

Fostering Continuing Education for Ministers in your Presbytery:



Ideas for implementing “Seeking a Heart of Wisdom”

**Guidelines for Continuing Education
for Uniting Church Ministers**

May 2002

**A guide for Pastoral Relations Committees, Ministry
Education Committees and Presbytery Ministers**

Recognising that education for ministry is a process of lifelong learning, the Uniting Church asks its ministers to pursue a program of continuing education, in order that they might:

- deepen their devotion to Christ
- keep current with recent directions in scholarship
- enhance their passion for ministry
- enrich the practice of ministry
- relate the faith to present challenges
- overcome the isolation of ministry

At the 1997 Assembly, the Uniting Church affirmed the importance of continuing education, and asked of all its ministers that they enter into **continuing education learning agreements** with their Presbytery to foster their faith and understanding.

In November of 2000, the Assembly Standing Committee adopted “Seeking a Heart of Wisdom” as official guidelines for ministers within the Uniting Church. Following further input from across the church, the guidelines were updated in July 2002.

Fostering Ministers’ Continuing Education

Presbyteries play a crucial role in helping ministers be enthused for their ministry and ongoing education. Presbyteries are encouraged through their PRC or Min Ed committee to reflect on ministry needs in their region, and to arrange continuing education events to address these areas. Congregations, agencies, schools, and other ministry placements should be consulted in determining local needs. Presbyteries likewise will aid ministers in assessing their own needs for continuing education to help realise and renew their passion for ministry. New trends in the church and new models of ministry, including fostering lay leadership, spiritual direction, creative worship, pastoral care, and community ministry are areas that may be fruitful to address.

Every Presbytery is different, and each ministry setting has its own call and challenge. Continuing education will therefore take a different shape in each setting, and different approaches will be used within each presbytery. Creativity and responsiveness to local settings and needs are at the heart of enriching continuing education for ministry. Some models that have worked for Presbyteries include:

Models of Presbytery Involvement:

Presbytery A has a Ministry Ed committee that draws on internal resources to put together the year's Continuing Education offerings. Ministers from within the Presbytery who have special training or who have themselves done specific programs are asked to give a morning workshop for peers, who have time to reflect and respond to the material for their setting. Workshops are held every first Tuesday morning of the month, February through November.

Presbytery B has a Presbytery Minister who meets with directors of agencies and schools employing Deacons, Youth Workers, and Chaplains to advocate for their continuing education, arranging pro rata study leave for those who are part time. The Presbytery Minister works with those in non-congregational settings to ensure they have access to continuing education that addresses their particular ministry setting.

Presbytery C is a predominantly rural Presbytery. Their Ministry Education committee has encouraged several larger churches in regional cities to be the hubs of their continuing education offerings. Every year, they hold a range of programs in that church for lay and clergy continuing education. Resource people are drawn from around the Synod.

Presbytery D has a special emphasis on one of the five core areas of study each year, hosting speakers with expertise from the theological college. They hold a School of Ministry jointly with a neighbouring Presbytery each year over a 4 day period, and all ministers are strongly urged to attend.

Presbytery E is working to assign a Pastoral Supervisor to each of its ministers, with these supervisors working as coaches for individual ministers on their continuing education. The supervisors take into account the minister's gifts, any areas that need developing, and the needs of the ministry setting. Ministers then pursue their continuing education in a variety of settings.

Presbytery F is in a remote rural area. The Presbytery chair/minister works with clergy in regional groupings to plan their continuing education. Groups have signed up for distance education courses through Coolamon College, and meet by email discussion group for collegial interaction.

Specific responsibilities of Presbyteries in implementing the "Seeking a Heart of Wisdom" guidelines:

- 1) Work with ministers on their Learning Agreements;** the PRC will normally ask the minister's supervisor or mentor to help advise in

Continuing Education, planning study proposed for the present year and outlining general areas of study for the next 3-5 years . The minister and a representative from the Presbytery will sign the Learning Agreement.

- Guidance on continuing education could be incorporated into a yearly retreat for ministers, paired with self-care and other reflection on ministry practice.
- For those in Presbyteries that use accompanied self-appraisal, (as is the case in some South Australian Presbyteries), that process will inform their continuing education choices.
- Encourage ministers to allocate their study leave across the five core areas of study (as listed in “Seeking a Heart of Wisdom” and to take into account their gifts and their placement’s needs. The five areas of study are:

Spiritual growth, Biblical Studies, Theology & Church History
Practice of Ministry, Society & Culture

2) Record Keeping: The Pastoral Relations Committee (or other group to whom they delegate this responsibility) will keep a copy of the Learning Agreements for ministers on file. Yearly, they will encourage ministers to reflect on and update their learning agreement.

3) Issue a Certificate or Written Statement of Recognition when a minister has completed his/her learning agreement courses for the 3-5 year period. This may be presented at a Presbytery meeting, and prepared by the PRC, Min Ed Committee or other designated body. To recognize the ongoing nature of continuing education, Presbyteries may want to issue a certificate for “10 Years of Continuing Education,” “15 Years,” etc.

Celebrate ministers’ continuing education and make space for ministers to share their “learnings” with the Presbytery through presentations or workshops. This can help to highlight the diverse and creative ways ministers can pursue their continuing education.

3) Give support to all ministers working in settings who may need advocacy to gain time and support to carry out their continuing education studies. (Deacons, Chaplains, Youth Workers and others may need special advocacy to access their continuing education allocation.) Identify any placements that have difficulty implementing the guidelines in terms of time allotted, finance, and coverage during leave, and help to arrange the needed support where possible.

4) Work with the Synod to include in the training of Supervisors or mentors work on guiding ministers in their continuing education.

5) Work with the Minister's Congregation, Agency, or other Ministry Placement to encourage them to:

-- **Reflect with the minister** on what kinds of continuing education might be most helpful in their placement given their mission & needs

-- **Make space for the minister to inform them on their** continuing education programme and learning outcomes for ongoing ministry.

--**support** the minister's continuing education with appropriate funding according to Synod guidelines.

Developed by the MEC working group on Continuing Education, May 2002

Continuing Education Learning Agreement

between

Minister _____ and the Presbytery of _____

Areas of Study:*	Spiritual growth	Biblical studies	Theology & Church History	Skills for practical ministry	Society & Culture
Year:					
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

*Over the five years of the learning agreement, half of continuing education time is to be allocated across the spectrum of the core areas of study listed above, with the remaining continuing education time to be given to courses chosen at your discretion according to interest and appropriateness for your ministry setting. Plan in detail for the next 1-2 years; longer term, sketch areas to explore.

The Uniting Church in Australia

**Awards this Certificate of Recognition
of Lifelong Learning**

Continuing Education Learning Agreement

between Minister _____ and Presbytery _____

Date _____

Studies Completed:

signed for the Presbytery _____