

Continuing Education for Seventh-day Adventist Pastors

Introduction

This document offers a **Definition of Continuing Education**, a **Biblical foundation** for continuing education and some examples of **Ellen White's counsel** regarding continuing education for Seventh-day Adventist pastors. The document highlights the need for **Planning Continuing Education**. It also presents a system for **Delivering & Developing a Personal Continuing Education Program for Seventh-day Adventist Pastors**. The document also offers **A Suggested Organizational Continuing Education Curriculum** as well as **Continuing Education and Development Phases of Seventh-day Adventist Pastors**. In the final section of the document **Eight Vital Components of a Comprehensive Continuing Education Program** are offered as well as a **Conclusion**.

A Definition of Continuing Education in the Seventh-day Adventist context:

Continuing Education is the carefully planned ongoing education of pastors, which enhances the pastor spiritually, professionally, personally, mentally and socially. Continuing Education typically follows the earning of formal academic qualifications and takes place after a pastor has entered into ministry and continues throughout the working life of the pastor. Continuing Education is **not** a series of haphazard or random experiences but reflects careful planning which enables the achievement of specific learning goals and competencies rather than mere exposures that do not have the effect of making a significant difference. It is essential that Seventh-day Adventist pastors be characterized by the perpetual development of God given talents and abilities, so that significant purposes and aims can be achieved – to the honor and glory of our Heavenly Father. 'Best Practices' is the permanent goal, rather than plateauing or an aimless wandering through life as a directionless minister.

Biblical Foundations:

- Matthew 9:35-11:1
- Acts 20:17-32
- 2 Timothy 2:14-26; 3:10-4:8
- Daniel 1:4, 19-21

Counsel of Ellen White:

“The cause of God is not so much in need of preachers as of earnest, persevering workers for the Master. God alone can measure the powers of the human mind. It was not his design that man should be content to remain in the lowlands of ignorance, but that he should secure all the advantages of an enlightened, cultivated intellect. Every man and every woman should feel that obligations are resting

upon them to reach the very height of intellectual greatness. While none should be puffed up because of the knowledge they have acquired, it is the privilege of all to enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that with every advance step they are rendered more capable of honoring and glorifying God. They may draw from an inexhaustible fountain, the Source of all wisdom and knowledge.” GW 92

“Continual progress in knowledge and virtue is God's purpose for us.” GW 274

“Ministers of age and experience should feel it their duty, as God's hired servants, to go forward, progressing every day, continually becoming more efficient in their work, and constantly gathering fresh matter to set before the people. Each effort to expound the gospel should be an improvement upon that which preceded it. Each year they should develop a deeper piety, a more tender spirit, a greater spirituality, and a more thorough knowledge of Bible truth. The greater their age and experience, the nearer should they be able to approach the hearts of the people, having a more perfect knowledge of them.” “Testimonies for the Church,” Vol. IV, page 270.

“Men of God must be diligent in study, earnest in the acquirement of knowledge, never wasting an hour. Through persevering exertion they may rise to almost any degree of eminence as Christians, as men of power and influence.” GW 278

“The cause of God needs men of intellect, men of thought, men well versed in the Scriptures, to meet the inflowing tide of opposition. We should give no sanction to arrogance, narrow-mindedness, and inconsistencies, although the garment of professed piety may be thrown over them.” GW 281

“Those who are men in the sight of God, and who are thus recorded in the books of heaven, are those who, like Daniel, cultivate every faculty in such a way as best represents the kingdom of God to a world lying in wickedness. Progress in knowledge is essential; for when employed in the cause of God, knowledge is a power for good. The world needs men of thought, men of principle, men who are constantly growing in understanding and discernment.” GW 505

Planning Continuing Education

Planning is an essential part of continuing education. In a sense, planning can mistakenly be seen as preparatory to continuing education. However, in reality planning is integral to the process of continuing education. Effective planning requires that each individual pastor discovers the degree of their effectiveness. This in itself is an educative process. As time goes on and continuing education becomes increasingly an unfolding process, the planning episodes will become so integral to it that the individual will recognize them fully as part and parcel of their continuing education.

The benefit received from this planning is based upon the assumption that the individual is planning their own continuing education program. Mark Rouch expresses it in terms of the individual being the “dean” of their own continuing education. No school, organization, or supervisor can fully determine an individual’s needs, let alone goals. Nor can someone else assume responsibility for a person’s involvement and growth.

