



sabbath · study · service

A Program for Sustaining Excellence in Ministry
Sponsored by the S3 Project Committee
Approved by the South Georgia Order of Elders and the Board of Ordained Ministry

“The purpose of an S3 group is to create a sanctuary in time providing a Sabbath environment for six to eight self-chosen participants who desire to spend a significant amount of time together over the next 2 years. Through Sabbath, study, and service the groups create deep, sustaining, enriching relationships with God and one another that sustain/enhance pastoral excellence through life giving settings of their choosing and creating.”

- **Purpose Statement of South Georgia’s S3 Groups**

“My experience in S3 has been an important part of my personal renewal and continuing formation. I believe that the time we spend together and even the time we spend planning and anticipating our events fights burnout, encourages creativity and boosts morale. The relationships that our group has developed will serve and support us for years to come. Our experience has been so positive that while our formal group experience ended several years ago we continue to gather...”

- Rev. Dr. Jimmy Asbell, Jr., Senior Pastor, First UMC, Warner Robins, GA

“The S3 experience is the difference between wandering through a barren land all alone or travelling with deeply loyal friends...”

- Rev. Creede Hinshaw, Senior Pastor, Wesley Monumental UMC, Savannah, GA

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The S3 Framework

S3 is a collaborative, small group, action learning project/experience that will help sustain/promote excellence in ordained ministry. You and your peer group develop and implement a two-year long learning project/experience focused on three areas: Sabbath, Study, and Service.

If your group is selected to participate in the program, your peer group will be invited to Epworth by the Sea for an orientation retreat. At the retreat, you will refine your project outline with help from the S3 Project Team. You will also participate in orientation activities, meet a mentor for your group that will provide support and encouragement, and spend a significant amount of time refining your learning project/experience while building community with your new group. Approved peer groups will receive funding through the South Georgia S3 program which will provide *\$500 per person, per year for the two years* of your group's learning process – to be used according to the approved learning project/experience.

You will collaborate with your peer group on the goals designed primarily by your group, with input from the S3 Project Team. The goal is that the lessons and experiences will translate into excellence in your ministry context.

The original design of the S3 program began at Columbia Theological Seminary and was sponsored by the Lilly Endowment as a part of their “Sustaining Pastoral Excellence” initiative. Since 2003, 49 groups and 297 individuals have participated in Columbia's S3 project.

Each of the S3 groups from South Georgia that participated in the Columbia program were self-selected and self-directed: they chose the members of their groups and they developed the S3 learning project for their groups (with direction from the S3 project committee). ***Each of these groups continues to meet even though they no longer receive funding from S3. The proof of the S3 program's effectiveness is in the excellent ministry witnessed in the lives and vocations of the participating ministers! S3 has a track record that is extremely successful. S3 works.***

Who is Eligible?

To participate in the South Georgia S3 Project, the applicant must:

- Serve as an ordained Elder/Deacon or Provisional Elder/Deacon in the South Georgia Conference and be in good standing
- Commit to participate as a member of a self-selected peer group of six to eight elders for the length of the project (2 years)
- Agree with the established project policies and guidelines, including support/mentoring from S3 peer mentors and attending the yearly reflection retreat at Epworth

What is a Peer Learning Group?

A peer learning group consists of six to eight elders who agree to engage collaboratively in a two-year long intentional learning project/experience of common interest, designed to strengthen their ministry. The learning project shall consist of elements of Sabbath, Study, and Service.

How Can I Form a Peer Learning Group?

Seek out colleagues with whom you will be able to learn and interact during the project. You will want some diversity to ensure a stimulating and rewarding learning experience and enough similarity to enjoy spending Sabbath together. Think creatively about how you could form a S3 group

that will contribute to pastoral excellence. You may currently be a part of a peer group that may wish to apply together, or you may wish to create a new group.

What are Some Types of Peer Learning Projects/Experiences?

Design the learning project/experience to meet the needs of your group. Focus that project on Sabbath, Study, and Service.

- Your Sabbath component should enhance your study time together while providing opportunities for deep and transforming renewal. You will want to share time together doing some common interest Sabbath activities that “give life” to your group. The S3 program affords you the opportunity to “cease labor” while you meet through funding. The Sabbath experience should beckon your group to gather. Sabbath is an integral part of the S3 program – it is the heart of the overall experience!
- Your Study component may focus on a specific practice of ministry such as: spiritual formation, administration, preaching, new church development, pastoral care, congregational life, ministry of the laity, education, teaching, or mission and outreach. Your group self-directs the study component – just make sure it is something that will feed your group and help you grow in pastoral excellence.
- Your Service component should be connected to your group’s identity and learning goals. What will stretch you and call you to see a new arena of service? How will it fit with the personality of your group and your vision for where you want to journey? How will your service connect to your Sabbath and study components? When you serve together, you form bonds and build trust.

