

Seeking a Heart of Wisdom

(Psalm 90:12)



Guidelines for Continuing Education for Uniting Church Ministers

Approved by the ASC Nov 17 2002

Background:

The Church is the community of God's people in the world, called to witness, in word and in action, to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, the church recognizes particular people who have a calling to leadership for which they are ordained or commissioned. The types of ministries to which people are called vary, and are in response to the need for a renewed participation of all the people of God in the service of Christ. The nature of the particular calling may include the preaching of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, the building up of the fellowship of the church and its commitment to the service of Christ in the world for which Christ died. These callings have at their heart leading God's people in witnessing through word and action, and relating the gospel to the needs of people in the 21st century.

The 1997 Report of the Task Group to Review Ministerial Education recognized that in order to respond to the urgent mission needs of the Australian community, "... the UCA needs faithful leaders who can enable the church to call people to faith in Jesus Christ, to witness to God's call for a just world, and to be a community which is a sign of God's promises for the world."

It established the goals of Ministerial Education as being to prepare Ministers with the following qualities and competencies:

- * A growing faith and spirituality that will sustain their lives in Ministry
- * A conscious and critical commitment to Ministry and mission
- * Knowledge and appreciation of the Tradition of the church
- * Skills appropriate for their particular Ministry
- * Critical imagination

In order to achieve these goals, the Uniting Church is committed to life-long continuing education for all members, and in particular for all those called into leadership ministries.

An Invitation to Lifelong Learning

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** to foster their faith and understanding.

Under duties of a minister in the regulations, 2.3.10 j lists "the **enhancement** of the Minister's own **gifts for the work of ministry**," of which continuing education plays a crucial part. In the Code of Ethics 3.4a, a minister's competence includes maintaining "high standards of knowledge and skills in all the areas of Ministry relevant to their settlement/appointment. This responsibility requires that the Minister undertakes continuing education appropriate to this ministry."

Normally, ministers would discuss their continuing education program as part of their ongoing conversation with their pastoral supervisor.¹

These guidelines are intended for **Ministers of the Word, Deacons, Youth Workers, Lay Pastors, Community Ministers, Congregations, Agencies, and ministry placements, Presbyteries and Synods**, to aid in finding their role in continuing education. They have been prepared with input from across the church, and are offered as a guide to continuing education. In these guidelines the word “minister” will be used to cover Deacons, Youth Workers, Ministers of the Word, Community Ministers, and Lay Pastors.)

To Be Nourished for the Journey

Areas of Study

In setting out suggested areas of study, **flexibility and variety** are critical, given the diverse kinds and settings of ministry. Nonetheless, certain **core areas of study** are foundational for most ministries. These include:

- **spiritual growth**
- **Biblical studies**
- understanding and appreciation of **theology** and **church history**
- skills for the **practice of ministry**
- reflecting on **society** and **culture**

Allocating Your Continuing Education Time

To balance a broad understanding with particular needs and interests, ministers are asked to:

- **devote at least half** of their continuing education time over the course of the five year learning agreement **across the spectrum of the core areas** of study.

For instance, over the five year period, a minister would seek to do at least one continuing education experience (a course, short course, workshop or other event) in the area of spiritual growth, one in some aspect of Biblical studies, one in theology or church history, one in the practice of ministry, and one reflecting on the larger society and culture.

- The **remaining half** of the minister’s continuing education time would then be **allocated as desired**, taking into account their specified ministry, the minister’s areas of interest and the needs of the present ministry setting. (See **sample Learning Agreement** at the end of these guidelines).

Planning for the year ahead will be able to be done in more depth and detail than planning for the later years of the learning agreement, however, broad outlines of areas of study can be sketched for the later years as part of a long-term learning plan.

Time Commitment:

Ministers are given **14 days** of continuing education leave per year. This time is meant to include preparation and contact learning time. This is a minimum amount, with ongoing planned reading programmes and other enrichment like spiritual disciplines being integrated into a minister’s regular duties. Those in part-time ministries would have their time for continuing education on a pro-rata basis.

Types of Courses

¹ See “Pastoral Supervision: Introducing a Process of Reflection on Ministry Experience,” Uniting Church MEC, September 2001.

All areas of study may include self-directed reading courses.

Continuing education in the area of **Spiritual Growth** may be undertaken in a variety of ways:

- through training in spiritual direction (ministers may be recipients as well of spiritual direction)
- through course work in college or by distance education (in Australia or overseas programs)
- through attending spiritual retreats
- training in Aboriginal spirituality

Biblical, historical, and theological studies may be taken up in a number of ways:

- where accessible, attendance at Hall/College units,
- conferences offered centrally or regionally
- reading units offered via distance education
- independent reading, e.g., a commentary each year

Skills for the practice of ministry may be offered in:

- seminars on preaching, liturgy and worship
- specialised seminars on rural, urban, Aboriginal ministries and other culturally-specific ministries
- specialised seminars for Deacons and Youth Workers, including conferences offered outside the church which are germane to their work, e.g., community development, social analysis, drug-related issues
- leadership development events; facilitation skills seminars
- seminars on changing patterns of church and ministry
- computer skills related to ongoing ministry
- counselling skills

It should be noted that as part of their continuing education in the practice of ministry, ministers are required to seek training on the range of issues including professional conduct, ethics, prevention of sexual misconduct, and discipline/discipleship at least twice in the five-year learning agreement cycle.