Organizations, that is, conferences, institutions, and associations, function as providers of continuing education for people in ministry. Although individuals need to be the “deans” of their own continuing education plan, individuals will make use of the offerings that are made available by organizations. Although organizations have an interest in ensuring that their workers obtain certain continuing education exposures, they should not determine the entire continuing education experience of their workers, but should do their best to offer and allow a variety of continuing education that will meet the self-determined needs and interest of their workers and other participants.

Therefore as organizations plan continuing education offerings, they must first of all do needs assessments. This can be done by means of interviews, surveys, receiving suggestions from focus groups, analysis of trends, organizational reports, and worker evaluations. The key to effective needs assessment is the identification of the gap between what the learner knows and what the learner needs to know.

Needs assessments lead to the development of specific learning outcomes, or behavioral and performance objectives. These are concise, written statements which specify the determined skills, knowledge, and /or attitudes that the learner should be able to demonstrate following the continuing education experience. The learners should be aware of these intended learning outcomes prior to and during the activity. Such outcomes form the basis for measurement of progress, periodic feedback, and final assessment.

In addition to the foregoing principles, organizational planning of continuing education should include balance and choice of offerings.

Delivering & Developing a Personal Continuing Education Program for Seventh-day Adventist Pastors

Following, is a planning model with steps and suggestions that might be used by an individual or by a Ministerial Secretary, who acts as a consultant – assisting an individual to plan a personal continuing education program.

1. Assess Learning Needs

- a. Consider the areas of need for ministry.

These usually include such major categories as:

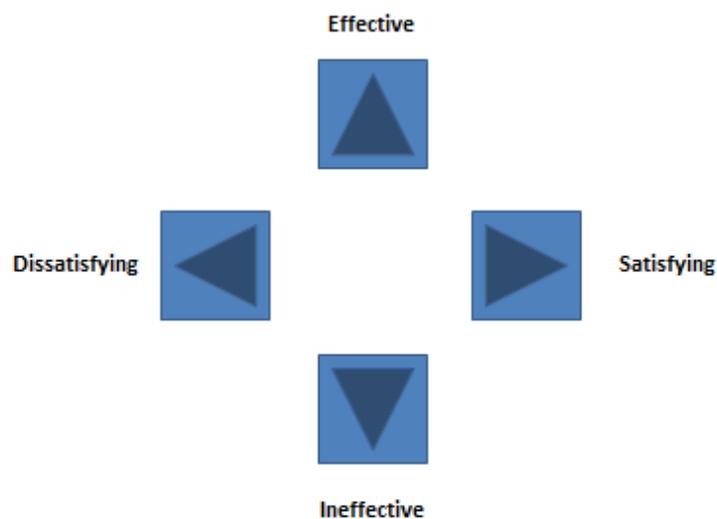
- A deeper understanding of the Word of God and related knowledge
- Professional skills in:
 - Training of the membership
 - Discipleship, mentoring & coaching
 - Leadership & administration
 - Evangelism, outreach & mission
 - Preaching & worship
 - Visitation & nurture
 - Counseling

- Teaching
- Communication
- Personal needs (which are often overlooked) such as:
 - Christian growth & spirituality
 - Sense of calling & commitment
 - Authenticity, personal integrity, maturity, self-awareness
 - Balanced living in family life, exercise, recreation, devotions, time management

These categories can be broken down into numerous specific competencies.

- b. Consider your strengths and weaknesses.

You may want to plot ministerial tasks on a chart like this one:



- c. Consider the stage of ministry in which you find yourself. Needs, goals, motivations, and interests change as the years pass. (See: Continuing Education and Development Phases of Seventh-day Adventist Pastors)
- d. Consider your hopes, dreams, and goals for the future. How do you visualize yourself in 7-10 years? What is there about your life and ministry that you want to change or develop?

2. Assess Learning Styles.

People differ in the way they learn most effectively. In continuing education you may choose the learning methods and settings that are most beneficial for you. It may be through structured courses, self-study, or interactive experiences. It may use visual or aural media. You may prefer explicit outlines and information or intuitive learning from involvement.

3. Build a Support System.

A support system for your continuing education plan is valuable for three reasons:

- Insight
- Encouragement
- Accountability

Your support system will include individuals from your family, your local congregation, and your conference.

