

Lay Committee Guidelines

Introduction

The Lay Committee plays a vital role in the training of pastors. This committee helps to welcome and orient the student to the local ministry situation. It also plays a key role in providing feedback and support. The committee is composed of 4-8 lay people who have agreed to guide, supervise and evaluate the student. Preferably, it should have members representing a cross-section of the congregation or institution. The Lay Committee meets with the student monthly to discuss the student's progress and offer suggestions. At the end of each term, the committee also does a written evaluation of the student.

Supervised Practice of Ministry (SPM) is an educational experience through which a student trains for service by engaging in activities of ministry under supervision. SPM involves time and effort spent in a field setting plus preparation for and reflection upon the experience in regular supervisory training sessions and classroom discussions.

Purposes of SPM

Field education serves several major purposes which may not be met by other parts of the ministry learning process. It fosters integrations, helps a student gain skills and experience in ministry, assists in confirming and developing ministry gifts, and serves to test the vocational call. All of these are areas to which you as a committee contribute through probing questions, feedback, sharing of experience, and support.

Financial Arrangements

In setting the terms for remuneration, the student is free to negotiate with a church/institution and serve for any stipend upon which both agree. However, the seminary considers the following guidelines to be minimal. For all the categories of employment, the employing church or institution is encouraged to contribute to the Social Security payments of the student.

Minimum payment of \$400.00 per semester. As a guideline for churches/institutions who want a student to work for 10-12 hours on weekends, \$10.00 or more per hour should be considered, plus transportation expenses, housing (if needed), and some consideration for food costs.

For a **part-time student pastorate** (normally 20-30 hours per week), the church should consider a salary usually in the range of \$800-1,400 per month, plus housing, utilities, automobile transportation, expenses, medical insurance and, if possible, the denominational pension plan.

The Functions of the Lay Field Education Committee

The purpose of the Lay Field Education Committee is to engage in honest dialogue with the student so that the student may better understand the lay person's views of the ministry (lay and ordained) and gain helpful feedback as he or she prepares for ministry.

The Field Education Committee members are educators. A committee meeting is a time for a student to learn. The committee members are not a screening group which approves or disapproves of a student; rather, they play a supportive role in the student's learning process.

Important Joint Functions of the SPM Supervisor and the Lay Field Education Committee:

Both the supervisor and the lay committee should provide the following basic functions in working with a student:

- 1. To help the student get settled into his or her new role.** One part of this is making sure that the student's personal needs are being taken care of. Is the office space and housing adequate? How are the spouse and family doing? Is the student getting sufficient personal and family time? Another part of this is acquainting the student with the members of the congregation or other institution, the local traditions of the church, and role expectations. What are some of the issues and concerns for the people in the pew? It is important that the student know the congregation and its heritage in order to preach, teach, and minister to them.
- 2. To support.** Students are learning and are growing in God's grace. They need spiritual, emotional, and collegial support. Please remember them with faithful prayer support. They need to be undergirded with prayer in order to grow and carry out their ministry. Emotional support includes accepting the whole person as a partner in ministry, even when particular actions may be unacceptable. Collegial support includes affirmation and praise for work well done and encouragement when mistakes are made (and there will be!). Genuine support provides the basis and context for helpful, constructive observations, listening, reflection, feedback, and evaluation.
- 3. To observe.** It takes time and attention to observe the student in a variety of settings in order to give accurate feedback and useful direction. As you observe, keep in mind the following questions: Is the student doing a good job in the various ministry areas, even if it is not the same way I would do it if I were in charge? How are congregational members responding? What seems to work for the student and what does not? What specific things could be done that would have been better? In addition to specific issues, what are the general areas where growth is needed?
- 4. To listen.** Good listening is not easy. It is much more than simply passively hearing someone else speak. It is attentive hearing beneath the level of just the words spoken. It is listening for the feelings beneath the words, searching for the meaning of what is "between the lines." The SPM supervisor and the Lay Committee needs to listen deeply to the student and to the members of the congregation in order to discern, interpret, and communicate needs and concerns both directions.
- 5. To help the student reflect.** The model of learning in SPM is action-reflection. The student acts or ministers in some way. The committee should ask the student to reflect on those acts of ministry. Experience is a good teacher. But the best teacher is experience that is reflected upon. Students will make mistakes - we all do. Reflecting upon mistakes and triumphs helps the student improve his or her ministry.

6. To give feedback. Feedback is an essential part of any trusting and open relationship between persons. Real learning comes from giving and receiving feedback. It is communication with a person about how others are affected by the person's behavior. Here are some guidelines for giving useful feedback:

- a. Make the feedback descriptive, not interpretive. Feedback is information, not evaluation. For example, "When you read the scripture, I can't hear you," is descriptive. "Your voice is weak" is interpretive.
- b. Give feedback about things that can be changed. It must be directed to behavior which the receiver can do something about.
- c. Give feedback only to be helpful. Check out your own motivation before giving it. It should be given in a spirit of loving concern. Also, feedback is not helpful if it fails to consider the receiver's needs.
- d. Make the feedback timely. The closer the feedback is given to the time the behavior took place, the more the receiver will be able to use the information.
- e. Make the feedback specific, not general. Give specific examples of the behavior to which you are referring. General statements are not helpful because they do not give the receiver a clear picture of your perceptions of his or her behavior.

