January 2005 – October 2005 – Mentoring advisory group met four times to discuss mentoring in the CRCNA
 - March 2005 – Hosted three dinners for CTS senior seminarians and their spouses to present information about the CRCNA’s mentoring program
 - March 2005 – May 2005 – Convened nine regional mentoring conferences for mentors, mentees and their spouses – 120 participants
 - March 2005 – Published and distributed second edition of mentoring manual, *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring*
 - May 2005 – January 2006 – Preliminary planning for 2006 bi-national mentoring conference
 - October 2005 – Received three and approved two proposals from classes to fund (on a matching basis) for three years the appointment of a half-time regional pastor (such pastors currently devote volunteer time to the job in addition to pastoring their own congregation)
 - October 2005 – Convened a conference for regional pastors – 70 participants
3. Peer Learning
- March 2005 – Revised overview document and application form
 - May 2005 – Approved nine out of eleven proposals to fund one-year peer learning groups among pastors (approved proposals involved 72 pastors and 61 congregations and came from 11 states and 4 provinces)
 - August 2005 - Analysis of denominational PL participation – purpose was to identify those geographical areas where pastors need a personal invitation to be part of PL group
 - August 2005 – With permission of LEI, reallocated funds to cover over-budget costs for PL group coordinators’ meeting
 - November 2005 - Approved 14 out of 16 proposals to fund one-year peer learning groups among pastors (approved proposals involved 105 pastors and 94 congregations and came from 10 states and 5 provinces – 75% of pastors were new to the program)
 - November 2005 – Convened the third annual meeting of PL group coordinators for sharing of experiences and mutual learning
4. Continuing Education
- February 2005 – January 2005 – 33 continuing education events held with 549 pastors (plus those linked by computer distance learning), 855 laypersons, and 659 congregations participating
 - March 2005 – Revised overview document and application form
 - June 2005 – Approved eight out of nine proposals to fund continuing education events (approved proposals will hold 25 events in nine states and two provinces)
 - December 2005 – Approved 11 out of 12 proposals to fund continuing education events (approved proposals will hold 27 events in nine states and two provinces)
5. Dissemination of Learning
- 2005 – Work continued on second volume of essays concerning the pastoral vocation
 - 2005 – Work continued on 2005 *significant training tool* concerning the final years in ministry and retirement
 - February 2005 – January 2006 – Shared reports with Calvin Institute of Christian Worship (CICW – the institute is supported by another LEI grant) and the Center for Excellence in Preaching (CEP – the center is supported by donors)
 - March 2005 – Posted stories on grantees on web site for first time
 - March 2005 - Added new pages to the web site: bibliography of published materials and grants awarded

- March 2005 – Submitted the 2005 report to LEI
- March, July, and August 2005 – Web site updated
- April, June, July, August, October, and November 2005 – Posted stories on grantees on web site
- April 2005 and September 2005 – Shared reports with Ministry Resource Center (the center is supported by another LEI grant)
- June 2005 - Display board at Synod (the governing body of the CRCNA)
- April 2005 – *Persevering in Ministry* distributed to 2005 ministry candidates
- April, July, and December 2005 – Mailed LEI recently published items
- May 2005 – *Persevering in Ministry* distributed to every CRC council, every ministry associate, every person in specialized ministries and those in the leadership development networks
- June 2005 – *Persevering in Ministry* distributed to those taking *The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry* course and members of new PL groups
- June 2005 – Began project to produce the 2006 *significant training tool* concerning pastoral accountability
- July 2005 - *Annual reports to Lilly, Sabbaticals and Pastors' Spouses* pages added to web site
- August 2005 – *Advisory Board Members* page added to web site
- August 2005 - Three CRCNA-SPE representatives attended SPE conference in Indianapolis
- November 2005 – Presentation on project to date given at SPE Advisory Board meeting
- November 2005 – Created display board for PL group coordinators' and Advisory Board meetings
- November 2005 – *Asian American Pastoral Ministry* (PL group) was featured on the CICW web site
- November 2005 – Advisory Board meeting held
- December 2005 – Shared SPE's analysis with the PNW Conference of the Free Methodist Church for their Ministerial Education and Guidance Board
- January 2006 – Published and distributed *Effective Leadership in the Church – significant training tool* for 2004

