

**Administrative Action Approved by the 2004 Annual Meeting  
Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ**

Title of Proposal: **Life-long Learning for NCNC Leaders**

Proposed by: the Board of Directors of the Northern California Nevada  
Conference of the United Church of Christ

Type of proposal: Administrative Action

Background: The idea of establishing a life-long learning requirement for NCNC ministers and in-care persons was first brought to the 2002 Annual Meeting and was approved by that body for development by the Committee on Ministry Sections A and B. Even though many ministers already avail themselves of life-long learning, the Northern California Nevada Conference has not in the past had a requirement for continuing education activities. Such requirements are the norm for many other similar human-helping professions such as social work, teaching and psychotherapy. More and more UCC conferences are also adopting requirements for life-long learning.

Administrative Action requested: **The 2004 Annual Meeting of the Northern California Nevada Conference adopts a requirement for life-long learning for all ordained, commissioned, licensed or retired ministers and all in-care persons as per the policy attached entitled "The Life-Long Learning Requirement".**

Fiscal Impact: Minimal

Recommendations for Implementation: (see attached FAQ)

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**The Life-Long Learning Requirement**  
**May 5, 2004**

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing  
of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God  
-what is good, acceptable and perfect. - Romans 12: 2 (NRSV)

The ethical and professional practice of ministry is an art. And like most professional arts, the best practitioners regularly seek educational opportunities so as to always improve their practice of ministry.

The requirements proposed by this document are designed to:

- assist ministers to continually improve their practice of ministry
- prevent potential ethical infractions and/or pastoral abuse
- educate all NCNC ministers about the sometimes changing legal and ethical requirements they are expected to uphold as ministers

These requirements will commence on **January 1, 2005**. All ministers with standing on that date will then need to meet these requirements by **January 1, 2008**. Ministers who are subsequently granted standing after January 1, 2005 will begin the three years when standing is granted.

The failure of an individual with standing to complete the continuing education requirement each three years may result in a loss of standing.

**Continuing education requirement for Ordained or Commissioned Ministers  
with standing and In-care Persons or Licensed Ministers**

- 2 hours on abuse prevention/mandatory reporting standards
- 6 hours (min) must be in pastoral ethics/boundary training
- 12 hours chosen by the minister to meet their individual needs
  
- 20 total approved contact hours every three years

**Continuing education requirement for Ordained  
or Commissioned Ministers with retired status or on leave of absence**

- 2 hours on abuse prevention/mandatory reporting standards
- 6 hours must be in pastoral ethics/boundary training
- 8 total approved contact hours every three years

The Life-long learning requirement extends into retirement because many retired ministers are very actively serving in many ministry settings and need to stay connected with abuse prevention and pastoral ethics. The requirement may be waived by the Committee on Ministry, Section B, on a case-by-case basis, given individual life circumstances.

### **FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Why are we doing this now?**

The idea of establishing a life-long learning requirement for NCNC ministers and in-care persons was first brought to the 2002 Annual Meeting and was approved by that body for development by the Committee on Ministry Sections A and B. Even though many ministers already avail themselves of life-long learning, the Northern California Nevada Conference has not in the past had a requirement for continuing education activities. Such requirements are the norm for many other similar human-helping professions such as social work, teaching and psychotherapy. More and more UCC conferences are also adopting requirements for life-long learning.

#### **What is an approved contact hour?**

An approved course of study could be offered by a seminary, church agency or body, non-profit or governmental agency (such as the Department of Justice course on mandatory reporting standards). The contact hours beyond the prevention and reporting requirements and the ethics and boundary requirements could be fulfilled in multiple ways, depending on individual foci and interests.

Contact hours are literally time spent in the classroom setting with an instructor and other students and may be possible through online settings. A single week-long course during the GTU summer session or through the Alban Institute would easily meet the total three-year requirement beyond the ethics requirements and could also meet the ethics requirement if the course is an appropriate ethics course. Though such classes usually offer 3 hours of course credit, the contact hours would be from 20-30 contact hours, depending upon the class.

Workshops at the Earl Lectures, Annual Meeting, General Synod, varied professional ministry conferences and/or other ministry-related gatherings might provide 1-2 contact hours or more.

Ongoing classes that promote the professional development of the individual minister offered through other educational institutions such as community colleges and universities would also be acceptable. For example, studying a second language, psychology, organizational development or other community-based issues would most

likely be acceptable. Pre-approval of courses is available by request to Committee on Ministry Section B.

### **What is pastoral ethics/boundary training?**

The ethical practice of ministry requires an individual minister to function well in many settings. At times, especially when providing counseling and/or pastoral care, ministers are with folks at times of great vulnerability and intimacy. It is easy then for a minister to not always behave appropriately and to abuse their privilege as clergy to be present in such situations. Research has shown that ministers who attend to these situations with clear boundaries and high professional ethics will be able to avoid and prevent behavior that might be damaging or inappropriate. Pastoral ethics training may also address issues of power, conflict and the development of psychologically-healthy means for attending to a minister's personal needs before, during and after serving in various settings as a minister. These requirements for continuing education seek not only to prevent violations of the various codes of ethics for ordained, commissioned, licensed and in-care persons, but also to assist all ministers to improve their practice of ministry and personal well-being.

