

CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION AT VALLEY BAPTIST HEALTH SYSTEM

Thank you for your inquiry about the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Program within the Valley Baptist Health System. Details of our training program would fill a small book; however, I will try to give you a brief overview of our program and its setting.

THE CENTER

Valley Baptist Health System (VBHS) utilizes several of its entities for CPE. The primary site, Valley Baptist Medical Center (VBMC) is located in Harlingen, Texas. We are about 45 miles from the beautiful beaches of South Padre Island and 13 miles from Mexico via the Los Indios International Bridge. Located only 25 miles from Harlingen is the international bridge that connects Brownsville, Texas with Matamoros, Mexico. Matamoros is a city of approximately 500,000 people. Our area offers a sub-tropical climate that draws visitors from throughout the North American continent. Harlingen's population is 65,000 people in the summer. In the winter the population increases significantly to approximately 150,000 with the arrival of our "Winter Texan" visitors from as far north as Canada. Southwest and Continental Airlines provide airline service to Harlingen. Coupled with our proximity to Mexico, CPE Residents enjoy rare learning opportunities with persons of varied cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. The Rio Grande Valley has the complete spectrum of socio-economic diversity that could be anticipated in any comparable sized community.

VBMC is a 600-plus bed acute care medical center that is also certified as a Level III Trauma Center and provides a wide range of services to the people of South Texas. These services also include a Women's Care Center, Dialysis Center, Diabetes Center, Day Surgery Center, Behavior and Wellness Center, Radiation Center, Retirement Center, Pediatric Center, Rehabilitation Centers, and many other services. The Medical Center employs over 2000 people and is continuing to expand its facilities. CPE Residents gain valuable pastoral experience through supervised ministry rotations in a variety of possible in-patient and outpatient care areas. Some of these areas include several intensive care units, cardiac units, the emergency room, oncology, medical and surgical units, orthopedics, pediatrics and obstetrics/gynecology to name only a few of our training areas. All CPE group and Individual Supervision Sessions are held daily at the VBMC-Harlingen Campus.

CPE CURRICULUM

The Clinical Pastoral Education Center of VBHS is accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. (ACPE). The formal course work for CPE Residents during each week includes Interpersonal Relationship Seminars, Pastoral Care Conferences, Individual Supervision Sessions, Didactic Seminars and Worship Seminars. Occasional field trip training is provided depending on the availability of funds.

Approximately 50% of a Resident's training time is spent in learning from the actual practice of pastoral care with patients and employees within clinical assignments that are designed to maximize learning from the interactions with persons who are the "textbooks" that are referred to in CPE as "Living Human Documents." Residents also have opportunities to develop an understanding of interprofessional relationships by working with the Medical Center staff and others. Opportunities are also provided to observe a surgical procedure, an autopsy, and other facets of patient care in order to acquaint the CPE Resident with a comprehensive understanding of ministry in the health care setting. The CPE training received at VBHS provides learning that is transferable to any ministry

setting. Many of our graduates are employed by institutions; enter military chaplaincy, prison ministry, hospice ministry or other specialized ministry. Others choose the parish ministry setting after their training.

Crisis ministry education is facilitated by the Chaplain Residents each serving in rotation as the On-Call Chaplain on weekday evenings and all day on Sundays and responding to pastoral care opportunities that are provided by emergencies and other requests for a chaplain. A chaplain On-Call private room with bed, television, shower and toilet facilities is used by the On-Call Chaplain when needed. After the first training Unit, Residents who live within the Harlingen/San Benito communities are normally allowed to be On-Call at their home provided they have chosen live close enough to the hospital to respond to an emergency call to the hospital within 15 minutes of receiving a request via the On-Call Pager.

Once a month each Chaplain Resident will also serve On-Call duty on a Sunday with the additional responsibility of providing the Sunday Ecumenical Worship Service in the hospital chapel and the Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit. Each CPE Resident normally also serves as the On-Call Chaplain on one of the major national holidays during the Residency year. One-half day compensatory time is normally provided for Sunday On-Call duty by Residents who depart the hospital at 12:30 P.M. (or after CPE activities if they extend beyond 12:30 P.M.) the day after the duty. Students who have On-Call duty during weekday evenings from 5:00 P.M. to Midnight are not normally required to report to the hospital until 10:00 A.M. on the day following On-Call duty. As with any CPE program, a Residency year is both a physically and emotionally demanding educational process and there is no time for a Resident to be employed part-time elsewhere or to be the pastor of a church.

Patient, charting and preparation of CPE written materials require a basic understanding of computer usage. Although not required, a basic understanding of the use of Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel would greatly benefit the beginning student since these are the computer platforms commonly used beginning with the first day of classes after the orientation period.

