

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

GUIDELINES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

I. INTRODUCTION

The 1999 “Ministerial Leadership” paper states that every ordained ministerial leader in the Church of the Brethren is expected to complete one of several approved educational tracks.¹ As important as formal education is, however, formal education does not complete one’s learning and preparation for ministerial leadership. Education is a lifelong process. The 1999 paper recognizes this need and includes as one of the areas of accountability this statement: “Each District Ministry Commission is expected to promote continuing education expectations for every ministerial leader under its jurisdiction.”² To support uniformity and encourage participation in continuing education opportunities, the Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee and the Office of Ministry developed this paper on “Guidelines for Continuing Education.”

The 1999 “Ministerial Leadership” paper calls the denomination to recognize the importance of continuing education for its ordained leaders. The nine Areas of Service for Ordained Leadership are included in the continuing education requirements with the exception of the ninth area (retired Ministers).³ The following statement affirms this point for pastors: “Ministerial leaders (lead pastors, associate pastors, pastors in special ministries, etc.) serving congregations in pastoral roles influence the lives of parishioners in significant ways. These leaders need to pay special attention to their ‘spiritual health’ and continue to improve their professional skills.”⁴ Retired ministers should also take advantage of continuing education opportunities, especially when they are still providing pastoral leadership; but, as a group, retired ministers are not included under these guidelines.

Ordained ministerial leaders serving in roles other than those in congregational settings may fulfill the expectations of these guidelines through the continuing education requirements of their employment.⁵ District Executives⁶ should receive copies, from all ordained ministers, of information about continuing education events attended for placement in the ministerial files.

1. Pages AC10.6 - AC10.7.

2. See III.J.3, p. AC10.12.

3. Page AC10.8.

4. Page AC10.12, footnote 36.

5. These ministers might include teachers, chaplains, district and General Board staff, etc.

6. Hereafter, the term Executive will include District Executive, District Pastor, District Executive/Minister, Associate District Executive, or any another term used by districts to identify district executive staff.

These guidelines urge . . .

- Congregations to be supportive by providing pastoral leaders with time away from ministerial duties so that they may engage in continuing education events;
- Congregations to provide continuing education accounts through their annual budgets, or to create special reserve funds, for their pastors;
- District ministry commissions to promote continuing education;
- Districts and the Office of Ministry of the General Board to establish continuing education accounts in their annual budget, or create special reserve funds, for the purpose of responding to requests on a need basis for pastoral leaders who are engaged in continuing education.

These guidelines also . . .

- Define the roles of congregations, pastors, and districts;
- Establish a minimum number of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) per year;
- Establish a process for decisionmaking.

II. THE CONGREGATION'S ROLE

Congregations benefit directly when its pastoral leaders engage in continuing education. Leaders must continue to grow spiritually and professionally if they are to provide the quality leadership expected and needed by the membership. Those who do not continue to grow and mature are likely to become discouraged and even dissatisfied with their ministry. These individuals are prime candidates for “burn out” and “drop out.” In the end, the church suffers the loss of good leadership. By the same token, renewed leaders are much more likely to provide inspired leadership, and the church becomes healthier as a result. Continuing education is a win-win situation for both congregations and pastoral leaders.

A. What can a congregation offer? The following things are especially helpful:

1. Strongly encourage and support continuing education.
2. Establish long-range continuing education goals, based on the needs of the congregation, with an annual review.
3. Incorporate at least seven (7) days a year in the pastor's schedule for continuing education. This should be planned so that the pastor is not away for more than one Sunday during the seven days.
4. Assist with appropriate financial support by creating a continuing education account in the annual budget or a special reserve fund, whereby both the congregation and the pastoral leader can save for the future.
5. Offer the pastor suggestions about growth opportunities.

6. Stay informed about the pastor's continuing education goals and plans.
7. Provide for feedback and reflection following each growth event.

III. THE PASTOR'S ROLE

The pastor engages in continuing education for the purpose of personal and professional growth. This "time away" from one's normal routine is not merely time off or an extended vacation. Continuing education, both personal and professional, is designed to enhance the pastor's ministry; therefore, the congregation is a direct beneficiary of the pastor's growth.

A. What's expected of the pastor? The following things are especially helpful:

1. Consult with the congregation on appropriate continuing education events.
2. Work with the congregation to schedule time away for continuing education events.
3. Invite congregational members, when appropriate, to attend continuing education events with the pastor.
4. Report completion of continuing education events to the congregation and the district.
5. Give Church of the Brethren continuing education events a high priority,⁷ recognizing, however, that there are many fine educational opportunities in other denominations and agencies.
6. Find appropriate ways to integrate new learnings and experiences into the ministry context.
7. In selecting a continuing education plan, be sensitive to areas where professional skills may be limited and growth is desirable and needed.