In engagement with **issues of society and culture**, ministers are encouraged to consider such areas as:

- ministry and evangelism in a multicultural, post-modern, secular context
- Aboriginal and covenanting issues
- ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue
- issues in rural ministry

Issues of society and culture may be pursued through:

- courses offered by hall/college
- other course work or seminars in regional universities, TAFE,
- distance education courses, and other agencies such as CAE

Degree Studies: Where ministers opt to do a degree or diploma this would normally constitute their continuing education time for that period.

Resources for Continuing Education:

Nungalinga College: PO Box 40371
Casuarina NT 0810

Otira College: 73 Walpole Street, Kew Vic 3101
(03) 9853 2000
info@otira.vic.edu.au

NSW Centre for Ministry, School of Continuing Education:
16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta NSW 2151
(02) 9683 3655
sce@nsw.uca.org.au

Coolamon College: Uniting Church Centre
GPO Box 674
Brisbane Qld 4001
(07) 3377-9940 or free call 1 800 639 385
coolamon@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au

The theological hall or college in your Synod

NSW United Theological College
Centre for Ministry
16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta 2151
(02) 8838 8926
sarahm@nsw.uca.org.au

QLD Trinity Theological College
GPO Box 674
Brisbane 4001
(07) 3377 9950
suef@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au

SA Parkin-Wesley College
34 Lipsett Terrace
Brooklyn Park 5032
(08) 8416 8422
andrew.dutney@flinders.edu.au

VIC Theological Hall
Ormond College
Parkville 3052
(03) 9347 7199
pmatheson@vic.uca.org.au

WA Perth Theological Hall
PO Box 76
Bull Creek 6149
(08) 9360 2395
pthall@central.murdoch.edu.au

Minister's Responsibilities

- 1) In consultation with your Presbytery PRC and supervisor, **fill out a Learning Agreement** as a guide to your continuing education over the next 5 years. Be prepared to revise this plan in the light of changing opportunities and needs. (You will find a sample Learning Agreement form at the end of this document).

Plan to apportion 1/2 of the continuing education time across the range of core areas of study listed above, with the remaining 1/2 to be taken in areas of particular interest.

- 2) **Undertake the agreed course of study**, using your 14 days per year of study leave as a starting point.
- 3) **Yearly**, discuss with your church council or other committee of management your continuing education studies.
- 4) **After completing** the courses outlined, notify your Presbytery to obtain a certificate or written statement of recognition, which may then be filed with your profile when seeking a new call.

Congregation, Agency, or other Ministry Placement Responsibilities

- 1) **Discuss with the minister** and give input on what kinds of continuing education might be most helpful in their placement
- 2) **Yearly, be informed** of the minister's continuing education programme and learning outcomes for ongoing ministry.
- 3) Taking account of Synod stipend guidelines, **support** the minister's continuing education with appropriate funding.

Presbytery Responsibilities

(See booklet: "Fostering Continuing Education for Ministers in Your Presbytery" for ideas on implementation)

- (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 . Alternately, the Pastoral Relations Committee may delegate this responsibility to an appropriate body. 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.

- 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 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. A sample certificate will be found on the last page of this document. 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.

- 4) **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, those in rural settings 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.
- 5) **Work with the Synod to include in the training of Supervisors or mentors** work on guiding ministers in their continuing education.
- 6) **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

Synod Responsibilities

- 1) Through the MEB or other appropriate body, **give careful consideration to funding** for continuing education, either through annual allowances, grants, or loans. (E.g., the Synod of Victoria recently approved an allowance of \$1500 per year for each minister. This can be used for continuing education, books, computer, etc. The Synod of NSW provides grants for continuing education through a foundation within its Ministerial Education Board.)
- 2) Consider appointing a **Continuing Education Coordinator** (if one is not at present in place) who can liaise with the Theological Halls and Presbyteries, broadly encourage continuing education, and develop structures to put in place programs ministers will undertake.
- 3) **Training of Pastoral Supervisors** should include work on guiding ministers in their continuing education.
- 4) **The Synod Secretariat** will determine how often and in what form to offer seminars for ministers in the area of **professional conduct**, ethics, and the prevention of sexual misconduct. Likewise, training in multicultural awareness and Aboriginal spirituality could be coordinated at the Synod level.

- 5) Give special consideration for the needs of **newly ordained or commissioned ministers**. Studies have shown that a program of reflection on ministry issues and collegial support can help ministers in their initial transition to ministry, helping in retention and commitment. (In the Synod of Victoria, ministers in their first 3 years of settlement take part in a “Romp” program, Reflections on Ministry Program, that is in house for 2-3 days twice a year.)

Accreditation

1) Academic Study

Continuing education undertaken through tertiary studies will be accredited through normal awards, e.g., diplomas. Copies of these and transcripts are kept as part of a minister’s continuing education file.

2) Other Study

Certificates or Written Statements of completion (if issued) are kept, together with a brief description of studies undertaken.

3) Portability and Continuity

Presbyteries will accept study satisfactorily completed in a minister’s previous presbytery. Any study begun in one placement may be continued in any following placement, provided it remains appropriate continuing education for the minister in the new setting. This may be negotiated during conversations between ministers and their proposed placement.

Approved by Assembly Standing Committee – November 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 _____