Your spouse and family can help provide objective insights regarding your self-assessment. They need the privilege of contributing to a decision on a continuing education plan that may impact them all.

A responsible continuing education plan will be sensitive to the needs of the current congregation. Ask yourself, what ministry growth areas is this church interested in having its pastor pursue? It is useful to communicate and negotiate with church leaders. It may even be possible to cooperatively plan the growth of the laity along with the pastor.

Conference leaders, because of their experience and acquaintance with their staff members, can recommend resources and identify areas of need on the part of ministers, as well as express the expectations and interest of the conference itself. They can be an important source of encouragement, especially by means of the time and financial assistance that they might help to make available.

When an intention is shared with others, there is usually a stronger sense of accountability to follow through on the action.

4. Survey the Resources.

In other words, find out what is available in terms of academic courses, seminars, webinars, self-study courses, groups, etc. Check seminaries, church organizations, consultants, professional agencies, colleagues, etc. Visit seminary book stores and libraries to discover what cutting-edge books and resources are available. Ministerial secretaries should provide recommended reading lists for their colleagues and perhaps even offer a lending library for workers in their conference to access.

While this survey is being conducted, it would be beneficial to also record the financial cost involved with each option, as well as the time commitment involved for each option.

5. List Several Options.

In light of the results of the proceeding steps, list a variety of options for continuing education. You may want to include not only areas that you need to strengthen, but also a few areas of strength that you enjoy and wish to develop further specialization.

6. Prioritize the Options.

Choose two or three growth goals to focus upon. It is not possible to encompass too many goals at one time. Mark Rouch suggests selecting a “major” and one or two “minors.” Setting priorities will also involve consideration of what Rouch calls the “reality factors:” time, money, family issues, impending job change, program availability. Due to such limitations, adjustments and compromises may be necessary.

7. Set Your Goals & Objectives.

In other words, establish what competencies you will seek to increase, and how you will accomplish this through specific methods and programs. Setting down a clear plan helps motivate follow through. Try to plan at least two years ahead.

8. Implement Your Plan.

This is where the strength of your personal motivation and your decision to act is tested. Try to follow your timetable and make use of your support system. Honest reporting to the members of a support system will encourage accountability.

9. Evaluation.

After participating in a continuing education experience, we often neglect to evaluate whether it really accomplished its purpose. Was it worth it? What actually happened to me? We can measure these experiences against our growth goals. Evaluation naturally leads us back to the beginning assessment steps of this planning process and the shaping and extension of the plan.

A Suggested Organizational Continuing Education Curriculum

There are at least three basic focus areas of continuing education in the life of a Seventh-day Adventist pastor:

1. Personal Growth

This focus area is very much concerned with the personal identity of the Seventh-day Adventist pastor called by God and the church.

Specific examples:

- Growth in maturity, both personal & spiritual

- Christian commitment
- The pastor as a godly person
- The prayer life of the pastor
- Personal renewal and development of one's spiritual life
- Finding satisfaction and fulfillment in ministry
- What leads to continuous growth in ministry
- Managing role conflicts in ministry
- Building upon the strengths of one's marriage
- How to cope with change and conflict on the personal, interpersonal, and systemic levels
- How to cope with criticism
- Effective time management
- Constructing and protecting essential boundaries
- Living a healthy life as a pastor
- Managing the aging process as a pastor

2. Spiritual Skills for Ministry

This focus area includes the practical aspects of ministry, e.g., training of members, preaching, evangelism, teaching, stewardship, youth ministry, pastoral care, counseling, worship, church planting, nurturing, discipleship, and leadership.

