



Continuing Education Policy

Adopted May 1, 2015 by Board of Ordained Ministry and Cabinet
Effective on July 1, 2015. Revised July 2017

The Great Plains Conference is committed to having clergy who are life-long learners. We believe that the life of a clergyperson is a spiritual journey of renewal and excellence in Jesus Christ. The responsibility of a clergyperson is to continue in study beyond the educational requirements for his/her clergy status (§323.1a, b; 334.2d) and to demonstrate growth in professional competence and effectiveness.

For this policy, clergy refers to all who are appointed or assigned to the local church: ordained and provisional elders and deacons; local pastors and associate members; Certified Lay Ministers and District Superintendent Assignments; to all clergy on conference staff; and to all elders and deacons in extension ministry. Retired clergy serving in appointment are also expected to meet the continuing education requirement.

This life-long learning is twofold: spiritual formation and professional development.

- **Spiritual formation** is the intentional pursuit of the nourishment and renewal of one's relationship with Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and the use of spiritual disciplines.
- **Professional development** is the intentional growth of professional identity and the skills utilized in ministry that will enhance the effectiveness and excellence of the clergyperson.

Learning can be focused in areas such as: theology, Wesleyan doctrine and polity, pastoral care, worship, sacraments, church organization and administration; evangelism and outreach; leadership; communication/technology (including computer literacy); preaching; spiritual disciplines; biblical studies; financial stewardship; self-awareness; social justice; educational skills. Over time, it is expected that continuing education be selected in many of these areas.

The program that a clergyperson chooses for continued education is to be planned in response to clearly identified continuing education needs, concerns, or interest while recognizing both the present context of ministry and a personal/professional career in licensed or ordained ministry. The plan is implemented by the clergy in consultation with the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.

The S/PPRC sees the clergyperson in action and is charged with identifying continuing education needs that are most pertinent to the church or to the skill development of the pastor and with recommending the time and funding for the continuing education (§258.2g5, 8). The committee is encouraged to work in cooperation with the pastor in determining and meeting educational goals. The committee is also encouraged to participate in conversation with the pastor about what the pastor is learning and how they can work together in order to have more effective ministry together.

The DS supervises the clergyperson and is charged with receiving reports of continuing education (§419.6, 7) and giving guidance to a clergyperson in matters affecting the effectiveness and fruitfulness in ministry (§350.1). The DS assists in determining the continuing education needs, confirms the development of a continuing education plan, and monitors the progress of the plan. The DS also verifies that the local church is providing adequate support for continuing education (§351.5).

The Board of Ordained Ministry sets policy in collaboration with the Cabinet (§§334.2d, 635.2o, p, q, r) and fosters a culture of life-long learning in the Conference.

Rationale

Life-long learning is an expectation of all clergy, as stated in the *2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*:

Throughout their careers, clergy shall engage in continuing education for ministry, professional development, and spiritual formation and growth in order to lead the church in fulfilling the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. This shall include carefully developed personal programs of study augmented periodically by involvement in organized educational and spiritual growth activities (§§350.5).

Clergy shall be asked by the district superintendent in the charge conference to report on their programs of continuing education, formation, and spiritual growth for the past year and plans for the year to come. The district superintendent shall also ask the local church to describe its provision for time and financial support of continuing education for ministry, professional development, formation and spiritual growth for the pastors, diaconal ministers, and deacons serving their primary appointment in that local church (§§350.5).

Number of Contact Hours:

A **contact hour** is defined as participation in the actual time of learning or transformation – the actual hours of lecture, instruction, group discussion or individual study. **Participation in** is defined as preparation for, attendance at, and active involvement in a continuing education learning activity.

1 CEU (continuing education unit) = 10 contact hours

Academic credits will be translated into contact hours as follows:

- one quarter hour = 10 contact hours
- one semester hour = 12 contact hours

Hours for travel, meals, sleep, fellowship and group discussion of issues outside the study topic are not considered contact hours.

Because both spiritual formation and professional development are important in developing effective clergy, continuing education should come from both categories. With that in mind, over a two-year period, continuing education should include 20 contact hours in spiritual formation and 20 contact hours in professional development.

If the event does not offer a CEU or specify the number of contact hours earned, the agenda/schedule for the event will be sufficient for verification. Clergy need to be present and participating in each session in order to count it as a contact hour. We expect that clergy have the highest integrity in confirming participation.

