

Snapshots & Insights



Winter 2010



The Publications and Dissemination Project (PDP), an initiative of JESNA's Learnings & Consultation Center (LCC), brings JESNA's knowledge and expertise to practitioners and policymakers in the field by means of print and online media.

Snapshots & Insights is JESNA's newest publication series designed to disseminate emergent data and understandings. Each issue briefly focuses on lessons learned about a single aspect of Jewish Education based on research and evaluations (performed primarily by JESNA's Berman Center for Research and Evaluation in Jewish Education) as well as on-the-ground knowledge (primarily gleaned from JESNA's Learnings & Consultation Center staff who work directly with Jewish educators in the field).

TOPIC:

Continuing Rabbinic Education

Introduction

During their years in rabbinical school, Rabbis acquire a tremendous amount of knowledge in certain areas (e.g., Jewish texts and law), and less, if any, in others (e.g., pastoral care and synagogue management). Like other professions, rabbis benefit from opportunities to engage in professional development and study opportunities throughout their careers. As their careers advance, they need training and mentoring around issues of self-care, and the care of their families, their congregations and the greater Jewish community, emergent issues, new responsibilities, changing field demands, non-profit management, and other such topics.

Background Information:

Initially, the Lasko Family Foundations were interested in exploring the feasibility of fostering an alliance among three Continuing Rabbinic Education (CRE) programs to which they allocated funds. In August, 2007, they sought JESNA's assistance in reviewing existing studies about the impact of continuing rabbinic education on rabbis, at various stages in their careers. As part of this review, JESNA created an inventory of known CRE programs. The programs were divided into two major categories: >>>>

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- 1 Continuing Rabbinic Education programs sponsored by Jewish organizations; and
- 2 Continuing Clergy Education (Christian and non-sectarian) programs open to Jewish clergy.



Having identified more than 30 CRE programs, the Lasko Family Foundations in partnership with JESNA launched ACRE (working with 20 of these programs) after the first National Conference on Continuing Rabbinic Education.

The launch of the Alliance for Continuing Rabbinic Education (ACRE) in April, 2009, represents the first effort to develop a coordinated, systemic approach to post-rabbinical school education for rabbis. ACRE is dedicated to advancing the field of continuing rabbinic education in order to enrich the communal, spiritual and educational life of rabbis, and through them, the entire Jewish community. Specific objectives include:

- Developing benchmarks to assess program implementation and impact;
- Gathering and analyzing data, and leveraging lessons learned to inform the field; and
- Stimulating change and growth for the field of CRE, including: the ways CRE is offered, the content of CRE programs, and the ways CRE is perceived by rabbis and congregational lay leadership.

ACRE's agenda is guided by several core strategies, including: networking among program providers and participants, and facilitating opportunities for individual program providers and the field at-large to learn from program strengths and challenges.

This report synthesizes findings from 19 separate evaluations of CRE programs sponsored by 7 different Jewish organizations. JESNA's Berman Center conducted 11 of the 19 the evaluations for three of the organizations; the others provided access to their evaluation reports for this publication. The following synthesis of learnings from the evaluation reports has been written to preserve the anonymity of the individual programs.

What We Know About Continuing Clergy Education (Christian and Non-Sectarian) Programs Open to Jewish Clergy

There are only a small number of professional development programs for pulpit rabbis. In contrast, the Christian community has more comprehensively addressed the need for clergy professional development and renewal. For example, we note the Lilly Endowment's "Transition-into-Ministry" Programs, designed to help new pastors make the transition from seminary student to full-time pastor. The diversity of projects in this program is designed to test and discover the best ways for helping new pastors get off to a solid start.

What We Know About CRE Programs

In October, 2007, JESNA's interviews with CRE program providers indicated that **up to 2,000 rabbis had participated in one or more of the 30 programs created by Jewish organizations for Jewish clergy**. This number likely reflects some duplication — rabbis who attended multiple programs or who repeated programs. Currently, there are no reliable data about the percentage of eligible rabbis who regularly participate in CRE programs.