### **How will ministers find out if a course is approved?**

Each minister and in-care person with standing will need to obtain a letter or transcript documenting their participation and number of contact hours completed. It should include: the name of the institution offering the class or workshop, the name of the instructor and how many contact hours were completed. Committee on Ministry, Section B will review the forms and give approval to appropriate continuing education courses. If individuals have concerns about the acceptability of a given course, they may request pre-approval from Committee on Ministry, Section B.

The Northern California Nevada Conference will offer pre-approved courses each year at Asilomar and at other regular intervals to assist all ministers in meeting this requirement. The Conference will also encourage churches, associations and other ministry settings to provide continuing education funds, study leave and low or no-cost courses to assist ministers in completing these requirements.

Additionally, a list of suggested courses and potential institutions and organizations will be available from the Conference office and via <[www.ncncucc.org](http://www.ncncucc.org)>

### **What are some examples of ways to fulfill the requirement?**

**Example A** - Suzy Q is a student at Pacific School of Religion and is in-care. She graduates and is ordained in May of 2005 and begins serving as a chaplain at a local hospital. To meet the requirement, she takes a 2-hour course on abuse prevention and mandatory reporting standards. Fortunately, this class is offered by her employer, though she also considers taking this workshop during the NCNC Annual Meeting at Asilomar. After a few months on the job, Suzy realizes that a course in Spanish would be very helpful in her work. She signs up with a local community college for a class that meets for two hours each week. After ten weeks, she has completed a full 20 contact hours of continuing education. In May 2006, Suzy completes her minister's update form and attaches a letter from each class and shows that she has completed 22 hours of continuing education. In the Fall of 2006, Suzy attends a one-day workshop sponsored by Kyros that provides six contact hours on pastoral boundaries and ethics. Her 2007 update form now includes a letter from Kyros and she has satisfied the requirement until May of 2008.

**Example B** - Fred Rogers has been a local church pastor for twenty years. When the requirement took effect in January 2005, he initially thought it would be a real hassle. So he went ahead with his normal pattern of educational plans. At Annual Meeting in 2005, he took the 2-hour mandatory reporting workshop and was surprised to discover that he was also required to report potential elder abuse and that he might be able to do something about a parishioner who was receiving abusive treatment in a local nursing home. In August, Fred took a one-week class with the Alban Institute on "The Pastor as Spiritual Leader". When he asked for a letter confirming his participation, he discovered he'd already achieved a whopping 30 contact hours in just one week of study leave! In addition, the course included a full day, 7 contact hours, on ethics in spiritual direction and counseling, so he had fulfilled all parts of the requirement until January, 2008.

**Example C** - Jonathan Edwards serves two very small parishes in the Sierra Nevada. Though his compensation is low, he is able to live very simply and loves serving these small congregations. When the requirement takes effect in January 2005, he really wonders how he will be able to afford to take the required courses. Over lunch with the director of the local nursing home, he discovers that he could take the mandatory reporting class with many of their workers for a very low fee. In 2006, Jonathan's congregation sends him to Cuernavaca, Mexico on a mission trip with a group of pastors and laity. Included on the schedule are two days of courses on Benedictine spirituality. He asks for a letter confirming these contact hours and reports another 12 hours on his annual minister's update form. The next year, the Mountain Valley Association sponsors a one-day training on ethics and boundary training and Jonathan hosts the event at one of his churches. His requirements are complete until January, 2008.

**NCNC-UCC Life-Long Learning  
Requirement  
Checklist and Reporting Form**

Name
Address
City, State, Zip
Telephone (s)
Email

In what settings are you currently serving in ministry? (please list all paid and volunteer positions)
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Part I - 2 contact hours in Abuse Prevention and Mandatory Reporting Standards	
Name of course	
Location and Date	
Instructor	Number of contact hours? <input type="checkbox"/>
Letter of completion attached?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Part II - 6 contact hours in Pastoral Ethics/Boundary Training	
Name of course	
Location and Date	
Instructor	Number of contact hours? <input type="checkbox"/>
Letter of completion attached?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Part III- 12 contact hours chosen to meet individual needs

Name of course

Location and Date

Instructor

Number of contact hours?

Letter of completion attached?

Yes  No

Part III- 12 contact hours chosen to meet individual needs

Name of course

Location and Date

Instructor

Number of contact hours?

Letter of completion attached?

Yes  No

Part III- 12 contact hours chosen to meet individual needs

Name of course

Location and Date

Instructor

Number of contact hours?

Letter of completion attached?

Yes  No

Part III- 12 contact hours chosen to meet individual needs

Name of course

Location and Date

Instructor

Number of contact hours?

Letter of completion attached?

Yes  No