

So, you want to attend an event? What about the cost?

We are extremely fortunate in the North Carolina Conference to have a plethora of opportunities for learning, spiritual enrichment and mission available to us. As clergy and lay members in The United Methodist Church, we benefit from the offerings of Duke Divinity School, Lake Junaluska and other agencies of the Connection, as they present workshops, seminars and retreats. It seems, at times, that an event is designed just for me, for my need, my church. The promise for positive impact stirs our passion and hope.

The NCC encourages participation in worthwhile events. Whether the benefit is realized personally, or by the church or community, the Conference Cabinet and staff recognize the potential for renewed energy and commitment following a well-designed event.

Attending an event typically requires registration, and arrangement for lodging, meals and travel. In some cases, materials have to be purchased and read/viewed in advance or during the event. Costs vary widely for participation.

The NCC policy is based on IRS regulations as it relates to these events and Conference support for participation. Attendees must register, arrange their own lodging and transportation, and pay all the expenses. Following the event, with appropriate documentation (receipts, invoices or email confirmation of registration), reimbursement of some of the expenses may be requested.

Reimbursement is not automatic, however. The first criterion in awarding scholarship support for participation is the alignment of purpose of the event with the mission and vision of the Annual Conference and specifically with the committee sought for funds. If the committee determines that the event is aligned with the mission and vision, the amount of assistance will depend upon resources available at that time. So, please contact the committee you want to help pay for the event. That committee will be the source of any funding you receive.

The amount of reimbursement depends upon the budget of the sponsoring board or committee. If, for example, the Worship Committee has budgeted \$5000 for training, and a workshop offered by the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville provides training for praise bands and worship leaders, that fund may be used for attendees, if the Committee approves. If 50 persons from the NCC want to go, the reimbursement rate will be up to \$100 per person.

In very rare cases, an event is fully underwritten by the Conference committee because it is valued for its content or purpose. The budget may have been developed with this event in mind, and with the hope that a person's participation will be encouraged by fully funding it. In most cases, however, clergy with continuing education funds must choose from the many opportunities available, and identify the opportunities that best meet their need or interest, whether a personal objective or a matter for the growth of the church. Or, they may choose to participate at their own expense.

The local church always may contribute to the costs of seminars or workshops. Attending Stephen Ministry/Leader training or Alpha Course training may involve travel to another state and a registration fee that is not covered in any Conference committee budget. In fact, it often is the case that

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no Conference funding is available for events that are sponsored by agencies outside of The United Methodist Church or offered by another Conference.

It is the strong hope of the Conference leadership that good stewardship is exercised in selecting and attending programs for continuing education or spiritual renewal. It also is expected that participants will contribute something toward the cost of the experience, rather than expecting full reimbursement for participation, so that resources can be distributed among a wider range of recipients.

Steps to take in seeking funds for participation:

1. Contact the chairperson of the Conference committee that sponsors the event. (If you do not know the chairperson or contact information, please call the Conference office, 800-849-4433 or 919-779-6115, or seek this information in the Conference Journal.)
2. Ask for an application for funds for participation. The committee determines whether funds will be made available for that event and notifies the applicant.
3. Register for the event, arrange for travel and other needs.
4. Keep receipts from registration, meals, travel and lodging, and sign each one that you submit. Be sure to keep a copy of receipts.
5. Submit receipts for reimbursement, as quickly as possible, to the Conference committee that sponsors the event. (Please note: The Conference must record expenses in the year in which they are actually incurred, so expenses will be matched to the budget year of the event regardless of when the registrations are paid. For example, if registration for an event is due the November of the year before the event actually occurs, the expense will be recorded in the budget year of the event – not the year the registration is due. This understanding is necessary for budget year planning by the committee.)
6. Allow ample time for reimbursement to be made as other requests are processed at the same time