How you want to learn is as important as what you learn. Where you engage in Sabbath is significant to your formation. Your proposal should outline your group’s learning project/experience, describe your plan/goals for learning, and discuss your hopes and dreams for Sabbath renewal. Your group’s learning project will be primarily your design. You will receive input and direction from the S3 project committee to make sure your learning project will be a vital tool for sustaining/creating excellence in your ministry.

What Does Participation in the S3 Project Involve?

- Your biggest cost is your investment of time and energy that you will make as a part of your peer group. You need to check with your family and your congregation since participating may affect them. The S3 project will require you meet together ***five times per year for two years***. Your meetings should be planned at the beginning of the project and incorporate the core elements of Sabbath, Study, and Service. You will notice that your individual application requires the signature of your Staff Parish Chair, which indicates the approval of your church. You may direct your Staff Parish Relations Committee members to view the short S3 video presentation on the Conference Web site. This will help them understand what is being asked of you during the S3 experience and how the church can benefit! When the local church realizes the benefit of the S3 program for their congregation, they are much more supportive of your time away in S3 formation.
- Your local church or institution will be asked to contribute \$150 per year for the two years you are in the program from your continuing education fund to defray costs of your annual retreat at Epworth. This will allow the church to participate in your learning project and contribute to your program of excellence. *As a participant of the South Georgia S3 Program, you will receive ALL*

your required Continuing Education for the two years of the program! Hopefully, your local church will see the benefit of gaining all your required CEU credits for a \$150 investment as a great thing for their pastor and for their budget!

- You must attend the Annual S3 Orientation Retreat at Epworth by the Sea, September 17-19, 2012. The sessions will begin Monday afternoon, September 17 and conclude by lunch on September 19 (allowing you to return to your church for Wednesday night programs). This retreat will serve as one of your required yearly gatherings and will afford your group significant Sabbath time to be together as you reflect and refine your learning experience.
- If your application is accepted, the project will fund the costs of implementing your group's learning plan by providing annual support of \$500 per person, per year for the two years required by the program.
 - The S3 program, with the support from your local church, will also cover all your expenses and materials for the annual orientation retreat at Epworth by the Sea (room, meals, meeting rooms, materials, and one special dinner out together with your group, etc.) You will be responsible for transportation to and from Epworth and any group activities outside the retreat.
- Your group will submit brief, quarterly group progress reports outlining the activity and reflection of group members
- You and your group will submit written evaluations of the learning experience submitted at end of each year, and end of overall project. Each individual will submit a reflection and the group will submit a reflection.

What Can I Gain As A S3 Participant?

Everyone's experience will be different. You may expect the following:

- A deeper understanding and appreciation of Sabbath
- Life giving community among peer who value Sabbath together
- Knowledge and skills which apply to your ministry
- Professional friendships and support networks with colleagues in ministry
- Practical assistance in addressing pastoral opportunities and challenges
- Intentional reflection on your call to ministry
- Creative approaches to ministry
- Stimulating learning experiences
- Opportunities for transformative service with peers

How Do I Apply?

In order to participate, you will need to apply as an individual *and* as a peer group. Each individual must complete the **Individual Application** for participation. In addition, your potential peer group must also complete a **Peer Group Application**. If you are already in an existing clergy group of elders, you are eligible to apply as long as you follow the guidelines and policies of the project. *Preference is given to groups that have not participated in S3 projects or Lilly Endowed projects.*

When is the Application Deadline?

Deadline for applications to be received to participate in the 2012 cohort is **July 1, 2012**. Successful applicants will be notified by or before **August 1, 2012**. If your group is selected, you will be required to attend the S3 Project Retreat at Epworth by the Sea, St. Simons Island, Georgia on **September 17-19, 2012**. You will also attend this retreat in 2013 (Dates TBA for 2013 at the 2012 retreat). *(It is wise to make sure all members of your group will be able to attend the September 17-19 Retreat BEFORE you apply. Attending the retreat together as a group is required.)*

S3 Project Requirements for Peer Learning Groups:

- Complete application for individual and peer group project participation. Send all the applications in ONE packet – the group application and the individual applications.
- Develop a structured, intentional peer group learning plan. This plan is created collaboratively with your peer group. It will be refined in conversation with members of the S3 Project Team. Each peer group final plan must be approved by the S3 Committee prior to receiving grant funding.
- Implement the learning plan, complete project reports in a timely way.
- Meet together at least five times per year during the project (the annual session at Epworth by the Sea may count as one meeting)
- Attend the Annual S3 Project Retreat (Sept. 17-19, 2012) while your group is part of the project.
- Have your local congregation/context submit \$150 each year to the S3 program from your Continuing Education budget or another source. (They will submit \$150 in September 2012 and \$150 in September 2013.)
- Maintain financial records of project expenditures funded by the S3 project (details at orientation)
- Complete written evaluations