6. Other Activities

- May 2005 – Pastors' spouses task force begins to meet
- May 2005 – Sustainability task force begins to meet
- May 2005 – External reviewer of CRCNA-SPE project retained
- August 2005 – With permission of LEI, reallocated funds to devote more to the Advisory Board meetings
- October 2005 – Report from external reviewer completed
- November 2005 – Preliminary report on survey results presented to Advisory Board – surveyed pastors and clerks of council for baseline for 2007 survey – purpose of surveys: to access impact of SPE project on pastoral excellence in CRCNA

Impact

One of the requirements for all grants we award is the completion of reports. It is through these reports that we most often see the impact the grant has had on the participants. Comments reflecting the impact confirm that our program is indeed helping pastors to sustain pastoral excellence.

1. *Asian-American Pastoral Ministry* (AAPM) Peer Learning Group

The AAPM is a truly unique group of pastors. The ten members include: three Cambodians, two Vietnamese, two Filipinos, one Laotian, one Hmong, and one Korean. Not only do these pastors

come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, they also come from diverse geographical areas within the US and Canada.

AAPM has been meeting for almost two years. Their focus is “*to support each other to grow in pastoral excellence so that we can collectively prepare well the future of Asian churches in the CRCNA.*”

The peer group has impacted each of the members, and ultimately their congregations, in several ways. These isolated pastors have been “helped emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually.” * They have been forced to “examine common and varying cultural norms and values that directly affect [their] spiritual and theological perspective.” Two years of peer learning group experiences have taught them “to listen to [one] another with more patience, understanding, and mutual respect.” And they have come to appreciate the place of Asian churches in the CRCNA.

Participation in the group has also impacted the pastors in practical ways. They have been encouraged and “motivated to build their churches and help edify the entire CRC.” They have gone from having fears and doubts about emailing with attachments and conference calling to creating power point presentations. As a result, their pastoral confidence in doing God’s work more effectively through modern technology has greatly increased. Eight of the ten group members will be retiring within the next ten years. Their time together has helped them “to be serious about finishing well and strong.”

One clear impact on the congregations of these pastors is that they possess an eagerness to get to know and connect with other Asian CRCs.

In an interesting turn of events, the AAPM group has had an impact on one of our Lilly Implementation Team (LIT) members who recently attended a group meeting. The report reads, “Not just once was Jerry touched and moved to tears by various personal testimonies and sincere expressions of thanksgiving by pastors and spouses for the way our peer learning group was able to create a process for learning and sustaining pastoral excellence.”

* All quotes are taken from AAPM’s reports

2. *The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry* – SPE/CTS course

Each year SPE, in conjunction with CTS, offers a graduate level course, *The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry*. In June the class is held in Grand Rapids, Michigan and in February, the location varies. To date it has been held in Ontario, Florida and California. Seventy-two pastors from all over the US and Canada have taken the course.

The central thesis of the course is that strong pastoral identity is the key to sustaining pastoral excellence. As the pastors learn about the ever changing role of the pastor, they are better equipped to maintain a strong pastoral identity which impacts their congregations in positive ways.

Comments such as the following are clear indicators that the course is having a significant impact on the pastors taking the course. “I’ve learned many practical things on how to be sustained in ministry and how to maintain proper boundaries.” “After nearly two years in ministry this course is addressing all the questions I’ve had.” “[The course] helped me develop wise habits (devotions, balance), [it] inspired me to keep reading/studying/taking classes, [and it will] help me lead my congregation more effectively.”

At one point in the course the pastors are asked, “What is one of the passages of the Bible that sustains you in ministry?” A recent response wondered if ministry was worthwhile. The pastor asked the question, “What would life be like if I wasn’t a pastor?” and admitted that there are times when, “I don’t want to do this.” He went on to share that he has the profound privilege of leading many to righteousness—righteousness that is found in Christ—and when he does that which God makes easy for him to do, he is sustained in ministry.*

*the entire response is found in appendix IV

3. Pastor-Church Relations

The mentoring program of our project is managed from the Office of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR). As their name implies, they work with congregations and their pastors in a variety of ways.

