

Pastoral Leadership Development Program (PLD)

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The Pastoral Leadership Development program was started in 2004 as an alternative educational track for UCC members in the Southern Conference who are called to ordained ministry but cannot, for various reasons, attend seminary. It was designed as a three-year program, meeting 15 weekends during the academic year in addition to a week of classes at Lancaster Seminary's Summer Academy. Since 2004, four cohorts of students, 19 people in all, have graduated from the program. All of them are currently serving faithfully in some capacity in churches in the Southern Conference. As of October 1, 2011, thirteen of the graduates have been ordained. Of those, 6 are solo pastors, 6 are associate pastors, and 1 is a chaplain. Two more PLD grads from ENCA will be ordained this month, and WNCA will vote to affirm Church and Ministry's recommendation on another candidate today. We are very proud and pleased about that large percentage of ordinations for our graduates...mostly because these people have had a sense of being called to ordained ministry for a long time, and we have been able to provide them a way to get the educational preparation they needed to fulfill that call in the UCC. That has been the singular goal of the PLD program from its inception.

Over the past year we have made some changes to the PLD program and curriculum which we began implementing with the cohort of students who entered the program this fall. The most obvious change is that the ordination track will now be four years instead of three. We made that change for a number of reasons. One is that we will now include as part of each candidate's preparation a 4 month internship or time of supervised ministry in the final year of preparation. This will allow our participants a chance to do some "hands on" ministry while also having a chance to learn and reflect with an experienced minister. For some people, particularly those in the Black church context, this is already part of the preparation for ordination, but for others this is will be new. We want to make it a standard opportunity for everyone in PLD who is seeking ordination.

A second reason for making this change is that we want the first year of the curriculum to be about more than academics. It will also serve as a year for participants to focus on discerning what God is calling them to do. The national church, through its Parish Life and Leadership Ministry, has now replaced the "In Care" process with "The Covenant of Discernment and Formation". As they note in their literature, "The primary question guiding discernment is, 'To what ministry is this person called?' and then, 'Does this ministry require authorization? If so, what form?'" We are using this first and foundational year of the PLD curriculum to help members answer those primary questions.

Another reason for expanding to a four year program is that the first year is now open to everyone in the SOC who would like to participate in furthering their theological education, whether they feel called to ordained ministry or simply want to learn more to be able to serve in their local setting better equipped with more knowledge and

confidence. This primary year of curriculum will be offered annually if there are enough participants to make it financially and educationally viable. We are calling this first year of coursework “Foundations and Formation for Ministry;” it includes 5 courses, each meeting for 3 Saturdays, for a total of 15 Saturdays during the academic year. It will culminate with a week of study at Lancaster Seminary in the summer. Everyone who successfully completes all 5 courses plus the week long summer course will receive a Certificate of Preparation for Advanced Lay Leadership; participants who feel called to ordained ministry will be qualified to apply for the final 3 years of the program.

We began this new curriculum on September 10, 2011 with seven students. Four are from WNCA: Anthony DeNuccio (Corinth Reformed Church, Hickory), Rex Evans (Heidelberg UCC, Thomasville), Dale Harrison (Brick UCC, Whitsett), Lisa Hooper (Parkway UCC, Winston-Salem),

Participants in the “old” curriculum from WNCA who are starting their second year of PLD are: Terri Barringer (Bethel UCC, Mt. Pleasant), Alex Nance (Hedrick’s Grove, Lexington) and Jeff McCarn (Second Reformed UCC, Lexington). Lance Smith (Congregational UCC, Tryon) is beginning his third and final year. All of these folks, along with 4 participants from ENCA, will participate in a two week visit with our partner church in Germany, the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland, in April 2012. We anticipate another happy celebration honoring four graduates next summer.