BENEFITS

Although they are students, for pay and benefits purposes, CPE Chaplain Residents are considered to be Full Time Employees of the Health System. This status provides Residents with medical, dental and life insurance at a reasonable cost to the employee beginning 30 days after the start of the program. Health insurance coverage is also available for family members at a reasonable monthly cost depending on the type of coverage selected. Hospital employees also receive a 50% discount on all meals in the cafeteria and numerous other benefits.

VBHS does not presently offer single training Units, extended training Units or supervisory training. When Residents are accepted for training, the Medical Center makes a commitment for one calendar year of training (four training Units) concurrent with the employment status and the Residents are expected to do the same. This commitment is based on a Resident successfully completing the requirements and objectives of each training Unit. Residents accrue "Paid Time Off" (PTO) during the Academic Year each pay period after the first 30 days of employment. Health benefits also begin on the 31st day of employment. Residents utilize these "PTO" days during the training integration periods between formal training Units. Between the beginning of the training

program in September and the beginning of the second training Unit, students acquire approximately two days of PTO. PTO must be accrued under the VBHS management system before time off may be taken.

We believe the VBHS CPE student stipend/tuition/benefits package is comparable to any CPE Center in the United States. When prospective students are exploring possible CPE training sites, we urge them to inquire of CPE Centers about such issues as: stipend, tuition, cost of medical insurance for self and family, "Paid Time Off", sick leave, etc.

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Although not a requirement, experience has shown that applicants who have completed at least one Unit of CPE training or a Clinical Pastoral Orientation Practicum at another institution before the VBHS Residency year begins are able to adapt more readily to the CPE Clinical Method of Learning. If you have had previous Clinical Pastoral Education, please provide copies of both yours and your supervisor's CPE Final Evaluations. Applicants normally should also have a Master of Divinity or equivalent degree. Those with a Master's degree in some other discipline should also possess adequate prior formal theological training via some other avenue of seminary training. All undergraduate and graduate education must be from an accredited institution.

CHAPLAIN CERTIFICATION

Most of the larger medical centers require new chaplains to be either Chaplain *Board Certified* or Eligible for Board Certification. Our center often encounters applicants for CPE who mistakenly believe that four accredited training units of CPE are all that are required for Board Certification. To clarify this subject for our applicants, the following information has been included in this letter to assist prospective students to understand Chaplain Certification requirements before being training in any CPE program.

The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) only certifies Clinical Pastoral Educators (Supervisors). It does not certify chaplains. The only recognized organizations that certify chaplains in the United States is the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), the National Association of Catholic Chaplain (NACC) and the National Association of Jewish Chaplains (NAJC).

The primary ecumenical chaplain certifying agency is the Association of Professional Chaplains, Inc.(APC) The APC provides for *Board Certified Chaplains* of all religious traditions. Each of the above organizations requires a minimum of four accredited units of Clinical Pastoral Education for certification. The APC requires a *Master of Divinity* degree of at least 72 semester hours (or equivalent) beyond the Bachelors degree for Board Certification from accredited educational institutions. An individual desiring recognition with APC as an *Associate Chaplain* requires at least 48 graduate semester hours (or equivalent) in theological education beyond the Bachelors degree. (The status of *Associate Chaplain* is not a certification status.)

All undergraduate and graduate level secular and theological education semester hours must be from an institution accredited by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation

<http://www.chea.org>). If a candidate's education for Board Certification does not meet the APC certification guidelines, then a candidate may apply for equivalency. The equivalency process very closely follows the strict APC certification Standards and exceptions to the Standards are not made. If a CPE student is anticipating applying for APC certification as a *Board Certified Chaplain* or status as an *Associate Chaplain* and his or her educational background will require a determination by the APC Certification Commission as to equivalency, it is strongly suggested that application is made as soon as possible just for a determination of equivalency for certification purposes.

The only APC recognized Clinical Pastoral Education training in the United States is that obtained from a CPE Center accredited by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) or the United States Catholic Conference/National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC). Such training must also have been provided by a CPE Supervisor certified by ACPE or NACC. The ACPE is the only organization recognized by the United States Department of Education as a pastoral care accrediting agency. Although there may be institutions not accredited by ACPE or NACC or who offer Clinical Pastoral Education by CPE Supervisors not certified by ACPE or NACC, one desiring Board Certification may apply for CPE equivalency to the APC Certification Commission. Students receiving CPE training within the Valley Baptist Health System receive training that is recognized by the Association of Professional Chaplains, the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education and the National Association of Catholic Chaplains and does not require an educational equivalency review by either APC or NACC.

