

VESTRY PAPERS



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CREDO: A Foundation for Ministry

by Lindsay Hardin Freeman

How can the church best support clergy wellness? And why does it matter? For Bill Craddock, director of CREDO, it's all about building a foundation that will strengthen the lives and vocations of clergy — and thus enhance the ministry of the whole church as well.

"Clergy wellness affects every fiber of the church, every person in the pew," he says.

"When the rector of the parish is anchored in Christ and experiencing a healthy, balanced lifestyle, that vitality cannot help but carry over to the rest of God's people."

Since its beginning in 1994, CREDO — a benefit of the Church Pension Group — has offered almost 100 eight-day conferences for clergy, concentrating on four aspects of

wellness — spiritual, vocational, health and financial. In that time, some 2300 bishops, priests and deacons have attended.

"It's an opportunity for clergy to stop and take stock of who they are and who God is calling them to become," says Memphis-based Craddock. "CREDO provides a space for them to reflect on their lives and ministry and build on their passion and commitment to serve God through Christ."

According to Craddock, a broad range of subjects come under consideration,

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CREDO

Clergy wellness, essential to the health of the whole church, can and should take many forms. One of the more dynamic resources for clergy wellness is CREDO, a benefit of the Church Pension Group. What has CREDO learned that can help vestries? What can vestries do to help clergy get the most out of CREDO? Read on...

Reclaiming Vocational Passion

by Norm Shaw

Defining one's vocational health can be tricky, and it is certainly not as clear cut as determining physical health. Are decisions about staying in a call or leaving healthy or unhealthy? The obvious answer is, it depends. That seems to be the case in most instances with vocational well-being.

What we do know is this: CREDO participants report greater clarity about their vocation and their ability to plan ahead.

Participants also return with a tangible outcome of the Clergy Vocational Profile (CVP). The CVP is a 360 degree survey completed by the CREDO participant prior to the conference. The participant also invites up to ten people who know his or her work to complete the survey. The results are

compiled so that the participant can match his or her perceptions with those of the profilers.

Discerning the future

One of the themes of CREDO is "How am I answering God's call?" and participants spend time discerning their future. According to analysis of behavioral changes, one in five will decide to seek a new call, or at least initiate the job search process. Other behavioral changes include continuing education, a retreat and seeking support groups.

Some of these issues could lead to direct changes in work conditions and will need to be discussed and agreed upon by the rector,

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Clergy Wellness*



A Foundation for Ministry

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including discussion of ongoing identity issues around vocation and call. "With each life change," he says, "each new congregation, each career advancement or setback, the question of 'Who am I?' and 'Who is God calling me to be?' must be addressed. At CREDO these questions are explored individually and in community."

"Vestries might expect their priest to return more excited about the Episcopal Church in general..."

A hectic life

For the Rev. Dr. Robert Hansel, CREDO conference leader and faculty member, the program helps to support clergy in what can be a hectic and even frenetic life. "Clergy are notorious for 'over-functioning,'" he says. "Being conscientious about visiting hospitals and shut-ins, preparing sermons, planning worship, attending meetings, developing programs, and being available for counseling is great, but those persistent pastoral

chores can wind up absolutely draining any spiritual renewal from the clergy."

As the participants examine four major life areas, they are aided by faculty members drawn from a wide scope of the church's life. Some 105 faculty from forty-six dioceses are involved.

More committed to ministry

Benefits of the program are not just limited to clergy, says the Rev. Canon Scott Hayashi, canon to the ordinary from the Diocese of Chicago and CREDO conference leader.

"Vestries might expect their priest to return more excited about the Episcopal Church in general and committed more greatly to their ministry," he says, and might well want to talk about what he or she learned, "especially about the importance of taking time for their own spiritual development."

The Reverend Lindsay Hardin Freeman is the editor of Vestry Papers and a parish priest.

The Episcopal Church Foundation is a long-time partner with CREDO in ministry development and welcomes this opportunity to introduce vestries to the work of CREDO. To learn more about CREDO and opportunities for clergy, call 901-527-6350 or visit www.episcopalcredo.org

Notes and News about CREDO

- ✚ By the end of 2005, more than 2300 priests, bishops and deacons will have attended a CREDO conference.
- ✚ CREDO will conduct its 100th conference in the spring of 2006.
- ✚ CREDO now has 105 faculty members, representing forty-six dioceses.
- ✚ Clergy selected to participate in CREDO are chosen randomly within age categories from the Church Pension Group's database.
- ✚ Invitations are issued annually each spring, and enrollment is on a first-come, first-served basis.
- ✚ The cost for participation in an eight-day CREDO conference is \$500.
- ✚ CREDO has used more than fifteen Episcopal conference centers around the country to host conferences.
- ✚ CREDO Institute Inc., which provides the CREDO benefit for the Church Pension Group, is located in Memphis, Tennessee, and has ten full-time employees.

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PUTTING FINANCES IN ORDER

A Key Ingredient to Clergy Health

As part of its evaluation process, CREDO has done extensive research into clergy attitudes toward change. One measure is self-efficacy, a person's estimate or judgment of his or her own ability to succeed in reaching a specific goal, e.g., quitting smoking or losing weight.