IV. THE DISTRICT'S ROLE

Neither the District Ministry Commission nor the Executive is in a good position to manage continuing education agreements between congregations and their pastoral leaders. It is important, however, for pastors and congregational leaders to keep the district office informed. Records of completed growth opportunities should be sent to the Executive for placement in the ministerial files by the pastor. This official information will be particularly useful for the five-year renewals of ordinations.

A. What can districts offer? The following things are especially helpful:

7. Those serving in a dually-aligned congregation should be sensitive to opportunities in the affiliated denomination.

1. Districts can model their commitment to continuing education by encouraging and supporting their executive staff with their own continuing education goals and plans.
2. Help the Office of Ministry to distribute this paper to all current pastoral leaders.
3. Discuss continuing education in every pastoral placement.
4. Promote continuing education in the districts.
5. Provide growth opportunities within the districts.
6. Inform pastoral leaders of additional growth opportunities.
7. Assist with financial support where possible by establishing continuing education accounts in the annual budgets, or by creating special reserve funds, for pastors engaged in continuing education.
8. Assist pastoral leaders and congregations with the development of continuing education plans.

V. MINIMUM NUMBER OF CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS (CEUs)

A CEU is equal to ten (10) contact hours of work with an accredited institution.⁸ That is to say, the institution is able to issue official CEU certificates. Bethany Theological Seminary, the Susquehanna Valley Satellite, and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership represent three excellent examples of qualified institutions. An accredited institution, however, does not necessarily guarantee quality education that is compatible with the values and heritage of the Church of the Brethren. Therefore, it is imperative that the pastor consult with the appropriate leaders of the congregation and District Executive staff as continuing education plans are developed.

A pastoral leader is expected to complete work in at least five (5) of the eight (8) focus areas listed below. The course work should be planned in such a way that five focus areas are covered during the five-year interval between ordination reviews.⁹ This will give the pastoral leader a minimum of five (5) CEUs (50 contact hours) during the stated period. Continuing education for part-time and bi-vocational pastors will need to take into account the pastoral/congregational agreement and be prorated to satisfy the agreement.

Why are the focus areas below so important? Someone has aptly stated, “the good news does not change, but the way it is presented must always be subject to change.” The world around us changes rapidly and constantly, and in order for us to effectively communicate with that world, we must have some understanding of it. We need to be passionate in our evangelism and church

8. Often there are excellent growth opportunities that offer the equivalent of a CEU (ten contact hours of study), but the institution or agency may not offer a CEU certificate. This is acceptable if the course of study is within the focus areas and it has been discussed and is acceptable to the congregational leaders where the pastor is serving. The pastor has the opportunity to select from a wide variety of options in each of the eight areas.

9. In order to avoid too much work in a single year, it would be wise for the pastor to plan to complete one CEU annually.

growth efforts, but the success of those efforts often depends on our knowledge about the changing world and the use of relevant methodology. The same is true in areas like preaching, worship, pastoral leadership, pastoral care, and many others. We are continually challenged by the emergence of new worship styles, new ways of communicating the gospel, new homiletical models, and new models of administration and pastoral care. So, pastoral leaders and congregations are encouraged to take seriously these focus areas.

A. Focus Areas

1. Biblical Studies

The scriptures are foundational in every aspect of the church's life. The need for biblical study does not end when one has graduated and has been ordained. Research and archeological discoveries are constantly shedding new light on old truths, and a well-informed pastoral leader is a blessing to the people of God who gather regularly for worship, fellowship, and service.

2. Spiritual Hardiness¹⁰

Spiritual hardiness involves the whole person: physical, emotional, and spiritual health. A leader, if he or she is to function well, needs to be healthy. Good health for a pastoral leader includes nurturing from the Scriptures, devotions, prayer life, and may well include working with a spiritual director. It also includes physical exercise, proper diet, adequate rest, and good stewardship of one's resources.

3. Pastoral Leadership

In order to avoid too much work in a single year, it would be wise for the pastor to plan to complete one CEU annually.

Pastoral leadership is more than administration. Excellent leadership requires self-differentiation; the desire and ability to envision the future, to develop long-range and short-range plans, to lead while walking with the congregation; the willingness to ask for and receive feedback, and the willingness to bring lay members into a leadership team. In this postmodern age, many members of the laity who have no interest in being credentialed to the "set apart" ministry are interested in having significant "ministerial" involvements in the congregation. That involvement may take the form of care ministries, visitation in homes and hospitals, preaching, planning, grief ministries, and many others.