In 2003 we produced a mentoring manual, *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring*. To date we have granted five regional pastors grants. These grants allow classes (regional judicatories) to hire a part-time pastor to focus on the needs of the pastors in that classis. Both of these resources have been made possible by the grant received from LEI.

The funds have made a phenomenal difference to PCR. They are moving more into a mentoring model (education and support) and away from a conflict resolution model. One coordinator of a regional pastor grant said, “The Lilly grant has helped this Classis to improve communication and [the] ability to work together by encouraging pastors to live, learn, laugh and weep together.”

Personal Assessment

1. What We Are Learning

In the fall of 2005 the results from our survey, of all pastors and clerks of council in the CRC, were tabulated. A number of interesting learnings about excellence in ministry have been gleaned from the report. Two learnings are:

- a) The pastors who have a church council that reflects with them on their role as a pastor had noticeably better average scores on questions pertaining to satisfaction with their current pastorate, feelings of isolation in ministry, and congregational fit. We have been reminded again of the importance of communication between pastors and their councils. In order for pastors to sustain excellence in ministry, they need to have open and honest discussions with their councils. Councils need to encourage, support and give feedback to their pastors on a regular basis.
- b) In order for pastors to sustain excellence in ministry they need to regularly attend continuing education (CE) events. This is why one of the three main programs of our grant is continuing education. What we learned from the survey is that 93% of the pastors indicated that they had attended at least one CE event in the last year. This is very encouraging to us.

Through our interaction with peer group members we are learning the importance of informal conversations for excellence in ministry. The pastors share times of spiritual and academic growth while in their groups and this is very important. Equally important are times spent in a car on the way to a conference, light-hearted conversations over dinner, and quiet sharing of ministry and family situations. The result of these activities is that pastors are forming strong bonds of friendship along with deep levels of trust. This too sustains excellence in ministry. One pastor shared, “The grant gave us a wonderful gift of not only learning but the chance to simply hang out together, eat together, laugh together, pray together, and struggle together. That was, and is, an invaluable gift.”

And finally, we have learned the important role the pastor's spouse plays in sustaining excellence in ministry. Along with this we have learned that there is a great need for support and encouragement of pastors' spouses. In response we have formed a task force that is currently planning a retreat for pastors' spouses (November 2006) and is also exploring other avenues to support spouses. (We are able to do these projects from the interest money earned on our grant funds.)

2. Strategy for Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

The strategy for sustaining pastoral excellence that has worked best in our project is to help pastors approach their work *communally* with other pastors, particularly through peer learning groups. In our culture there tends to be an accepted understanding that pastors *go it alone* in a vocation with many responsibilities—responsibilities that are often too heavy to bear alone. It is vital to the health of our pastors, and ultimately their congregations, that they know they do not need to be alone in ministry. If pastors are to be sustained in pastoral excellence, they need a community of peers that will encourage and support them. We have found that peer learning groups are a wonderful place to experience community.

Quite often pastors say that they are too busy to commit to meeting with peers on a regular basis. Peer groups do take time but it is time well spent. One pastor reported, "The gift of being joined in community with fellow professional clergy has been a gift beyond words."

Peer learning groups have been the most successful part of our project. To date one third of CRC pastors have joined an SPE PL group. Seventy-eight percent of the groups plan to continue to meet after their funding ends. The pastors involved in the groups have come to appreciate both the community experienced and the importance of that community. We see this as confirmation that the sustainability of pastoral excellence will be best accomplished in peer groups.

3. What Has Not Worked Well

We are very pleased with all aspects of our project to date except for the regional pastor (RP) matching grants we offer. In our denominational structure, regional pastors are experienced pastors who counsel and otherwise support all pastors in their classis. In most cases they do this in addition to serving their own congregation.

