

**CONTINUING EDUCATION
FOR
MINISTRY STAFF
Christian Reformed Church in North America**

The Need

In the world in which we live, there is scarcely a vocation that is not requiring continuing education in some form to meet the demands of changing technology and complex demands of the current workplace. In industry, offices, farming, schools, and other settings, staff are expected and encouraged to stay current by means of continuing opportunities for training. Ministry is no exception. The 1998 Synod of the CRC supported this concept in mandating study of continuing professional education for ministry staff (Agenda for Synod, 2000, p. 418).

Terms

Continuing Education - is an annual opportunity for spiritual growth and professional training. This education can be accomplished through workshops, classes, spiritual retreats, guided groups, online programs, or supervised individual study.

Ministry Staff - The persons who are eligible for continuing education are the professional church staff who are employed at least 20 hours each week. This includes pastors, ministry associates, youth pastors, ministry coordinators, and others who are actively involved in doing direct ministry in a congregation.

Council Policy

Synod 2000 of the CRCNA approved a proposal which urges all councils (a) to establish a policy for continuing education, (b) to establish the expectation that their pastor(s) and ministry staff annually engage in an appropriate program of continuing education for ministry, and (c) to hold ministers and other ministry staff accountable for obtaining continuing education and for the content of the programs. This accountability is to be based on clear criteria adopted by the council in consultation with the minister(s) and ministry staff (Acts of Synod 2000, p. 681).

When a call is extended to ministry staff, the call letter should include such information and an encouragement and expectation to continue to learn and grow through intentional participation in continuing education.

Council Resources

Synod strongly recommended that each council set aside adequate funds for continuing education of ministry staff. Synod recommended that approximately ten days (not vacation time) and \$1,200.00 be set aside each year for this purpose for each ministry staff person. This should be the first option. It is also apparent that some congregations and ministry staff may need assistance in financing programs of continued learning (Acts of Synod 2000, p. 681).

Denominational Continuing Education Fund

The fund purpose is to encourage all ministry staff to engage in continuing education. The denomination is willing to offer financial assistance as part of this encouragement and to assist congregations and ministry staff who cannot afford adequate financing locally for continuing educational activities. Not all congregations have equal resources. Small and less financially established congregations and their pastors are as much in need of continuing education as larger, more financially stable congregations. Ministry Shares support these grants.

Process of application

Ministry staff are primarily responsible for planning and facilitating their continuing education programs.

1. Complete the Continuing Education Fund Application including signatures of the ministry staff person and a representative of the council.
2. Return form to the Pastor-Church Relations office by one of the deadlines: April 1, August 1 or November 1. Send to: Pastor Church Relations, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560.
3. Write a brief report about the completed continuing education for the church council and the denominational committee.

Allocation will be on the basis of perceived need and priority, which include:

- Size of congregation – smaller congregations will be given priority
- Timing of request
- Availability of funds – funds will be distributed on a financial need basis

Limits of grants for continuing education activities

- Limited based on availability of funds
- Individual grants will generally not exceed more than \$750.00 per year (July 1 – June 30)

Eligibility

- Level 1 – Ministry staff in congregations who are unable to support continuing education to its full extent.
- Level 2 – If funds are available, the Continuing Education Committee will consider ministry staff in non-congregational settings.

**Continuing Education Application and Agreement
(Council and Ministry Staff Person)**

Name of Ministry Staff _____ Congregation of _____
Position Title _____ Number of Hours Paid to Work Weekly _____
Address _____ Date _____
_____ E-mail _____

This congregation has called me to the ministry of the Gospel in this place. In order to faithfully engage in this ministry, I desire to engage in continuing education and thereby submit the following request. This request takes into account both the ministry emphases of the congregation as well as my own growth needs.

Continuing Education Request

A. Subject (area of ministry addressed)

B. Instructor (avenue of education)

C. Date (length of time requested)

D. Purpose of Continuing Education

This request will enrich my ministry by:

This request will benefit the congregation by:

Expenses of Continuing Education

Registration fee: _____

Travel: _____

Lodging/meals: _____

Additional: _____

Pulpit Supply: _____

Additional: _____

Total Expense: \$ _____

Income for Continuing Education

Church Funds: _____

Personal out-of-pocket funds:

_____ **Denominational Grant Requested:**

These amounts are:

USA _____ Canadian _____

I, the undersigned, agree that this is a faithful effort at continuing education and pledge my best effort to grow through this participation.

Ministry Staff _____

Our Church Council accepts its responsibility to assist our Ministry Staff in using and developing gifts for ministry. Therefore having reviewed this request, we endorse it with our support.