7. To assess. One important responsibility for the SPM supervisor and the lay committee members is to share with the student their perceptions of his or her progress in ministry, especially the areas which the student is currently emphasizing in SPM. The purpose of such assessment is to help the student shape his or her learning agenda for the future. At the end of the SPM course the supervisor and lay committee will complete an evaluation on a form provided by the seminary and discuss what they have written with the student. The evaluation form is then submitted to the Field Education Office at the seminary.

8. To discern. The processes of observing, listening, reflecting, giving feedback, and assessing all help a student to discern more fully different aspects of God's call in his or her life. Your observations and feedback play a vital role in helping the student to discern vocational call, giftedness, and needs for further growth.

Organizing the Committee

Four to eight people representative of the parish or ministry setting should be recruited to form the Field Education Committee. In settings with an on-site supervisor, he or she will usually initiate the selection and formation of the group. In student pastorates, usually the lay leaders involved in the recruitment of the student will play this organizing role. In either case, it is advisable to consult with the student during the selection and organization process.

Parishes and other ministry settings have widely different ways of organizing committees, but here are some common practices that have worked well:

- In small Presbyterian parishes, a subcommittee of the session may fulfill the committee's role. To gain a cross-section from the church, others may be included who are not on the Session.
- In Presbyterian parishes that have a personnel committee of the Session, that committee may become the Field Education Committee.
- In United Methodist parishes the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee often assumes the role, if it is small enough. When it is a large PPR Committee, often a sub-committee is formed as a Field Education Committee.

A chairperson should be appointed by the committee at its first meeting. The chairperson's duties are:

- To convene and chair the meetings.
- To discuss the agenda for the meeting with the student.
- To consult with the clergy supervisor about the progress of the group.
- To coordinate the final evaluation process with the committee.
- To sign the learning contract and the final evaluation on behalf of the committee.

The Committee Meetings

The Field Education Lay Committee should meet with the student **at least once each month for a minimum of one hour and not more than two hours**. It helps to schedule a regular time and place and have a set beginning and ending time. At the first meeting of the committee the clergy supervisor should be present to explain to the committee what his or her role is in relation to the student. However, it is not necessary for the supervisor to meet with the committee after this initial meeting.

The chairperson and the student should plan in advance the agenda for the meetings. Meetings should allow ample time for in-depth discussion and opportunity for both the student and committee members to suggest issues for discussion and express concerns. Ground rules for confidentiality should also be established.

Written Evaluations

At the end of the course, evaluations are to be completed by the student, field supervisor, and the lay field education committee. Sometime during the last month of the SPM grading period, the Committee should meet without the student present. At this meeting the chairperson should solicit responses from each member to the questions on the evaluation form provided by the seminary. Discussion should follow in an effort to reach consensus. The chairperson should then write out the consensus and check this out with the Committee.

In writing these evaluations, it is important to remember that they are often reproduced and sent to various people who are involved in the student's studies, candidacy oversight, and evaluation for ordination. Therefore, it is important that these evaluations be clear, concise, easy to read, and either **written in black ink or typed** dark enough to reproduce.

The evaluations should reflect whether or not the student has completed the SPM learning objectives written at the beginning of the term. It is not necessary for a student to meet all of the objectives to get a good evaluation. When a student fails to meet an objective, you, the student, and the supervisor should determine what, if anything, the student learned from the failure. If the student learned from his or her failure to complete the objectives, this should be a part of the evaluation. A student may learn more in the failure of an objective than in its completion.

A second area of evaluation relates to the student's ability to assess personal growth or achievement, including a growing sense of strengths in ministry and areas of needed improvement.

The final section of the evaluation assesses the student's performance in several specific areas. Please see the evaluation forms for a listing of those areas.

Credit for SPM

The SPM will be graded P/F (Pass/Fail). The Director of Field Education will grant the grade. It will be listed as credit if the evaluations and coursework are satisfactory. If one or more of the evaluations is questionable, the Director of Field Education will call you, and together you will decide whether the student should receive credit or no credit.

The student's grade cannot be given until all evaluations are in. It is the student's responsibility to see to it that **your** evaluation and the supervisor's evaluation are completed and sent to the seminary. ***Thus, a student can be denied credit for SPM work if all of these evaluations are not turned in on time.***

Summary

SPM involves hard work and intentionality of learning on the part of the student, but it also requires gifts of time and wise counsel on your part. Yet, it is not only the student who gains from the field education experience. In helping to shape a person learning ministry, you can often gain new ideas and insights into your own beliefs and lay ministry, as well as collegial bonds of caring and support. Each party in the field education experience - the student, the field education committee, and the supervisor - has an opportunity to serve and be served. As a result the whole church is strengthened. May this bring spiritual growth to all and glory to God!