We wanted to strengthen this system by testing the benefits of relieving regional pastors of some of their duties by providing the classis with a part-time person whose salary would be covered by a grant and matching funds from the classis. But we have not realized the results we were hoping for. The chief problem is that classes have not taken advantage of the program. We originally budgeted \$250,000 for these RP grants. To date only 48% of the funds have been awarded. Since we decided that all the RP grants would be awarded by December 2006, this leaves 52% of the budget to be awarded in the next nine months. From our experience to date, we know this will not happen.

We believe the reason why the RP grants have not had the same success as the other parts of the project is because of the required matching funds. Many of the classes just do not have the funds. As one pastor said, "Our classis doesn't have two nickels to rub together."

We continue to be convinced that regional pastors, and the pastoral support they offer, are critical to sustaining pastoral excellence. We are not giving up! We are currently looking at options to restructure this program so that the funds can be utilized to support our pastors.

4. Program Changes

When we began to administer the grant in 2003, we were very careful to follow the direction of the proposal that we submitted to LEI. When faced with certain issues or circumstances we responded by saying that we were committed to “sticking to the plan”. At the September 2004 Indianapolis meeting we were encouraged to adjust our projects as needed. This was welcome news and since then we have made some changes which we believe have strengthened the project.

As mentioned above we are making some changes to the regional pastor program. We remain committed to regional pastors and the work they do. We are currently discussing the best ways to fulfill this commitment.

We had originally planned to produce a second brochure in 2005. We decided that the \$10,000 budgeted would be better spent in a different form of advertising—the telling of stories. We hired a contract writer who submits a story on one of our grantees each month. These are posted on the SPE web site. It is our hope that by reading about the experiences of grantees others will be encouraged to get involved.

We have opened up the membership of peer groups so that pastors from other denominations may join as long as the majority of the members are CRC. We found that in some geographical areas there just are not enough CRC pastors to form a group. The feedback that we receive from these groups indicates that the experience was richer for having a non-CRC pastor in the group.

This past summer we did a study on pastor participation in PL groups. We identified 14 classes that had less than 11% participation. Originally, the plan was that after the initial visits to the classes it would be up to the pastors to take the initiative to form PL groups. We decided that we needed to change this approach. Ten veteran peer group pastors were asked to personally contact the 218 pastors from these 14 classes. We hope to see the fruit of these personal contacts in the upcoming rounds of PL grants. (This project was also funded from the interest money.)

And finally, we have added to our project the goal to sustain pastors’ spouses. As mentioned under “What We Are Learning,” we have become aware of the great need for encouragement and support for spouses. While they are not as directly involved with ministry as their pastor husbands or wives are, they are nevertheless vital to sustaining pastoral excellence. We are currently planning a retreat. Other ideas are also being discussed. The feedback that we have received so far is that of deep gratitude and excitement that “something is being done for us.” (As noted above, this project is being funded from interest earned on the LEI grant.)

Theological Understanding

In our report last year we talked about the theological understandings that were emerging in our project. These understandings have continued to be evident in the past year and will, we believe, contribute to sustaining a culture of pastoral excellence in the Christian Reformed Church long after the grant is completed.

1. Character

To those who participate in our SPE programs the ongoing formation of their character in Christ increasingly becomes a priority, even though it is not necessarily so at the beginning of their SPE experience. When pastors complete a PL group proposal they are asked to list what their spiritual formation goals are. We receive a surprisingly large number of proposals where this question is not answered. When pressed for a response, the pastors sometimes ask, “What are you looking for?”

Some pastors assume that spiritual formation happens in their congregational life, others that it is an individual matter between them and God, but they soon discover rich opportunities for spiritual growth as they share their struggles, hopes, and yearnings with their peers. It has been gratifying to those of us who lead the SPE project to see this occur.

2. Renewal

Pastors are in constant need of renewal (physical, spiritual and academic) and re-equipping (gaining of skills). The demands of ministry are great. If pastors are not renewed and re-equipped, they can easily become overwhelmed. Almost without exception our PL groups experience renewal in significant ways. After meeting for some time pastors are asked how their grant will make a difference in their life, ministry, and church a year from now. Pastors said:

- “We will be healthier pastors with a support network of other pastors who will encourage us. This means that even five years from now we will be better equipped to do ministry.”
- “Ministries are strengthened since a church’s pastor better understands himself and as skills and methods are shared and passed on.”