Council Clerk _____

Please send a copy of this application and agreement along with the ministry's current budget and any other supporting evidence of need to:

Pastor-Church Relations
2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560

Optional Steps for a Continuing Education Plan

Ministry Staff

1. Plans continuing education – Use **Ministry Staff Worksheet**
2. Asks council to appoint a continuing education committee
3. Takes part in Performance Review. This is an opportunity for the staff and the council to review ministry expectations and performance. As a result of these evaluations, the staff and council can determine areas of needed growth and focus the annual goals for continuing education programs.
4. Fills out the **Continuing Education Agreement** with Continuing Education Committee for approval by Council
5. Participates in Continuing Education
6. Writes a report for the Council
7. Annually repeats the above procedures

Continuing Education Committee

1. Assists staff in assessment of educational needs, learning goals, continued educational options, and presentation of the annual continuing education proposal to the council.
Use **Church Advice Worksheet**
2. Meets with Ministry Staff Person to:
 - A. Review **Ministry Staff** and **Church Advice Worksheets**
 - B. Mutually complete **Continuing Education Agreement**
3. Meets with Council for presentation of Covenant
4. Monitors completion of the agreement
5. Encourages further learning experiences

Council/Congregation

1. Council expects continuing education
(This expectation may be shown by making a mutual continuing education agreement with current ministry staff or expectations and support (time and funds). These can be included in the Letter of Call for new staff.
2. Establishes a Continuing Education Committee in consultation with the ministry staff person(s)
3. Completes Performance Review of ministry staff
4. Completes a **Continuing Education Agreement** with the ministry staff person(s)
5. Provides for appropriate funding and time needed for continuing education programs

Ministry Staff Worksheet (To be completed by Ministry Staff Person)
Determining Direction

- A. Previous continuing education

- B. Present goals for ministry

- C. Needs of local congregation

- D. Personal growth/interest areas

- E. Possible components
 - 1. Biblical and Theological Studies
 - 2. Personal and Spiritual Growth
 - 3. Skills for Ministry
 - 4. Church and Society
 - 5. Development and Assessment of Ministry

General Three Year Plan

	Area for Study	Options
Year 1		
Year 2		
Year 3		

Current Year Recommendations to Advice Committee

Course(s) of study (conferences, classes, etc.)	Dates
1.	
2.	
3.	

Church Advice Worksheet

(To be completed by Continuing Education Committee)

The following worksheet is for use by the Continuing Education Committee in preparation for meeting with the Ministry Staff Person. Ministry Staff Persons have areas of interest for growth and continuing education. This worksheet is for giving advice relating to the needs of the church and areas the church would see as beneficial for the Ministry Staff Person and the needs of the congregation.

If a Performance Review of the Ministry Staff Person has been done, summarize the areas that could provide some guidance for continuing education.

If a Performance Review has not been done, informally provide the following information relating to the Ministry Staff Person. What does the council/congregation see as:

Strengths

Areas for improvement

Suggested Areas for Continuing Education

Particular Classes/Conferences that could be helpful for the Ministry Staff Person and the needs of the congregation are:

Date _____ for meeting with Ministry Staff Person for completing the **Continuing Education Agreement.**

Additional Resources

There are many sources for continuing education for lay and ordained leaders in the church. These can be found from searching the advertising of Christian magazines, mailed promotions and conversations with those who share in our common areas of calling. The Internet is one of the greatest resources, not only for information, but also for continuing education courses on-line. Included below is a list of resources. Our committee has no way to endorse all of the resources below. Be sure to use discretion. If the resource is a web site, check for links to related information. Consider the following areas: Biblical and Theological Studies; Personal and Spiritual Growth; Skills for Ministry; Church and Society; Development and Assessment of Ministry.

Calvin Theological Seminary will continue to assist councils and ministry staff in planning resources, specific educational program both on-site and online, and assistance in finding educational opportunities. The seminary tape library contains a wide variety of audio and videotapes, which are listed by speaker and by subject (<http://www.calvinseminary.edu>).

The Alban Institute <http://www.alban.org> (1 800 486-1318) connects laity, clergy, and executives to resources as they seek to serve God in their congregations, communities, and the world at large. They have workshops, publications, and participate in projects such as the Indianapolis Center for Congregations (<http://www.centerforcongregations.org/>). The book, Clergy Renewal: The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning. Bullock, A Richard and Bruesehoof, Richard J., N.p. [Bethesda, MD], 2000, is useful in itself and contains a bibliography, sample sabbatical policies, sample sabbatical brochure, and a set of resources on the Internet.

Almost all of the 243 member schools of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada offer continuing education programs. An alphabetical, denominational and geographical index of member schools can be found at <http://www.ats.edu/members/membtoc.html>