

Guidelines for Continuing Education for Teaching Elders Serving Congregations

As Pittsburgh Presbytery requires at least two weeks of Continuing Education in pastoral calls, with an amount of at least \$1,500 for such, the Presbytery provides these guidelines for pastors and Sessions.

1. The process in the local church should begin with Session's Personnel Committee, which should be an advocate for the pastor's use of the time and money provided for Continuing Education. If your church does not have such a committee, Presbytery's Commission on Ministry can help you establish one.
2. At the time of the pastor's Annual Review, an assessment should be made of the pastor's continuing education over the previous year, and funds used. (Unexpended Continuing Education funds may be carried over up to three years at the request of the teaching elder and consent of the Session.) At this time also, the committee should have conversation with the pastor about his/her plans for Continuing Education in the next year.
3. Matters to consider: The strengths of the pastor—How can a particular Continuing Education experience build on these? The need for the pastor's growth and expertise in particular areas—What's "out there" for the teaching elder to build on? What are the needs of the congregation for growth and development? What Continuing Education opportunities are available in this region? (Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, presbytery events, university offerings, etc.) What "big ticket" opportunities would the pastor thrive on? (Study abroad, an overseas short-term pastoral exchange, a Presbyterian Heritage tour, a unique mission trip, a visit to the General Assembly, etc.) This is why the building up of funds over three years is provided.
4. Plans should be made between the teaching elder and the personnel committee and the recommended action taken to the session for approval. This should be a time of celebration about the professionalism of the pastor, and the affirmation of such by the church officers.
5. The congregation should be aware of the pastor's plans, affirming him/her in such. The Presbytery office should be contacted for a list of available supply preachers, and for the recommended stipend. Please also discuss stipend expectations with the supply preacher.
6. Upon completion of the Continuing Education program/event and the pastor's return, the pastor should provide a written report of the values of the event along with an itemized list of expenditures to the Personnel Committee and the Session. The report should be part of the pastor's permanent file. The pastor should also take this opportunity to teach and preach to the congregation about his/her experience. This is another opportunity for the church to celebrate the professionalism and growth of the pastor.
7. The pastor's use of Continuing Education time and money is a trust matter between the teaching elder and the Session. Continuing Education funds can be used for continuing education only. The pastor should not be reticent about using this portion of the pastoral call; nor should the Personnel Committee and Session be reticent about recommending particular needs for growth of the pastor. Christ's call to reach out is dependent upon the growth of every disciple.
8. Church officers and lay leaders need to grow as well. There are many fine opportunities—local and inexpensive—where ruling elders and deacons and lay leaders can sharpen their skills. We highly recommend that they be encouraged to attend such events, be evaluated in their effectiveness, and be affirmed in their high commitment!