The goals and designs of the individual CRE programs cited vary widely. Overall, the CRE programs were designed to **develop rabbis' skills and knowledge** in areas including:

- Advocacy on behalf of Israel;
- Cross-denominational collaboration;
- Dialogue and outreach to the broader community;
- Ethics, theology, philosophy and politics (all referenced together in one evaluation);
- Meaningful text study (*Torah l'shma*);
- Not-for-profit management, executive leadership skills and visioning;
- Pastoral care;
- Program innovation;
- Providing spiritual guidance;
- Teaching others; and
- Understanding the role of the rabbi in the evolving American Jewish community/synagogue. >>>>



The **delivery modes** of the evaluated CRE programs include “one-shot” events, others that are multiple day retreats, and three-year intensive programs. Programs often took place outside of the rabbis “day-to-day” settings, and were purposefully designed to facilitate relationships and network building. The delivery modes included:

- Elective online videoconferences;
- Experiential learning and workshops;
- *Hevruta* (pair study) with rabbinic colleagues;
- Informal exchanges (online or in-person, outside of the CRE program framework);
- Monthly conference calls;
- Online courses;
- Social programming and “down time”;
- Study and retreats in Israel; and
- (Text) study — *Torah l’shema* (mandatory weekly study is required by at least one of the CRE programs).

Some CRE programs **continued their connections with participants** after completion of the formal program via technological means (e.g., webinars, podcasts, and conference calls), and/or alumni programs.

Many CRE program **retreats** took place during winter, summer and vacation breaks. Others were facilitated during “slower” times of the calendar year for Rabbis (e.g., after the High Holidays). The majority of CRE program retreats took place at conference centers in the North East or the West Coast of the United States, and some occurred in Israel.

The weekly and monthly **technological convenings** took place throughout the calendar year.

In general, rabbis responding to the evaluations gave **four reasons for participating in CRE programs**:

- To combat their sense of isolation by developing relationships with colleagues and/or mentors;
- To provide them with dedicated time for text study;
- To meet their desire for spiritual growth and renewal; and
- To learn skills in “business,” leadership, and congregational management.

Lessons Learned from CRE Program Evaluations

As noted, this report is based on the analysis of 19 evaluations of 21 separate CRE Programs from seven organizations. For the purposes of this report, CRE programs are operationally defined as programs that are designed for rabbis, post-graduation. It should be noted, however, that some CRE programs include other “related” constituencies in their efforts (e.g., rabbinical students, rebbetzins/life partners and lay leaders).

Lessons learned from these evaluations focus on several key areas:

- Program implementation;
- Most-valued program components;
- Outstanding needs of participants; and
- Potential next steps for CRE programs.

Program Implementation

Respondents identified two key challenges to their full participation in CRE programs, including:

- 1 Their struggle to meet the **demands of their jobs** while at the same time balancing in other spheres of their lives and continuing to grow spiritually.
- 2 Finding **time** to engage in online text study after participating in retreats.

It is sometimes difficult to meet the **spiritual needs** of participants during *tefillah* services, particularly in inter-denominational settings. For some, interdenominational *tefillah* experiences are very meaningful. Others noted that since each service is a “compromise,” it is no surprise that the most traditional and liberal ends of the spectrum found the experience most challenging.

Using **technology** effectively is a challenge for some of those CRE programs which rely on technology, and for some participants in those programs as well. Evaluation feedback confirmed that some people are uncomfortable using technology because of their lack of proficiency, while others asserted that they do not connect well through online learning or distance communication. >>>>



Most-Valued Program Components

Jewish text study and spiritual growth/renewal

- Participants indicated that they sought to participate in experiences “that would help revive [my] inner Jewish soul,” and that provided opportunities to study with colleagues who had “different takes on the text than [I] did,” whether from the same or a different denominational purview.



Skill development

- Participants found programs designed to teach skills related to **working with lay leadership** to be very helpful, particularly in contract and sabbatical negotiations, and regarding job transitions. Participating rabbis report having stronger relationships with their lay leaders as a result of their participation in such CRE programs.
- Participants also valued the **leadership skills** they acquired, especially as they enhanced their capacities vis-à-vis program development and organizational management and change.