Self-efficacy in each of the four component areas is assessed prior to the conference, and has been assessed in more than 600 participants immediately after the conference, at six months and one year later. There is a statistical increase in self-efficacy in all four components at six months and one year, but the greatest leap is in the financial component.

Analysis of post-conference behavior shows that positive steps clergy make once they return home focus most on savings, reducing debt and preparing for retirement. Financial planning, including using a professional planner and estate planner, also rank highly in behavioral change.

Lesslie Keller, who served as a church treasurer for four years and as a vestry member for three years, is now a CREDO financial faculty member and chief financial officer of the Diocese of Chicago. She says what she has seen mirrors the data, and her advice is succinct.

"I would tell a vestry that at CREDO their priest should know about 403(b)s and urge them, if they haven't already, to support the establishment of a tax-deferred annuity," she said. "The priest also needs to develop a better understanding of the tax benefits of a housing allowance which requires vestry resolution."

According to analysis of pre-conference financial surveys, clergy are most unprepared financially when it comes to long-range planning. Fifty-two percent of those surveyed do not have an updated financial plan, and fifty-one percent have not analyzed their cash flow. On the plus side, the majority are putting some money away in a savings account (seventy percent) and have a rainy-day fund (seventy-nine percent).

Keller says offering help in these areas can be a great benefit. Though, her advice to vestries goes beyond financial.

"I would also tell vestries that clergy have been urged to have 'healthier' life styles which includes taking time away for relaxation and refreshment and urge them to respect that, especially the weekly day(s) off," she said.



An early vestry/clergy relationship, perhaps?

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Summon before me seventy of the leaders of Israel...I will take some of the Spirit that is upon you, and I will put the Spirit upon them also. They will bear the burden of the people along with you, so you will not have to carry it alone."

Numbers 11:16-17

Protect your clergy from burn-out:

Clergy need the support of their vestries if they are to function well. That support takes many forms (see page 4), but according to the Rev. Dr. Robert Hansel, CREDO conference leader, the following points are essential:

- ✦ Schedule study/reading time, periodic retreats, and a sabbatical every five to seven years through the written Letter of Agreement.
- ✦ Remember that after the morning services, Sundays need to be genuine "sabbaths" for the ordained as well as the laity.
- ✦ Educating the congregation to be sensitive to intentionally protected times (except in genuine emergencies) is a key responsibility of every congregation's leadership.
- ✦ Insist on a weekly twenty-four hour day off.

Otherwise, clergy will not be maximally effective because of being "used up" without being sufficiently renewed by the Source from Whom any authentic Ministry flows.

VESTRIES, TAKE NOTE

How to Support Your Clergy...

by Gay C. Jennings

- ✚ Encourage your priest to go on a retreat this year so that he or she might be spiritually uplifted and refreshed. Jesus went to quiet places to pray, and so should your clergy.
- ✚ Insist that your priest take time for continuing education — it will renew your priest and benefit the parish. Two weeks paid leave for continuing education along with an allowance of \$750 should be the minimum offered by the parish.
- ✚ Encourage your priest to take the full amount of his or her vacation time for renewal and relaxation. (Not all clergy do.)
- ✚ Have a surprise party for your priest thanking him or her for faithful ministry to the parish. The party could take place on the occasion of his or her ordination anniversary.
- ✚ Review the compensation and benefits paid to your priest. Is the package comparable to other clergy in similar size parishes? Is a cost-of-living increase offered every year? Have there been merit increases when appropriate? Is health and dental insurance provided for the priest and his or her family?
- ✚ Remember the birthday of your priest. Have a cake at coffee hour.
- ✚ Remember the anniversary of your priest if married. Give the couple a gift certificate for dinner at a nice restaurant to help them celebrate. If you really want to surprise them, arrange for a weekend get-away, get a babysitter for the kids, and hire a supply priest for that Sunday.
- ✚ Encourage your priest to take a sabbatical once eligible. If there are no provisions in the Letter of Agreement for a sabbatical, amend the agreement. Begin to plan now for the related costs (full compensation and benefits for the priest, supply clergy, sabbatical allowance for a trip or educational program that is part of the sabbatical) by starting a sabbatical fund as part of the annual budget.
- ✚ If your priest lives in a rectory, make sure it is an attractive place to live. Complete needed repairs, update painting and carpeting if necessary, check the landscaping, consider new major appliances if old (the appliances, not the priest). And while you're at it, check his or her church office as well.
- ✚ If your priest is not taking a regular day off, call him or her on it. Everyone needs time to recharge their batteries.
- ✚ If your parish has other priests and/or deacons (paid or volunteer), don't forget to honor and celebrate their presence among you.

Associate Director of CREDO, the Reverend Gay C. Jennings is former canon to the ordinary for the Diocese of Ohio.



One of our Midwestern clergy friends who now owns a house says that the best gift a vestry gave him were payments into a housing equity fund when he lived in the parish rectory. That enabled him to buy a house before retirement, when that task becomes almost impossible.

