



What is the purpose of Continuing Education or Study Leave for Pastors?

Presbyterians have a long history of a commitment to education—for our clergy, for our communities, and for the strengthening of our world. We strive for, in the words of St. Augustine, a faith seeking understanding. We believe that faith is more than knowledge about God and scripture that can be attained at a point in time. Rather, it is as dynamic as the Holy Spirit, moving, growing, and adapting as God reveals God's self in the world and in our lives. Our task as disciples of Christ is to engage that faith with our minds and let it transform our hearts to love and serve God's world.

Ministry, in a similar way, is a vocation that keeps adapting to the needs of the communities and culture in which we are a part. Our tradition recognizes the importance of rigorous academic preparation and spiritual development of our pastors before they can be ordained as teaching elders/ ministers of the word and sacrament. Yet even that preparation cannot cover the breadth of skills and development pastors need to thrive over a lifetime in ministry. It also does not address the changing needs of the churches we serve over time. Continuing Education is an opportunity for congregations to support their clergy in the regular practice of study and learning for their professional development, the nourishment and renewal of their souls, and for the health of the congregation they serve.

What are the different types of Continuing Education/ Study Leave for pastors?

Conferences/ Workshops: The PC(USA) and its affiliate groups, educational institutions, and other ministry organizations all offer conferences on specific topics to further pastoral development, ministry skills, and spiritual renewal. The benefits of conferences are often their engagement with experts in the field, up-to-date training, in addition to the collegial relationships developed in sessions, over meals, and during downtime. Most conferences require travel and hotel funds in addition to a registration fee to attend. While there are extensive options for great conferences for pastors, some examples are: NEXT Church, Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE), The Presbyterian Foundation's Stewardship Kaleidoscope, The Festival of Homiletics, and the Arts, Recreation, and Worship Conference at Montreat. Please contact the Presbytery Office if you would like more information or guidance on how to find conferences that connect to your area of interest or skill development focus.

Certification, Training, and Relevant Degree Pursuit: As pastors gain experience, many find areas in which they want to dive deeper into a specific field or specialize in an aspect of ministry. Several training and certificate programs exist in areas such as transitional ministry, stewardship and fundraising, pastoral care/ chaplaincy, youth ministry, and more. Sometimes, a pastor may decide they want to

pursue another degree to complement their existing seminary training in multi-year programs designed for working professionals. Most often, this is in the form of a Doctor of Ministry. Other examples of programs that might apply are a Master of Business Administration, Non-Profit Management, or Social Work. Board Certification for Chaplaincy would also apply.

Self-Directed Study/ Skill Enhancement: Some pastors thrive and learn best when they can retreat from the constant schedule demands to read, write, and engage in activities within a framework they create themselves. Whether a week at a cabin in the woods with a stack of books, or taking the space to plan a full season of sermons, or a small cohort of ministry colleagues who take a week in the summer to study a topic together, the possibilities for this type of continuing education are endless. One of our Donegal pastors even learned how to play a new instrument to lead the congregation in worship. This type of self-directed study is different from sabbaths, sabbaticals, and vacations.

Some pastors regularly schedule a week of study leave at a location in nature (often the shore, or a lake), where there are recreational options for family, who are along for the week. In this model, the pastor is accountable for a study plan of at least 4 hours per day, while the family is engaged in other activities. The pastor and family are then able to enjoy the recreation of family time away from the parish. In this model, the pastor is expected to submit a proposal as to the scope of work to be accomplished, and a report within two weeks of the conclusion of the study leave on how the work was completed.

Is Continuing Education/ Study Leave required by the Presbytery of Donegal?

Donegal Presbytery requires a minimum of \$1000 and a minimum of 2 weeks (defined as fourteen days, including 2 Sundays). Both the time and Continuing Education allowance are cumulative for three years and must be documented in the minutes by the session. This figure is not taxable to the minister and is not part of the Effective Salary for the Board of Pension. Congregations are encouraged to provide more funds where possible, as travel, conference fees, or rentals for just one event often exceed this amount. Please see the presbytery documents on specific types of pastoral calls for continuing education/ study leave requirements for pastors serving very specific contexts: less than half-time roles, student pastorates, and others.

How is study leave approved?

Study leave is approved by the Session—both the time and the plan—or another body, like the personnel committee designated by the session. Approved study leave plans should always be recorded in the presbytery minutes.

What about the Board of Pensions' CREDO?

CREDO is a program sponsored and paid for by the PC(USA) Board of Pensions that emphasizes the holistic support of pastors through spiritual, vocational, physical, emotional, and financial well-being.

This retreat is offered by invitation to teaching elders in the PC(USA) benefits plan. (The Presbytery is unable to influence who receives the invitations each year. Congregations are encouraged to support pastors who receive invitations to CREDO to participate and not count that week against the continuing education/ study leave, or vacation provided in their terms of call.)

Who do we contact for assistance with administering Study Leave for our pastor?

Feel free to contact the Presbytery of Donegal office with any questions. Your question will be routed to the Connecting our Ministry Commission (COM) and/or the presbytery staff for response