We are becoming more aware of the importance of renewal being done in community. When pastors were students in seminary their learning was generally linear, cognitive, and deductive in nature. New information was *poured* into their heads and was later *poured* back out for exams and papers. Once away from the academic setting and engaged in ministry, pastors realize that this way of learning and knowing is incomplete. It should be a much more holistic, relational, and communal event.

Without the pressures of exams, papers, and the teacher’s expectations, pastors are discovering a kind of learning and knowing that is deeper and more transformative. Here is how one pastor puts it. “There was a growing recognition, through the sharing of ideas and pooling of wisdom, that this work best, and most deeply, happens as a company, as a prophetic community of shared discernment.”

3. Change in Practices

We have noticed a number of changes in practice that are resulting from pastors’ SPE experiences. These include such things as better boundaries, healthier balances between work and leisure, broadening the scope of books read, and deeper prayer lives. We have noticed an increase in pastors writing sermons in community. Several PL groups have focused on sermon writing. Some of these groups had their members preach a sermon in each of the churches represented in the group. This allowed the congregations to experience and appreciate several pastors while allowing the pastors to experience worship in a variety of churches. It also allowed the pastors to cut down on their sermon preparation for a few weeks—which they enjoyed!

At a recent session of the course, *The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry*, the students discussed the benefits of pastors writing sermons in community. During their discussion, the leader said, “It dawned upon us that perhaps one of the radical implications of the Trinity, the divine community that is God, is that pastors should never do anything alone, that all ministry should be done in community.”

The theological discussion about pastoral excellence is deepening as the project progresses. More and more pastors and congregations are becoming aware of the SPE project and the impact that it is having. This is resulting in more discussion about pastoral excellence and what it entails. Recently the CRCNA made the creating and sustaining of healthy congregations a strategic priority. Pastoral excellence and healthy congregations are a natural fit. We are confident that the discussions concerning pastoral excellence will continue to increase and be fruitful.

Sustaining Our Program

Our discussion about sustaining our program began at our Advisory Board meeting in November 2003—before the first year of our grant was over. At the 2004 meeting it was again on the agenda. In May 2005, a task force was formed to take a more focused look at sustainability. Two options for sustaining the project were discussed at the June 2005, Lilly Implementation Team (LIT) meeting. In August 2005, worksheets completed at the Indianapolis peer group meeting helped us further refine our work.

In January 2006, all of the above documents were reviewed. Based on this review a memo has been prepared for the LIT's consideration at its next meeting. Our next step is to decide which parts of the current project should be sustained by the Denominational Office, which parts can be adopted by other agencies/institutions of the CRCNA, and which parts, if any, can be dropped all together.

We have requested information from the CRCNA Director of Finance pertaining to the timeline of the CRCNA budget discussions. We are aware of the critical dates and are keeping these in mind as we continue our planning.

We recently updated the CRCNA Board of Trustees on the project, emphasizing the importance of sustaining its most valuable programs. During the presentation the Director of Denominational Ministries showed his support by stressing that the SPE project was very important to the Board-approved strategic priority of creating and sustaining healthy congregations.

1. Successes and Challenges

We have been successful in our sustainability work in that we have had many thought provoking conversations about sustainability and the challenges that it brings. We are slowly but surely making headway and are determined to have a viable plan in place before our funding from LEI expires.

We have brought key people within the denomination into the sustainability conversation. They are aware that our funding will end in December 2007. They are also aware of the success of SPE to date and the key role the project plays in the “healthy congregations” priority.

One challenge, as mentioned above, is to determine which parts of the project will be sustained by which agency, and which parts, if any, will be dropped. Some can and will be sustained without additional funding—or without funding at all. The main challenge is to find the funding for those aspects of our SPE program that will need it.

Resources

1. Helpful Resources for Pastors

There is a variety of resources that have been helpful to our pastoral leaders as they work towards sustaining excellence in ministry. First and foremost is Lilly Endowment Inc. itself. Expressions of deep gratitude to LEI for the grants pastors receive from us continue to arrive in our office.

