

Pastoral excellence is developed and nurtured in community. Yet it plays out uniquely in each pastor's life.

It is a lifelong journey, a most worthy pursuit that works best when pastors—and congregations—see its value.

*Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* helps pastors develop character, knowledge, and skills. They become strong servant leaders who adapt and grow with their congregations.

By November 2007, more than half of CRC pastors had joined a peer learning group and 49% of CRC congregations had a pastor in a peer learning group. Many of these pastors say they now have a healthier life/work balance. They draw on a broader scope of books and study materials and have learned how to write sermons in community.



## HOW CAN CONGREGATIONS RECOGNIZE PASTORAL EXCELLENCE?

### HOW CAN PASTORS SUSTAIN EFFECTIVE MINISTRY?

#### Pastoral excellence is marked by:

- a deep, authentic relationship with Jesus Christ, marked by prayer, godliness, and fruits of the Spirit
- a strong vision of the church's mission
- a thorough grasp of the Christian faith and an ability to communicate it clearly
- a healthy pastoral identity
- an understanding of leadership in a congregational system
- a commitment to lifelong learning

#### Pastors can flourish in ministry if they:

- set boundaries to make time for fun and family
- find a safe place to share weaknesses and needs
- seek and use opportunities for continuing education
- make time for sabbaticals that refresh and renew them
- build relationships outside the congregation
- receive appreciation, encouragement, and support from their congregation, council, spouse, peers, and the CRC as a whole

Pastors can't develop these traits all on their own. It takes a denomination-wide effort to develop a culture that sustains pastoral excellence.

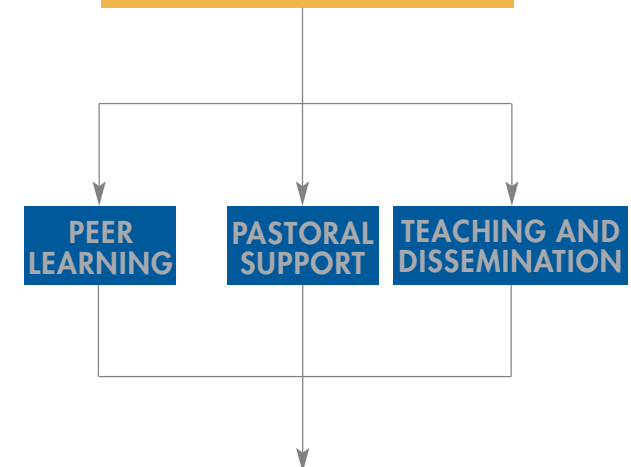
The first five years of *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* showed how important it is for pastors to be in tune with their congregations and councils.

Pastors' spouses also play a key role in the health of pastors and their excellence in ministry. Supporting and encouraging spouses strengthens pastoral marriages.

Council members work with pastors and agencies to develop practices that foster spiritually mature, imaginative congregational leadership. That's why council members also have a stake in sustaining pastoral excellence.



### PROMOTING AN UNDERSTANDING OF PASTORAL EXCELLENCE



### RESULTS SPREAD THROUGH CRC

- Pastors and churches alike see learning-in-community as normal and expected.
- Pastors and congregations recognize that healthy pastoral identity is essential.
- Pastoral excellence is not only expected, it is increasing practised everywhere.
- For married pastors, healthier marriages lead to healthier pastorates.

*Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* strengthens and sustains pastors in ministry through peer learning, pastoral support, and teaching and dissemination.

## PEER LEARNING

How can pastors stay close to God when they're so busy with church? One way is to pray, learn, and grow in groups with other pastors.

Pastors who've joined peer groups say it's vital for their vocational, spiritual, and personal lives. They now have plans for lifelong learning. Their councils and colleagues support and hold them accountable.

*Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* accepts proposals to fund group activity and learning in clusters of five to eight pastors. Groups meet for a year and often attend a continuing education event together.

Not sure how to begin? We'll help you choose peer learning topics and write proposals.

Proposals submitted by new peer learning groups will be more generously funded, while renewal grants will usually require in-kind funds.

Geographically isolated pastors will get electronic learning opportunities.

## PASTORAL SUPPORT

Married pastors and their spouses have a unique relationship with their congregations and each other. Whether or not they engage as active partners, pastors' spouses deeply affect their partners' health and morale.

For pastors' spouses, the *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* website will add resources, a blog, and online advice from experienced pastors' spouses.

Two biennial conferences will encourage spouses. A network of local spouses will be available to welcome and enfold spouses when they move into a new geographic area.

Spouses may submit proposals for peer groups of four to eight members. They'll meet four to six times per year and may have an overnight retreat.

Four learning events will provide pastor couples with refreshment, renewal, and learning.

## TEACHING AND DISSEMINATION

When 2012 ends, we anticipate that 90% of CRC pastors will be familiar with the concept of pastoral excellence and most will have read about or participated in the project.

Up to 100 pastors will complete a continuing education course from Calvin Theological Seminary, "The Theology and Practice of Pastoral Ministry" (or its equivalent).

Annual informational dinners will introduce *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* to pastors entering the CRC.

Every CRC council and congregation will have access to:

- the *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* website
- two significant training tools based on the outcome of selected peer learning groups
- findings, case studies, and best practices as reported in magazines, online, and at classis and regional meetings

**A NOTE TO CHURCH COUNCILS: *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* funds are available to help your pastors, pastors' spouses, and congregations. Encourage them to get involved!**

## AGENCIES INVOLVED IN THE SUSTAINING PASTORAL EXCELLENCE PROJECT ARE:

- Calvin Theological Seminary
- Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
- Christian Reformed Home Missions
- Christian Reformed Pastor-Church Relations
- CRCNA Denominational Office
- Leadership Institute of the CRC
- Sustaining Congregational Excellence

**Pastors, pastors' spouses, and congregations in the United States and Canada are eligible for assistance.**

For more information, contact Project Administrator Lis Van Harten phone 877-279-9994 x0805 (toll-free) or email [pastoralexcellence@crcna.org](mailto:pastoralexcellence@crcna.org).

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S U S T A I N I N G  
**Pastoral**  
E X C E L L E N C E

*Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* began in 2003 to support and strengthen Christian Reformed pastors—so they can help build vital congregations. God blessed that project in many ways. Now we're building on those blessings to reach even more pastors.

Flourishing  
pastors.  
Healthy  
congregations.  
We need both.

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