“ON-SITE” INTERVIEW

An On-Site interview at VBHS is required for admission into the program. **Transportation, hotel and meal expenses for an interview are the responsibility of the candidate.** The written application is very important as decisions concerning asking an applicant to come to Harlingen for an On-Site interview are based on this written material. It is very important for applicants to understand that the “CPE Interview” is NOT an employment interview. Also, an on-site interview does not guarantee that an applicant will be accepted into the program. Applications are normally very candid and comprehensive. This provides for the CPE Screening Committee to better determine if an applicant's learning needs could be met by training at the VBHS.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The Valley Baptist Health System CPE Center has trained numerous International Students in the past. The VBHS CPE Center, however, does not become involved in any way with International Visas. International student applicants are responsible for their own arrangements to be in the United States for the entire Academic Year and, if invited into the CPE program, to provide evidence of their status before final acceptance is granted. It is important that the Visas of International students are of the type that allows them to pursue CPE educational training. Roman Catholic applicants should inquire further from our Center regarding how to obtain Extended Faculties for priests, etc. This information will be provided upon request.

STIPEND AND COMMITMENT FEE

The 2007-2008 Academic Year is scheduled to begin in early September 2007 and program completion will be in late August 2008. The CPE stipend is \$26,000.00 for the Academic Year. The non-refundable Commitment Fee for the year is \$400.00 and is due upon acceptance to the program. This non-refundable Commitment Fee will be deposited in the Clinical Pastoral Education Restricted Fund and will be utilized only for activities that are a direct benefit to the education of CPE students. This low-cost Commitment Fee has no positive effect upon the **actual** cost of providing a CPE Program at VBHS on a per-student-basis since Student Unit fees and other expenses of which students are usually unaware are assessed the CPE Center by both the Regional and National offices of ACPE. There is no tuition fee. When applicants for CPE training apply to more than one institution and compare the stipends, they should also consider the Commitment Fee charges and the student benefits that are provided to students as a part of their comparisons. Full or partial Commitment Fee scholarships are available on a case-by-case basis for Residents who have extenuating financial circumstances. For those applicants who are selected, an invitation to participate in the program is issued in writing with a short suspense date for a reply. If an applicant accepts the invitation, the non-refundable Commitment Fee is to be enclosed with the written acceptance. When an invitation is accepted, a covenant has been established between the CPE Center and the applicant for training in accordance with CPE Center policy and the Standards of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE). ACPE is the Center's accrediting agency and the CPE Supervisor's certifying authority. Should an applicant decide not to participate in the program after acceptance of the invitation, there will be no refund of the Commitment Fee since other applicants were denied admission to the program based on a selected applicant's acceptance of the training invitation.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The VBHS application form is enclosed with this letter. Please answer questions 1 through 5 listed on the back of the form as comprehensively as possible. If you have had any previous ACPE or NACC accredited CPE training, please provide the information listed in 6, 7 and 8 on the back of the application. Our Admissions Committee requires that all application material be typewritten or computer printed. As with any organization to whom written materials are submitted, the first step of a selection procedure begins with a review of an applicant's written materials to determine if the organization will be able to provide the type of opportunity the applicant needs or desires. Responses to the questions on the back of the application form should not be taken lightly and should be very candid. Questions #1 and #5 are especially important for the Screening Committee to get to know the applicant "on paper" and to get a sense of how the applicant envisions using the CPE training after graduation. Most applications are about ten to fifteen typewritten single-spaced pages in length. In addition to this form, please provide us with copies of all your diplomas on the college and university and seminary levels from accredited learning institutions. If you are ordained or a Professed Religious, please provide a copy of your ordination certificate or verification of your status by your Religious Order. If there are any restrictions placed on you by your religious order or denomination that may interfere with your full-time participation in the training program, please explain those restrictions in your application.

The VBHS CPE Center begins accepting applications in January each year for the next academic year's training. Upon review of your application by our Admissions Screening Committee, you will be contacted to arrange an interview, if appropriate. The sooner you return your application, the sooner our Admissions Screening Committee can make a determination about

inviting you for an On-Site Interview. Should you accept another position before the completion of your interview process with us, it will be greatly appreciated if you would contact me and request that your application be withdrawn. If you have not heard otherwise from us as to the decision about an invitation to interview, your application is still being considered and you have not been rejected as a prospective student. Our process may seem lengthy, but it helps to assure us of quality students and you will be a part of a quality training program.

If you have any specific questions that are not covered in this letter, please do not hesitate to write or call the Clinical Pastoral Education Center at (956) 389-6750. You can also find more information about our CPE program on the Internet by going to: <http://www.valleybaptist.net/CPE> and clicking on the various webpage links you will find there.