

DIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR LAY PROFESSIONALS

1. Definition

Lay Professionals are persons who choose to use their God-given gifts to fulfill needs in the Church's structures within the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas. They serve the Church in a variety of positions and possess an array of professional skills. Lay Professionals are more than persons who work for the Church showing competence and expertise; they are persons working within the gathered Church who are called to be witnesses to the ways in which God's many gifts are used to equip the whole people of God for ministry. A Lay Professional can be either full time or part time, paid or volunteer.

2. Basic Assumptions

- 2.1 The Lay Professional has a vocation to serve God through his/her work in the Church.
- 2.2 The purpose of continuing education for the Lay Professional flows from their vocation and its demands and stresses.
- 2.3 Lay Professionals need opportunities for spiritual direction and professional development.
- 2.4 A continuing education leave (CEL) is not the same as an extended vacation or an extended leave for personal or medical reasons.
- 2.5 Continuing education leave time should not be considered as a means of dealing with or avoiding conflict between the lay professional and the clergy, or between the lay professional and the congregation.
- 2.6 It is understood that the standard for Lay Professional continuing education is a total of one week per year including Sundays.
- 2.7 The recommended standard for Lay Professional continuing education is a total of twelve (12) contact hours (classroom hours).
- 2.8 It is understood that the parish will support and financially participate with the Lay Professional.

3. Purpose

- 3.1 The fundamental purpose of continuing education leave is to strengthen the vocation to serve in the church.
- 3.2 Continuing education should therefore provide opportunities for professional development and spiritual renewal toward being re-grounded in the will of God who calls us to His service.
- 3.3 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. Varied skills are required of the Lay Professional in the church. Continuing education should enable the Lay Professional to deepen and enhance existing vocational skills and acquire new ones.

4. Eligibility

- 4.1 All Lay Professionals, paid or volunteer, are eligible to apply for annual continuing education leave based on full-time or part-time status (full time status being 20 hours per week or more, part time status being less than 20 hours per week). Lay Professionals considered part time are eligible to apply for a one-time grant per year of one-half (1/2) the amount designated for full-time Lay professionals.

5. Procedure

- 5.1 The Continuing Education grant request will be submitted by the Rector or person in charge on behalf of the Lay Professional.
- 5.2 It is recommended that the Lay Professional meet with the Rector and the Senior/Bishop's Warden to discuss definition and goals of each annual continuing education leave.
- 5.3 Plans and purpose for CEL, as well as reporting and reflection, should be communicated to the congregation.

6. Diocesan Participation

- 6.1 The Committee on Continuing Education of the Commission on Ministry will continue to provide scholarship funds set aside for that purpose, matching grants to assist the Lay Professional in taking CEL. 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.
- 6.2 The Department of Communications will make available through the *Church News* the means by which Lay Professionals may report the activities and benefits of their CEL experiences to the entire diocese.