Specific examples:

- Training & empowering the membership for ministry
- Developing the priesthood of all believers in the local church
- Growth in leadership
- Functioning effectively in ministry
- Preaching / teaching the Bible more effectively
- Developing effective skills in public and personal evangelism
- Improving and developing visitation (pastoral & evangelistic) skills
- Developing skills in church administration – the art of delegation
- Reaching out to ministers of other denominations
- Coping with conflicts in the local church
- Developing communication skills, particularly with youth and young adults

3. Seventh-day Adventist Heritage and Identity

This focus area includes the theological aspect. Because ministry is done in a complex and ever changing world which is frequently at odds with the Word, it is essential that the Seventh-day Adventist pastor be solidly and perpetually grounded in the knowledge of the Bible and the theological historical heritage of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

Specific examples:

- Growth in the knowledge and articulation of the Scriptures and writings of Ellen White
- Theological studies in the Old Testament, New Testament, and Ellen White
- Exploring recent trends in theological, ecclesiastical, and Biblical thought e.g.: Revival & Reformation, ordination, hermeneutics, Seventh-day Adventist identity etc.
- Sharing the gospel with different faiths & denominations such as: Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Roman Catholics, and Pentecostals etc.
- Dealing with current social issues from a Biblical perspective for e.g.: homosexuality, same sex marriage, creation, (theistic) evolution etc.
- Relating to ministers of other denominations and clergy of other faiths
- Effectively proclaiming the Adventist message to a secularized society

This curriculum can be presented in a variety of formats including seminars, workshops, self-study, retreats, conferences, and other events that can be taken for non-credit continuing education units as well as for academic credit.

Consideration needs to be given to what is already available to our constituents and thus avoid, if possible, unnecessary duplication of what is already being done.

Organizational planning will also need to give attention to:

- Qualified instruction
- Course content and teaching methodology
- Attendees who will be invited to receive the instruction
- Budgetary planning
- Predetermined requirements that will indicate satisfactory completion of the course
- Methods to use for the individual measurement of the degree of achievement of learning outcomes
- General program evaluation

Continuing Education and Development Phases of Seventh-day Adventist Pastors

There are at least four phases of Seventh-day Adventist ministry which reflect years of experience and development of skills in ministry. It is important that local conferences take these phases into account when considering a continuing education curriculum. It should also be noted that some pastors may span one or more phases that are identified below. For example, a pastor may be exceptionally gifted in certain specific areas of ministry (such as preaching) but may be unfortunately deficient in other skills of ministry (such as leadership). These phases of ministry should not be taken in isolation when planning a structured continuing education curriculum.

1. Foundational Phase.

The foundational phase is the period of ministry prior to ordination and includes internship. The essential skills of ministry are acquired and developed during this phase. Professional guidance, training, supervision, mentoring and opportunity to explore the essential skills of ministry are critical during this phase. The new minister and spouse (N.B.) are frequently adjusting to the demands of ministry and are frequently exposed to stressful and demanding situations and for these reasons levels of appropriate support need to be liberally available as well as essential continuing education. Typically the new minister searches for pastoral models among colleagues, denominational leaders and resource specialists. As well as carefully planned continuing education during this phase, it is also essential that the formative minister receives encouragement and appropriate evaluation from conference leadership and church members.

2. Consolidation Phase.

During this second phase, pastors further develop skills that create confidence in performance. Additional opportunities for service may open up with relocation to a district that has more responsibilities, demands and higher expectations. Further continuing education experiences may be necessary to meet the heavier pressures. Unfortunately, the busy schedule often precludes taking time for growth experiences, and the minister risks burnout personally and professionally. During this consolidation phase the family may suffer neglect because of the intense focus upon ministry. Carefully planned and appropriate continuing education during this phase is also essential to ensure that the minister continues to develop and grow as an effective minister.

3. Mid-life Phase.

In this third phase, ministers may reach a plateau where routines are set and life in ministry is familiar. During this phase ministers sometimes run dry spiritually. During the previous years of intense skill building, the personal spiritual life may have been neglected and ministry now looks dull and drab. Goals can now seem meaningless, ministry can become mechanical and depression can set in. This same period may coincide with a mid-life crisis when home responsibilities are heavy financially and relationally. Church demands continue. Joy for life and ministry may ebb. Ministers may feel locked into a particular type of ministry. They may see colleagues serving in seemingly more dramatic situations, and they could feel that the church (and life) has bypassed them.

Effectively planned continuing education during this phase, taking into account the challenges of this period, can offer the minister a new lease on life and ministry. These same years can be rich and fulfilling as a positive and effective pastor finds new ways to grow and uses valuable experience as an asset to grow.

Frequently during this period, the minister may be given the responsibility of training an intern. Conference leadership needs to ensure that interns are entrusted to those pastors who are finding these years to be rich and rewarding rather than to those who have plateaued in their growth and see no need of continuing education.