Full-time Clergy: 20 contact hours are required annually.

Part-time Clergy: The number of required contact hours shall be in accordance with the percentage of the appointment. For example, a half-time pastor will complete half of the full-time requirements or 10 contact hours.

Clergy in Seminary or Course of Study: No continuing education is required; however, a report of courses completed needs to be made.

Online webinar or self-directed continuing education: This can account for no more than 10 contact hours per year. For online continuing education, the sponsoring entity shall offer an official CEU or verification of successful completion.

Approved Events

There is no approved list of Professional Development and Spiritual Formation events. Each clergyperson is responsible for choosing growth-producing, transforming and formative events in collaboration with the S/PPRC and District Superintendent and for determining the appropriate number of contact hours to report for each event.

Types of events appropriate for contact hours

1. Supervised activities, such as additional degree programs, credit courses, advanced Course of Study, clinical training, BOOM-sponsored Residency retreats
2. Short-term events, such as seminars, workshops, retreats
3. Peer study groups (guidelines below)
4. Short study leaves
5. Educational travel (approved by the DS)
6. College courses to develop a skill needed in ministry, such as improvement of written or oral communication skills, family counseling, psychology

Examples of Professional Development and Spiritual Formation events:

1. Orders and Fellowship gathering
2. Mission u
3. District/Conference-sponsored seminars, workshops, retreats
4. Five-Day Academy of Spiritual Formation (15 contact hours maximum)
5. Upper Room Two-Year Academy for Spiritual Formation
6. Clinical Pastoral Education
7. Doctor of Ministry programs or other degree programs that instruct ministry
8. Silent or Guided Retreat
9. Center for Pastoral Effectiveness retreats
10. Walk to Emmaus (as a pilgrim)
11. Coaching
12. Healthy Congregations event sponsored by United Methodist Health Ministry Fund

What is not considered Professional Development or Spiritual Formation

1. List of books read for sermon preparation
2. Classes taught by the clergyperson
3. Study trips without a specific educational component
4. Mission trips (unless approved by the DS for continuing education)

5. Programs dealing with the structure or function of the church or judicatory
6. Orientation, training or meetings for district or conference boards and committees
7. Safe Gatherings or Boundary training certification
8. Walk to Emmaus team service

Self-Directed Continuing Education (no more than 10 contact hours per year)

- Spiritual Formation may be self-directed. A plan for the self-directed spiritual formation needs to be approved by the SPRC and District Superintendent in advance as stated below. The clergy person must be able to produce evidence of the work, such as:
 - ✓ A selection from a journal of what is learned
 - ✓ A schedule for the spiritual or silent retreat
 - ✓ A written reflection
- Self-directed continuing education (whether Spiritual Formation or Professional Development) must be approved in advance by the S/PPRC and DS by adhering to the following guidelines:
 - ✓ Describe personal/professional learning goals for the self-directed study.
 - ✓ Identify the books, material, persons or other sources of information that will be used to accomplish the study.
 - ✓ Define the ways of evaluation and measurement for the learning.
 - ✓ Share the learnings with the S/PPRC and DS.

Following completion of the study, the contact hour value is determined by the pastor and included on the Continuing Education Report to the SPRC and DS. This will include identifying what was learned and how learning has been integrated into ministry.

- A peer group may organize continuing education for the group. This type of learning will be approved by the Director of Clergy Excellence and the BOM Covenant Team. This could be an affinity group, colleague study group, or covenant group choosing to study a specific topic together. Requirements for approval as a Continuing Education learning event are:
 - ✓ Describe the learning goals or objective for the event or study, including the type of group, how often you will meet (if the study/learning occurs over time).
 - ✓ Identify the resources that will be used to accomplish the goals or objectives.
 - ✓ Provide the schedule for the learning event.
 - ✓ Report what was learned and how the practice of ministry has been affected on the annual Continuing Education Report form.

Funding for Continuing Education

The amount that a church has budgeted for continuing education cannot be used for seminary or Course of Study tuition per IRS regulations. This amount can be used for other professional expenses and other events such as Orders and Fellowship.

Annual Report Year

The annual report shall be based on the appointment year July 1 to June 30.