Networking and socializing within a “safe space”

- Rabbis described the CRE program retreats as “Shabbos for the rabbi.” Developing relationships with other rabbis, previously known or unknown, was an important component of the programs. Specifically, participants mentioned the benefits of inter-denominational networking. As one participant noted, “understanding the range of practice and theologies within Judaism allows me to feel comfortable interacting with individuals from all the streams of Judaism and to understand those individuals better.”

The teaching faculty

- Some participants were drawn to CRE programs because of the opportunities they provided to **study with master teachers**. In some cases, the rabbis had learned with the same teachers when they were in rabbinical school and appreciated reconnecting. In other cases, the teachers were well known people in their own fields of whom the rabbis were aware, but whom they would not, outside of the context of the CRE programs, have had access to study with directly.

Outstanding Needs of CRE Program Alumni

Participants in the cited CRE programs identified myriad topics and themes to either enhance existing or stimulate the development of new CRE programs, primarily:

- **Leadership development/role clarification;**
- **Positive relationship building/conflict management;**
- **Program evaluation and fiscal/financial management; and**
- **Self-care/self-awareness tasks.**

It is interesting to note that each of these areas is already the focus of one or more of the CRE programs evaluated, suggesting that respondents may not have participated in or been aware of CRE programs that focused on the issues they identified. One of ACRE's goals is to enable and empower CRE program providers to have broader reaches (i.e., to Rabbis outside their specific purviews), and to foster CRE program collaborations to meet the needs of the field.

In addition to the four areas listed above, evaluation feedback from CRE program participants highlighted that **rabbis need guidance about how to apply their learnings and skills upon their return to their congregations**, after the seminars/retreats. Some evaluation respondents offered specific suggestions, such as programming for alumni, and facilitated opportunities to re-connect with CRE program faculty. Other respondents reported having maintained relationships they had built with CRE program faculty and other participants.

Potential Next Steps for CRE Programs

Feedback from program participants suggests the following next steps to bolster the CRE field. Extant and emerging CRE program providers should:

- **Foster collaborations to:**
 - advance inter-denominational dialogue;
 - increase the pool of CRE programs to a wider audience of potential participants;
 - realize financial and human resource efficiencies; and
 - develop additional programs.
- Clearly **articulate program goals and (work load) expectations** to assist prospective participants in choosing “the right” program to meet their needs and limitations. >>>>



- Focus **programmatic efforts** on helping participants develop strategies to cope more effectively with the realities of the rabbinate.
- Ensure that approaches to *tefillah* are pluralistic, and that various options are provided to better meet the needs of the broadest range of participants.
- Vary **modes of teaching** within the CRE programs to include opportunities for formal and informal networking and dialogue, and for experiential learning.
- Develop “best practices” for planners of CRE program **retreats**, to maximize their success. Issues to consider include:
 - length of the retreat
 - timing of sessions
 - faculty/master teachers
 - creating a “community” among participants
 - balancing sessions with “down time”
- Schedule and circulate **dates for retreats and program components** as far in advance as possible, making every effort to avoid conflicts.
- Provide training and orientation to CRE program participants to enable them to fully participate in technological aspects of the programs.
- Maintain **connections with alumni**, and establish mechanisms and procedures to facilitate communication between and amongst participants.
- Facilitate greater understanding on the part of **congregational lay leaders** about CRE programs, specifically their content and the impact they have on participants and, ultimately on congregations.



Conclusion

The establishment of ACRE, and the combined learnings from the evaluations cited in this report confirm that there is a field of Continuing Rabbinic Education, comprised of a substantial cohort of program providers who offer programs with diverse goals, implementation strategies and methodologies.

ACRE seeks to grow this field, in part by building on the existing library of literature about CRE programs and by advocating and seeking funding for additional program evaluations. These actions will expand our knowledge, improve and expand CRE programs, and advance the ultimate goal of supporting the personal and professional lives of pulpit rabbis.





Appendix A: Sources of Evaluations

- CLAL
- Institute for Jewish Spirituality*
- Legacy Heritage Fund Rabbinic Enrichment Initiative at Yeshiva University (Conducted by Yeshiva University)
- Oraita: Institute for Continuing Rabbinic Education*
- Panim
- Shalom Hartman Institute
- STAR PEER (Professional Education for Excellence in Rabbis)*

* Evaluations conducted for these organizations by JESNA's Berman Center.