

DIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

1. Basic Assumptions and Definitions

- 1.1. Clergy have a vocation to serve God through the Church, rather than pursue a profession in order to develop a career.
- 1.2. The purpose of continuing education for the clergy flows from their vocation and its demands and stresses. A continuing education leave (CEL) is not the same as an extended vacation or an extended leave for personal or medical reasons.
- 1.3. The clergy have in the Diocese of West Texas an obligation by their letter of call to take regular annual continuing education leave.
- 1.4. Continuing education time should not be considered as a means of dealing with or avoiding conflict between clergy and congregations, nor as a substitute for a sabbatical. (cf. Diocesan Guidelines on Clergy Sabbaticals)
- 1.5. It is understood that the standard for continuing education is a total of two weeks per year including Sundays.
- 1.6. The minimum standard for clergy continuing education is a total of 25 contact hours.
- 1.7. Each active member of the clergy in the Diocese will account for his/her continuing education by submitting a letter to the Suffragan Bishop annually.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The fundamental purpose of a clergy continuing education leave is to strengthen priestly vocation.
- 2.2. Continuing education should therefore provide opportunities for reflection and renewal toward the end of being re-grounded in the will of God who calls us to His service.
- 2.3. Continuing education may have a variety of valid contents. Some pre-defined and reportable goal should exist before leave is undertaken. Spiritual retreats and opportunities for serious academic theological reflection can and often should be part of continuing education. The clergy vocation requires certain skills and clergy continuing education should enable the priest to deepen and enhance existing vocational skills and acquire new ones.

3. Eligibility

- 3.1. All clergy are eligible for annual continuing education leave, whether in full or part-time employment by the church, and without regard to the position in which they are employed, i.e., assisting and associate clergy and mission vicars are entitled to continuing education leave in the same manner as rectors of parishes and officials of the diocesan office.
- 3.2. Eligibility for clergy serving the church in situations other than full-time employment by a congregation may be adapted to the particulars of their situation; the ideal remains to seek provision for two weeks leave annually.

4. Procedure

- 4.1 In order to prevent misunderstanding, the letter of call for each cleric should address the congregation's provision for continuing education.
(See Appendix 1)
- 4.2 It is recommended that each cleric gather a committee from the congregation to assist in reflection on goals and definition of each annual continuing education leave.
- 4.3 Plans and purpose for CEL should be communicated widely to the congregation.
- 4.4 It is the duty of the wardens of the congregation to confirm that the agreements developed concerning the reporting of the CEL to the vestry and congregation are carried out.

5. Diocesan Participation

- 5.1 The Committee on Continuing Education of the Commission on Ministry will continue to provide, within the budget set aside for that purpose, matching grants to assist clergy in taking CEL. The Committee will maintain diocesan membership in at least one major national association for promoting continuing education for the clergy and extend its benefits and learning to all the clergy through an annual circular letter. The Committee will consult with the Commission on Ministry and the Executive Board annually to assess topical areas for special emphasis and encouragement for CEL studies, to be fostered through recruiting and supplemental preferential grants of aid. The Committee will vigorously promote among the clergy and wardens awareness of the charge to take seriously the need for and benefits of regular and well-planned CEL.
- 5.2 The Continuing Education Committee will research a syllabus of available classes, courses, and other resources to recommend participation by the clergy for their CEL.
- 5.3 The Department of Communications will make available through the *Church News* the means by which clergy may report the activities and benefits of their CEL experiences to the entire diocese.
- 5.4 The annual diocesan clergy conferences and Executive Board meetings will be used to allow clergy to report their CEL results.
- 5.5 The Compensation Committee of the COM will annually include a reminder of the diocesan policy for financial provision for CEL to be made by each vestry and bishop's committee in their clergy agreement. The Committee will see that a paragraph is included in the sample letter of call to be used by calling committees mandating and making financial provision for CEL.
- 5.6 The Office of the Bishop will continue to review all letters of call within the diocese to be certain that each contains a mandate and financial provision for CEL.

Appendix

A Sample Paragraph for the Letter of Call

_____ Church will provide for the *rector* a continuing education leave of two weeks annually including Sundays. The *parish* will annually provide the amount of \$_____, exclusively for provision for continuing education purposes. Conditions for clergy continuing education leave shall be as outlined in the diocesan guidelines for those purposes.