

Clinical Pastoral Education

Committee on Ministry: Preparation

St. Louis Association of the Missouri Mid-South Conference

United Church of Christ

(based on information from the ACPE website)

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is interfaith professional education for ministry. It brings theological students and ministers of all faiths (pastors, priests, rabbis, imams and others) into supervised encounters. Out of an intense involvement with persons in need, and the feedback from peers and teachers, students develop new awareness of themselves as persons and of the needs of those to whom they minister. From theological reflection on specific human situations, they gain a new understanding of ministry. Within the interdisciplinary team process of helping others, they develop skills in interpersonal and interprofessional relationships. This is important work during the Member in Discernment (MID) process.

The essential elements of CPE include: *the actual practice of ministry to others; detailed reporting and evaluation of that practice; pastoral supervision; a process conception of learning; a small group of peers in a common learning experience; a specific time period; an individual contract for learning consistent with the objectives of CPE. The CPE program must be conducted under the auspices of an Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) certified supervisor attached to an ACPE-accredited CPE center.*

The following might be included in the individual learning contract:

Pastoral Reflection - reflection on one's self as person and pastor in relationship to persons in crisis, the supervisor, and peer group members, as well as the curriculum and institutional setting

Pastoral Formation - focus on personal and pastoral identity issues in learning and ministry

Pastoral Competence - deepening and unfolding of competence in pastoral function, pastoral skills and knowledge of theology and the behavioral sciences

Some ACPE-accredited centers also offer **Pastoral Specialization**, focusing on the student's desire to become competent and knowledgeable in a particular area of ministry, e.g. oncology, urban ministry, parish ministry, hospice ministry, etc.

ACPE-certified CPE serves as a part of one's preparation for parish ministry, chaplaincy, lay ministry, teaching and counseling. A student's learning contract may be focused toward integration of theological, psychological and pastoral insights into pastoral functioning for parish work. Or the contract may be designed with a career goal of chaplaincy or pastoral counseling.

ACPE-certified CPE units may be either full-time or part-time. Either schedule will include an equivalent number of ministry and education hours. Some extended ACPE-certified CPE units meet one day per week for structured educational sessions, and ministry is performed at other times. A more common day, however, is one in which time is provided for ministry and for several education events. Since the heart of ACPE-certified CPE is ministering and learning from the experience, a day's schedule frequently includes a clinical seminar in which a student presents a pastoral encounter to other students and the supervisor for discussion and feedback. Other typical sessions are didactic seminars in which discussion follows a lecture; discussion of a book or article; exploration of theological concerns; peer group meetings or interpersonal group

sessions where mutual sharing, caring, support and relationship concerns are explored; and worship or sharing occasions which provide opportunity for spiritual nurture. Field trips, workshops and clinical observations may be periodically included.

Evaluation experiences with other students and the supervisor are also part of an ACPE-accredited CPE program and may be scheduled at the end of a unit to sum up the experience, midway to assess the learning objectives and at other times, such as with the other care providers in the ministry area. A participant will discover that an ACPE-accredited CPE schedule asks for active investment but also provides time for sharing, reflection, preparation and relaxation.

If one has never participated in a dynamic, interpersonal, process educational experience, the person may be concerned about what it will be like. A core value of CPE is that students and supervisor share with one another in such a way that all are cared for, supported and challenged without being belittled. Furthermore, since an individual best knows their own limits, everyone will need to respect other's boundaries and work to negotiate appropriate learning relationships. Developing a learning environment that is supportive, stimulating and safe will make the risks of interpersonal learning and growth worth taking.

[Anyone embarking on a CPE experience may want to look into the CPE scholarship fund from David Spooner, a member of St. John UCC, Mehlville.]