Vocational Passion

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wardens and vestry. The Rev. Susan Klein of St. Aidan's in the Diocese of Los Angeles provides a good example:

"I decided at CREDO that I needed more time to study and write, and I went to the next vestry meeting and said, 'I need a study day!' They were very fine with that, and in fact wondered why I had never asked for that before."

More of a steady presence

The Rev. Stephen Holmgren, CREDO faculty member, believes that through the program,

clergy are given the chance to reclaim a part of their vocation that may have lapsed. As a result, he says, clergy may well return with a "greater sense of self-sufficiency and inner self-direction, and may more readily be a steady presence in the midst of the ongoing life of the parish."

Norm Shaw is the director of communications and information technology for CREDO.

*Next Issue:
Disaster Recovery*

Ed's note: What can vestries expect when their priest attends a CREDO conference? We asked Dr. Salem Saloom, former senior warden at St. Stephen's Church in Brewton, Alabama, and a current CREDO health faculty member. He is also a general surgeon with the Surgical Associates of South Alabama.

Expect Change and Growth

Question: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about a priest attending a CREDO conference? What should a vestry know?

Answer: It's key that the vestry know what CREDO is, and how they can support their priest before, during, and after his or her CREDO experience. A great deal that comes out of CREDO for the priest is experiential. Sometimes, having gone through such a powerful encounter, one has difficulty in articulating that experience, for it really is partly a time of renewal.

In order for the priest to receive the support they deserve, it would be a good idea for the priest to be up front with the vestry as to their idea or explanation of CREDO. Vestries also need to be aware of how much preparatory work goes into the experience with the pre-conference work that is done by the participant.

Q: What can a parish do to help?

A: How wonderful it would be for the parish to organize a prayer vigil for the priest during a portion or all of the time he or she is away attending CREDO! This would really be an effective way of having the entire parish involved and supportive.

Q: What advice would you give the returning priest for his or her vestry?

A: That they hear some of the things their priest has decided to work on and potentially change to become better balanced, as far as health and wellness and spiritual goals. If vocational goals are positive between the congregation and the priest, that could be articulated as well. As far as finances go, that is something that should not be overly discussed, it is a call by the priest as to how much he or she should

share. We have to be sensitive since there is still a corporate mind set of many laity that "they own their priest" and many want to "have a priest for as little money output as possible." It really is a shame people think that way, but I have seen it.

This is a great teaching opportunity for the priest to reemphasize what a call is about. He or she is not just hired but is called by the Holy Spirit and that call needs to be honored by the laity as well as the priest. Laity need to understand a vocation is more than just a career or job and that we are called to live and work together for the Mission that Christ has set before us.

Q: Any other thoughts about reentry for the CREDO participant and the vestry?

A: The vestry needs to understand and expect from their priest on his/her return that the priest will be changed in some way. That change may or may not be noticed on immediate return and is an ongoing process of growth.

Vestries need to be supportive. With prayer and tenderness, change will be positive for the good of not only the priest and his/her family, but also for the vestry and congregation. I am speaking of a change of the heart stimulated and nourished by the Holy Spirit. That is good. It may, however, not directly affect anyone else except the clergy person and that needs to be honored as well.

Also, it is a good idea participants and vestries know that there is follow up from CREDO for support and encouragement.



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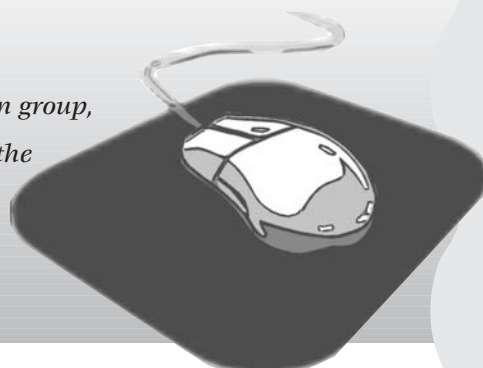
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Holy God, be in my mind, that I might let go of all that diminishes the movement of Your Spirit within me.

Discerning God, be in my eyes, that I might see You in the midst of all the business that fills my life.

Loving God, be in my heart, that I can be open to those I love, to those with whom I share ministry and to the whole human family.

Gracious God, be in that grace-filled silence that lies deep within me, that I might live in Christ as Christ lives in me. Amen.

Written by the Rev. James C. Fenhagen, this prayer has been used at CREDO conferences since CREDO's inception.

Editor's Note



Some of you are first-time readers of *Vestry Papers* and are receiving this complimentary issue as a gift from the Episcopal Church Foundation and CREDO, our friend and sponsor for this issue. We welcome you to our circle of some 30,000 readers. We believe deeply in the ministry and work of vestry members, and do all we can to support it.

Vestry Papers is published six times a year and each subscribing parish receives fifteen copies, one for each member of the vestry. Recent topics have included buildings and grounds, Christian formation, safe church guidelines, ministry of hospitality, church finances and more. We've won fifteen national awards in the past three years, but more important, vestry members across the nation receive current, relevant and helpful information.

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Lindsay Hardin Freeman
Editor