4. Preaching and Worship

Preaching and worship planning/leadership are among the most important aspects of a pastor's life. Preaching must be grounded in Scripture and relevant to today's issues; the preacher must believe and live what he or she proclaims and be passionate about wanting others to receive Christ into their lives. Worship must focus on the awesome presence of God and Christ in the life of the gathered community. The worship planner and leader needs to be very sensitive to the needs of individuals and the "unchurched" community, seeking always to find new ways of proclaiming the good news.

10. The Creative Church Leadership (CCL) program provides excellent training in both spiritual hardiness and pastoral leadership. For information about CCL, contact Brethren Academy or the Office of Ministry. This period of study might also be greatly enhanced by working with a spiritual director. Many pastors are working with a spiritual director on a regular basis.

5. Evangelism and Church Growth

Evangelism is not a program to be developed and “sold” to a reluctant congregation. It is a commitment to Christ and a deep desire to share the good news with others. Therefore, evangelism and church growth are not separate things; they are one. A congregation will not grow unless it has an evangelist fervor; an evangelistic fervor often leads to church growth.

6. Pastoral care

Pastoral care is quite important. To use the biblical image, the pastor is a shepherd who loves, knows, and is committed to the parishioners. The good shepherd knows the unique identity of every sheep in the flock and will risk his own life for the sheep. So, pastoral care involves visiting in homes, hospitals, and nursing homes; crisis counseling; celebrating high moments in people’s lives; and weeping with those who weep. It is important to note that the pastor should not be the only one providing the caring; the pastor needs to assist in calling and equipping lay people as caregivers.

7. Special Ministry Areas

Congregations are increasingly calling pastors to serve in specialized ministries. These include, but are not limited to, children’s ministry, youth ministry, young adult ministry, singles ministry, older adult ministry, small group ministry, visitation ministry, counseling ministry, and Christian education ministry. Those who serve in specialized ministry areas may include studies related to their specific ministry description in this focus.

8. General Enrichment

Professional growth should lead the pastor into at least one area that is not directly related to pastoral ministry. The opportunities are unlimited and could include things like health care, the arts, mechanical endeavors, development of skills in a sporting interest, a science project, etc.

VI. ELECTIVES

A pastoral leader, in order to fulfill the expectations of these guidelines, is expected also to engage in a least one elective study annually. The electives may be of shorter duration; therefore, they do not involve a CEU certificate. CEUs, however, are often provided in a wide variety of electives one might select, but a CEU under an elective option does not fulfill the expectations of focus areas listed in the previous section. The electives might include course work or teaching experiences in leadership development, biblical studies, stewardship, conflict management, youth ministries, church administration, additional work in preaching and worship planning, pastoral counseling, district workshops, workcamps, caring ministry conferences, state pastors’ conferences, peace and justice, ethics, interpersonal relationships, and a variety of other topics of interest.

VII. EXCLUSIONS

The above continuing education requirements may be waived for the period of time during which an individual is engaged in post-ordination education, such as a PhD or a D.Min. degree program.

VIII. PROCESS FOR DECISION MAKING

- A. Executives should include continuing education in the pastoral placement discussions with search committees;
- B. The pastor and appropriate congregational leaders should establish long-range continuing education plans, including time away for sabbath rest;¹¹
- C. A sabbath rest program could include at least one of the eight focus areas;
- D. The pastor should provide a written report to the appropriate congregational body following each continuing education event;
- E. The pastor should provide a copy of the written report to the congregation (including copies of CEU certificates), and to the District Office for placement in the ministerial file.

11. Continuing education includes sabbaticals. This paper uses the term *sabbath rest*, rather than *sabbatical*. Sabbath rest seems more appropriate and biblical for pastoral leadership and is possible after four, five, six, or seven years of ministerial leadership to the same congregation. A separate paper on “Guidelines for Sabbath Rest” may be obtained from your District Office or from the denominational Office of Ministry.

Developed by Pastoral Compensation and Benefits Advisory Committee and the Office of Ministry in consultation with Ministry Advisory Council, Council of District Executives, and Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership

Action of the 2002 Annual Conference: Idaho/Western Montana Standing Committee member Jim Hardenbrook presented the Standing Committee recommendation that the guidelines be accepted. The delegate body adopted the Standing Committee recommendation with one amendment that was incorporated in the text.

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