4. Pre-retirement & Retirement Phase.

A fourth phase of ministry looks toward retirement and includes retirement. Ministry continues. Energy may be waning but experience can more than compensate for the loss of energy. The minister can assume a role as mentor, helping others to grow and develop in ministry skills and attitudes. The pastor's focus can turn to "being" instead of "doing." This can be a rewarding spiritual time with emphasis on God at work in people's lives. Or it can be a time of severe stress if the minister fights the aging process, tries to maintain earlier levels of job performance, and mopes about the impending retirement years. The retirement period itself continues to offer challenges for ministry and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Carefully selected pastors in this phase can be ideal providers of continuing education. Those with years of fruitful and effective service are thoroughly qualified for this exceptionally important role of inspiring and educating their less experienced colleagues.

Eight Vital Components of a Comprehensive Continuing Education Program

1. Motivation.

The best programs in the world go unused unless the individual minister is motivated to learn and grow. Without motivation, a pastor will simply endure official conferences and instruction meetings at workers meetings – avoiding formal learning activities, no matter how high the quality.

2. Need Identification.

As discussed above, identifying an area (or areas) of need in the skills of a pastor is of vital importance. Each pastor bears a responsibility to make their needs known to their conference ministerial secretary and ministerial secretaries have the responsibility of providing services that will appropriately address those identified needs. However it should also be observed that continuing education is about strengthening areas of weakness as well as growing stronger in areas where the pastor is already strong.

3. Support System.

The importance of building a support system has already been noted above. The support of colleagues, laity and family is a major ingredient in a comprehensive continuing education program.

4. Resources.

The role of the ministerial secretary is to assist pastors in finding resources. This may be achieved by locating suitable books, recommending seminars, workshops and other appropriate learning opportunities, which may include referring the pastor to a colleague who is highly skilled in the applicable area(s). However this is not to say that the pastor has no role in locating helpful resources, rather, the pastor should take the initiative in finding resources for their own personal learning plan.

5. Coordination.

Any effective continuing education program calls for good coordination between the pastor and those who support the pastor. The local conference should consider a variety of individual needs and interests. The local conference has a role in planning growth activities so that events do not conflict with each other. It would also be helpful if conferences, unions and perhaps divisions produced a list of the various continuing education opportunities available to local pastors in a given year, within their fields.

6. Recognition.

It is important that pastors receive recognition for their learning or continuing education efforts. While continuing education may not involve the conferring of higher academic degrees, there is value in some attestation of work completed in a satisfactory manner. The standard criterion in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the Continuing Education Unit (CEU). With a CEU system in place, the pastor is in a position to accumulate units towards a specialization. Specialization will also generate recognition in due course as well.

7. Financing.

The benefits of a pastor receiving continuing education are shared by the pastor and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Therefore it stands to reason that the costs involved in acquiring these benefits be shared by those who benefit. In the Seventh-day Adventist context this includes the local church (or district) where the pastor is located, the conference or entity that employs the pastor as well as the pastor. This is a valuable and worthwhile investment for all parties concerned. It is important that there be shared financial responsibility because it is then more likely that the learning activity will be taken seriously by all those who have financially invested in it.

8. Expectations.

The pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church occupies the position and performs a very important role. Almost all other professionals (physicians, dentists, teachers, airline pilots etc.) are required to continually improve their skills and education so that they can continue to practice in their professions. The General Conference Ministerial Association recommends that each pastor completes a minimum of 2 CEUs each year – which is the equivalent of 20 hours of continuing education per year. In some world fields of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, completion of this minimum expectation is required to maintain continued employment as a local church pastor. In other fields, only pastors who have faithfully earned CEUs, are considered by nominating committees for roles in conference leadership and departments.

Conclusion

It is imperative that Seventh-day Adventist pastors continue to grow, develop and mature, throughout their entire ministries, reaching the highest attainable level of excellence – to the honor and glory of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. By actively engaging in continuing education, a pastor is staying faithful to their calling, stretching for skills, adjusting to career phases and addressing the demands of ministry.

Continuing education is an exciting adventure – an adventure of ongoing growth and increasingly effective ministry; an adventure continuing alongside family, church members, colleagues in ministry and most importantly – Jesus! It's an adventure offering new possibilities, new discoveries, new skills, new outlooks, new partnerships, new vision, new service, and new hope.