- “Please know that your money went to good use and both we [pastors] and the denomination were, and will be, enriched by your efforts.”
- “Once again thank you for your generous financial backing of this project. It really does make a positive difference in our [pastors] lives to be supported in this way.”

There are two books that we have come to believe are key resources for pastors: *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* by William H. Willimon (Abingdon Press, 2002),

and *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* by Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech and Trish Taylor (Jossey-Bass, 2003).

We recommend these volumes to all our peer groups. They are also the required texts for the SPE course at Calvin Theological Seminary, *The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry*. A conference was held in October 2005, at which 230 attendees heard Jim Herrington and Trish Taylor address "Leading Congregations Through Change." Participants were encouraged to read *The Leader's Journey* prior to the event. Many of our peer groups also use Eugene Peterson's books as a part of their studies.

Reverends Kathy Smith and Duane Kelderman, both members of our SPE Implementation Team, have been excellent resources to both peer learning groups and continuing education events. Kathy is the Director of Continuing Education for the Calvin College Institute of Christian Worship and Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS), and Director of the Making Connections Initiative supported by another LEI grant. Duane is the Vice President for Administration and an Associate Professor of Preaching at CTS.

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, National Clergy Renewal (both supported by LEI grants) and the Center for Excellence in Preaching (CTS) are also valuable resources for our pastors.

2. Project-Developed Resources

Our project has developed several resources of its own. In the past three years we have commissioned and published 20 articles on the pastoral vocation. Each one is written with the pastor and pastoral excellence in mind. In addition to appearing in CRCNA-related publications, these articles are posted on our web site. *Persevering in Ministry*, a volume of essays by pastors, was published in June 2004. Thirty-five hundred copies have been distributed to date. It is being used as a text in a CTS course and is being studied in various pastors' and congregational book clubs. In May 2004, we published and distributed a mentoring manual, *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring*. In January 2006, we published a training tool for pastors and congregations, *Effective Leadership in the Church*. Twenty-five hundred copies have been distributed to date.

In response to requests for materials on sabbaticals we have added a page to our web site with 50 actual sabbatical policies, a guide to developing a policy, and a variety of sabbatical opportunities across the US. Another page has been added in response to requests from pastors' spouses.

3. Future Resources

Resources we are developing:

- Second volume of essays to be published June 2006 – parishioners tell their stories of experiences with pastors
- 2005 significant training tool – the final years in ministry and retirement
- 2006 significant training tool – pastoral accountability tool
- 2007 significant training tool – to be determined

4. SPE Coordination Program Resources

The Duke Divinity School SPE online monthly newsletter is distributed to the members of our Implementation Team. In the December 2005/January 2006 edition there was "A Litany for Sustaining Pastoral Excellence" that we plan to use at our peer learning group coordinators' meeting in November.

Our project has had two articles published in the newsletter: “How Congregations Can Sustain Pastoral Excellence” by Duane Kelderman (member of the Implementation Team) and “Shall We Dance” by Tony Meyer (PL group member). We have been contacted by Bob Wells from Duke about an article on the final years of ministry and retirement—which we recently sent to him.

Plans for the Next Year

During the coming year we will continue to administer our current programs in mentoring, peer learning, and continuing education. We will also continue to promote among CRC pastors and congregations the understanding of excellence in pastoral ministry we have developed. We will use the proven, successful activities that have been mentioned earlier in this report to accomplish this. Our work with pastors’ spouses will expand. And the sustainability of the project will become a very high priority.

In addition we will introduce some new activities this year:

- Begin to explore online curriculum for the mentoring program – spring 2006
- Publish and distribute two significant training tools (ending ministry well – May 2006; pastoral accountability tool – end of year).
- Publish and distribute our second volume of essays on the pastoral vocation – June 2006
- Share the stories of peer learning group members at classis meetings – Fall 2006
- Hold a retreat for pastors’ spouses – November 2006

Project Leadership

- Peter Borgdorff is the Executive Director of Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). He bears ultimate responsibility for the project.
- John Bolt is the Chief Financial Officer of the CRCNA. He has general oversight of the financial accounting of the project, although the day to day accounting is handled by the denomination’s controller, Chris Cok.
- The Project Director is Michael Bruinooge. He is responsible for implementation of the project.
- The Project Administrator is Lis Van Harten. She makes program decisions and administers the project on a daily basis.
- The project Implementation Team has eight members and meets nine times a year:
 - Michael Bruinooge, Director of Ministries Planning, CRCNA
 - Jerry Dykstra, Director of Denominational Ministries, CRCNA
 - Duane Kelderman, Vice President for Administration, Calvin Theological Seminary
 - David Koll, Pastor, Anaheim, California
 - Al Mulder, Regional Church Planting Specialist, CRCNA
 - Kathy Smith, Director of Continuing Education, Calvin Theological Seminary
 - Duane Visser, Director of Pastor-Church Relations, CRCNA
 - Lis Van Harten, SPE Project Administrator

This team has a guiding role with regard to the project. They also make decisions regarding proposals under our internal grants program. Ms. Van Harten facilitates the team’s meetings.

- The Advisory Board meets annually. Its third meeting was held in November, 2005. As its name implies, this group gives advice to the implementation team and other leadership concerning the overall direction of the project. Its members have pastoral experience and represent diverse perspectives. They are:
 - Manny Bersach, Pastor, Miami, Florida
 - George Hunsberger, Director of SPE Project, Western Theological Seminary
 - Moon Bae Kim, Pastor, Grand Rapids, Michigan

- Jake Kuipers, Pastor, Trenton, Ontario
- Thea Leunk, Pastor, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Lynn Likkel, Pastor, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Esteban Lugo, Director of Race Relations, CRCNA
- Tom Niehof, Pastor, Ames, Iowa
- Reggie Smith, Pastor, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- John D. Witvliet, Director, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
- Carl Zylstra, President, Dordt College

Appendix I

	2005 - New	Total to Date
A. Peer Learning Groups		
Number of groups begun by our project	15	62
Number of pastoral participants in all groups	101	356
Number of lay participants in all groups	20	41
Number of congregations represented in all groups	86	347

	2005- New	Totals to Date
B. Other Learning/Training Events *		
Number of events conducted by our project	47	90
Number of pastoral participants in all events	723 **	1,294 **
Number of lay participants in all events	955	1,334
Number of congregations represented in all events	834	1,568

* The numbers here represent the continuing education events that are hosted through grants awarded by the SPE project as well as events that our project itself has hosted. Note that some pastors/lay participants have attended more than one event. This results in both the participant and the congregation being counted each time an event is attended.

** Includes those linked by computer distance learning.

C. Other Statistics

Sustainability of Peer Learning Groups

Seventy-eight per cent of the peer learning groups that received funding have indicated that they plan to continue to meet past their grant period. This is significant to us because it is our hope that pastors who participate in the SPE project will sustain their activities as they pursue pastoral excellence.

Appendix II

Date	Event Description	Location
Monday April 17 – Wednesday April 19, 2006	<u>Mentoring Conference</u> - Mentors, mentees and their spouses will gather for the bi-annual conference.	Prince Conference Center Calvin College 3201 Burton Street SE Grand Rapids, MI 49546
Monday June 5 – Friday June 19, 2006	<u><i>The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry</i></u> - The SPE/CTS course	Calvin Theological Seminary 3233 Burton Street SE Grand Rapids, MI 49546
Monday November 8 – Wednesday November 10, 2006	<u>Pastors' Spouses Retreat</u> - Pastors' spouses will enjoy a time of refreshment, renewal and relaxation.	To be determined
Wednesday November 15, 2006	<u>Peer Learning Group Coordinators' Meeting</u> - Coordinators from the November 2005 and May 2006 grants will gather for a day of learning and sharing	CRCNA 2850 Kalamazoo SE Grand Rapids, MI 49560
Thursday November 16, 2006	<u>SPE Advisory Board Meeting</u>	Prince Conference Center Calvin College 3201 Burton Street SE Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Appendix III

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PUBLISHED GRANT PRODUCTS February 1, 2005 – January 31, 2006

- February - article in *Christian Courier* "Peer Learning Groups Help Provide Pastor Care" by Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen
- March - article in *Ministry Reports to Classes and Councils* on PL group coordinator's meeting by Lis Van Harten
- March - bulletin insert – promoting SPE
- March - second edition of *Toward Effective Pastoral Mentoring*
- March - article in *Christian Courier*, "The Character of a Near Disaster" by Jim Dekker
- April - article in *Christian Courier*, "Shall We Dance?" by Tony Meyer
- May - article in *Christian Courier*, "The Conviction to Hope and Thrive--Again, or for the First Time" by Jim Dekker
- May - article in *Ministry Report to Classes and Councils* on Regional Pastor Grants by Lis Van Harten
- June - ad in *The Banner*
- June - ad in *Christian Courier*
- July - article in *Christian Courier*, "Competency for Communal Leadership" by Jim Dekker
- August - article in *The Banner*, "Toronto Graduate School Gives Pastors Tools for Ministry" by Sophie Vandenberg
- September - article in *Christian Courier*, "Confluence for Congregational Leadership" by Jim Dekker
- September - ad in *The Banner*
- September - ad in *Christian Courier*
- September - article in *Ministry Report to Classes and Councils* on SPE/CTS Course by Lis Van Harten
- Fall - article in *Forum*, "We Need Each Other" by Gary Brouwers
- Fall - article in *Forum*, "The Power of Peer Learning Groups" by Kathy Smith
- October - Leadership Training Tool produced: *Effective Leadership in the Church*
- December - article in *The Banner*, "Classis Delegates Go Back to School" by Ruth Moblard De Young
- December - article in *The Banner*, "Soul Change" by Roxanne Van Farowe

- January - article in *Christian Courier*, "An Ounce of Prevention - Healthy Pastors, Healthy Churches" by Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen
- January - article in *Ministry Report to Classes and Councils*, "Pastors' Spouses" by Lis Van Harten

Appendix IV

Sustained in Ministry

By Rev. George Koopmans

The question, "What is one of the passages of the Bible that sustains you in ministry?" presupposes that pastors experience times of discouragement and disillusionment in ministry as well as times of simply wondering "is it all worthwhile?"

As I reflect upon these matters . . .

I think of times I have responded to tragedies in the congregation - and part of me says, "I don't want to do this!" and part of me replies, "If not you, then who?"

I think of the trips to the nursing home and I wonder if that shortage of workers has been taken care of or will it still smell bad in the home? I also think of the stories that I will hear, stories I have already heard many times before. I think of the ones in the home who are no longer able to communicate with me, and I wonder, do they really hear me? What are they thinking? Am I really ministering to them effectively?

Sometimes I ponder the fact that even though I am not a doctor I hear about medical conditions and what is going on with the body in minute detail.

Sometimes in too much detail!

There are times I think about taking my family away for the weekend like so many others do - perhaps camping, or to get a room by the beach - but I have this commitment which takes up all my weekends.

I sometimes think of the young man I overheard speaking to a friend at the mall. He was so excited about his new job in the oil patch. Why shouldn't he be? The job was paying him a six figure salary.

Sometimes I wonder - "What would life be like if I wasn't a pastor?"

And in times like this my mind is drawn to Daniel 12:1-3 and especially to verse 3: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

Then I am reminded once again that God has given me the profound privilege of leading many to righteousness. Responsibility - sure. But mostly privilege. And he makes it so easy. They come on their own, by the dozens, even hundreds! Each Sunday they come and I have the opportunity to lead to righteousness. After all, our righteousness is found in Christ alone!

Our righteousness is not found in our good works or any thing else we do or are, our righteousness is found at the foot of the cross - and I get to lead the way to the cross each week. I get to do that on Monday too when our Catechism Class gathers - and each day of the week!

Of course I am not, the pastor is not, the only one who is called to lead others to righteousness - all God's people share in that noble calling - and yet God gives me so many opportunities to do this. He makes it so easy for me to do this as he brings all kinds of people into contact with me. And then he

says - when you simply do what I make easy for you to do – I will bless you and you will shine like the stars forever and ever - and I am sustained in ministry.

George Koopmans is the pastor of Medicine Hat Christian Reformed Church in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada.