

Field Supervisor Information

Introduction

As you have undoubtedly learned from your own experience, ministry is not something which can be learned without doing it. On the other hand, "doing ministry" may not always entail much learning--we can be so caught up in the hectic pace and seemingly insatiable needs that we do not stop to reflect, process, and evaluate our practice of ministry. Especially in the formative years of learning ministry skills and roles, an aspiring minister needs intentionality of learning while doing ministry on site. This combination is what the Supervised Practice of Ministry Program seeks to provide.

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 integration, 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 the supervisor invaluablely contribute through probing questions, feedback, sharing of experience, and support.

Integration - Ministry is a vocation which draws upon the wisdom and increased competence of experience, as well as the clarity of thought gained from study and reflection. It is inherently a combination of theory and practice, concepts and skills, ideas and relationships, critical reflection and action. Field education serves to integrate the learning gained from biblical studies; systematic, historical, and practical theology; and church history. Clergy supervisors who have had to do this integration themselves can play a key role in helping students in the process of integration. For example, you should prompt students to do theological reflection and think through the theological values underlying their preaching, teaching, programs, and other aspects of ministry.

Experience and Skills - While ministry cannot be reduced to skills and activities, skills are needed to interpret and communicate the Christian faith and tradition. In field education, students are given opportunities to perform tasks which draw upon and develop skills necessary for ministry under the guidance of a more experienced colleague.

Ministry Gifts - Field education enables students to identify, confirm, and develop their gifts for service to the people of God. It also helps students to see important areas where they need to work intentionally toward developing increased competency. Your feedback on both areas of giftedness and those needing further strengthening is very important.

Testing of Vocational Call - Often students are unclear about their call to ministry. Field education allows students to test different facets of ministry and see if these are suited for them. This is invaluable for the student's own sense of call, ongoing assessment by denominational committees overseeing the student's candidacy process, and the seminary's role in guiding and further preparing the student. A call is not just an inner conviction, but is something which must be tested and confirmed by

other members of the Body of Christ. The ministry setting is a natural place to evaluate appropriateness for ministry. You play a vital role in observing the student in ministry and assessing his or her ministry call and capability. You will ask questions and guide experiences that help to shape a student's emerging identity as a minister.

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. Minimum payment of \$400.00 per semester for SPM work.

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 all the categories of employment, the employing church or institution is encouraged to contribute to the Social Security payments of the student.

For a 9-15 month full-time internship, the church or institution should consider \$850.00-1,400.00 per month salary, plus housing, utilities, automobile expenses, moving expenses, medical insurance and the denominational pension plan, if possible.

For a summer internship (normally full-time), the church or institution should consider a salary of \$850.00-1,400.00 per month, plus housing, utilities, automobile transportation expenses, medical insurance, and some consideration for moving expenses.

For a part-time student pastorate (normally 20-30 hours per week), the church should consider a salary usually in the range of \$850.00-1,400.00 per month, plus housing, utilities, automobile transportation, expenses, medical insurance and, if possible, the denominational pension plan.

Your Role as Field Supervisor

As the field supervisor you have a unique role in the SPM process. You are a senior ministry colleague, usually with at least three years of ministry experience. You are typically on-site or at least familiar with the student's ministry site. You have also consented to be a sounding board for the student. Out of tradition, **we use the term field supervisor** to describe your role. That tends to carry the connotation of a hierarchical business relationship. **This is not what we have in mind.** We prefer to think of your role as one of **mentor**. Your experience and insight, honed by years in the ministry, are being drawn upon to shape the development of a junior colleague.

Training for Supervisors

Training is provided for new supervisors to help with understanding the supervisory role and the UDTS SPM program. Occasional training events will be held at the seminary.

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. If you are an off-site supervisor, you can still ask questions to check on whether the student's needs are being taken care of and whether the student is getting to know the congregation

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 they will be!). Genuine support provides the basis and context for helpful, constructive observations, listening, reflection, feedback, and evaluation.
3. **To observe.** How is the student doing in the various ministry areas? What seems to work for the student and what does not? In what areas does he or she need to grow? How are the congregation members responding to the student's ministry? Off-site supervisors are encouraged to arrange opportunities to observe the student. However, you may have to rely mostly on student self-assessments and conversations with members of the congregation.
4. **To listen.** As you already know from your own ministry, listening is not easy. It is more than passively hearing someone else talk. 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." A supervisor 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 to reflect.** The model of learning in SPM is action-reflection. The student acts or ministers in some way. The supervisor 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. You should also prompt the student to think more deeply about the theological values behind actions and plans.
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. Appendix A gives some recommended guidelines for giving useful feedback.
7. **To Assess.** One responsibility of the field supervisor is to share with the student your 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, you will be asked to complete an evaluation on a form provided by the seminary and discuss what you have written with the student. The evaluation is then submitted to the Field Education Office at the seminary.
8. **To discern.** The process of observing, listening, reflecting, giving feedback, and assessing all help a student to discern more fully different aspects of God's call on 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.

Other Members of the Team

You and the student are not the only people who are actively involved in the student's SPM experience. There are several other people who will play an active role in guiding and evaluating the student.

The Weekly Integrative Seminar. Each week during the regular semester, SPM students meet with a small group of peers and a faculty member with significant experience in pastoral ministry. During this hour and a half meeting, students learn new information about ministry, they also have the opportunity to discuss and reflect on issues that arise in their field settings.

The Lay Field Education Committee. A major component of the SPM experience is the Lay Field Education Committee. This committee is composed of 4-8 lay people who have agreed to support, guide, supervise, and evaluate the student. On-site supervisors usually initiate the selection and formation of this group. In student pastorates, the lay leaders involved in the recruitment of the student will usually play this organizing role. In either case, it is advisable to consult with the student during the selection and organization process. In a Presbyterian setting, the lay committee is often a subcommittee of the session or the personnel committee. In a United Methodist setting, the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee often assumes this important role. A special committee can also be formed at any church or organization to assume the role of the Field Education Committee. Preferably, it should have members representing a cross-section of the congregation or institution.

The Lay Field Education Committee meets with the student monthly to discuss the student's progress and offer suggestions. Supervisors may wish to attend the first session to introduce the student, help the committee understand their role, and jointly discuss the student's learning covenant. The committee also does a written evaluation of the student at the end of each SPM grading period. (For more information on this vital component, see the "Guidelines for Lay Field Education Committees.")

The academic supervisor. You are not the only supervisor that the student has--each student also has an academic supervisor. The academic supervisor for SPM is the Director of Field Education or the instructor for the SPM class. This faculty member conducts the SPM class, facilitates peer discussion of ministry dilemmas and decisions, and encourages theological reflection upon the practice of ministry. The academic supervisor reviews the learning contracts, student agreements, monthly reports, and final evaluations to ensure that the goals are suitable and the student is making progress. The final responsibility for grading rests with the academic supervisor.

Other Major Components of the Program

Several other major components comprise the SPM program at UDTS. These include the student agreement, the learning covenant, the weekly supervisory session, and evaluation.

The Learning Covenant. Probably one of the first and most important things that you and the student will do together is to develop the Learning Covenant. The learning covenant is a tool to help students focus their learning experiences. Experience is a good teacher, but a better teacher when the students identify beforehand what they seek to learn. See an example of a Learning Covenant at http://udts.dbq.edu/pdf_files/EXAMPLELEARNCOV.pdf

In Part II of the covenant, students write out briefly the job description that they have agreed to fulfill. This job description should have been settled prior to the time of writing the learning covenant. If a job description has already been developed by a church or institution, it may be attached. An estimate of the number of hours per week in each activity may also be appropriate.

In Part III, students covenant to work on specific learning objectives in two or more of the following areas: worship, preaching, teaching, visitation, pastoral care, committee responsibilities, group leadership, (youth/adult), evangelism, community outreach, and planning and administration. Emphases should be selected with both the student learning needs and the needs of the church in mind.

Learning objectives are to be: a) measurable; b) related to the guidelines for practice of ministry that emerge from specific ministry courses; c) conducive toward growing ability to reflect theologically on the practice of ministry; d) achievable; e) "owned" by the student; and f) represent a moderate rise in capability--success must be possible, but not guaranteed. A learning objective for SPM should have three parts: a) the statement of what the student wants to learn; b) the tasks involved in reaching that objective; and c) the means built-in for gaining feedback.

Two major questions should always be asked when a learning covenant is being developed: First, can the tasks be done within the amount of weeks that the student has available? Second, can the student complete the tasks in the amount of hours available each week?

The Bi-weekly Supervisory Meeting. Another major component of our SPM program is the bi-weekly supervisor meeting. It is expected that all students will meet with their field supervisors bi-weekly. The purpose of the meeting is for you to assist the student in analysis and reflection upon his or her work.

You and the student should agree early in the term as to what the basic agenda for the meetings will be. However, agendas for individual meetings may well vary to meet current needs. Suggested areas to cover:

1. **Current programs or congregational concerns.** For example, the student may be faced with a first funeral, a delicate marriage counseling situation, or the practical details of starting a visitation program.
2. **Theological reflection on ministry.** What are the theological issues at stake in a given situation? What theological values are represented? What is the student's sense of ministry? How does the student see himself or herself as a minister, including gifts, role, etc.? Are the student's preaching and actions in line with his or her theology and denominational tradition? For example, if the student believes in the priesthood of all believers and especially equipping the laity, is he or she doing that or carrying out a "lone ranger" ministry? Often case studies and verbatims are a helpful way to encourage deep reflection on a ministry situation.

Long-range planning for ministry and personal development. For example, discussion may cover working out a ministry pattern that nurtures marriage and family relationships, that avoid burnout, and that provides for continuing education and growth. This may also entail long range planning for the church, for administrative skill improvement, sermon series or seasonal strategies, and so on.

3. **Personal spiritual support.** It is always appropriate to ask a student about his or her own spiritual life. What is the student doing, such as regular Bible readings and prayer, to nurture spiritual growth? In what areas is spiritual growth evident? What is he or she learning about God's grace, faithfulness, and love? In what areas is your prayer support needed? Please take time to pray for each other.

Written Evaluations. At the end of the course, evaluations are to be completed by the student, the field education committee, and yourself. The reports if handwritten should be printed or legible; students may also submit the answers on an additional document which may be completed via computer. You and the student should exchange your evaluations, discuss them, and sign them prior to submitting them to the seminary Field Education Office. The student and the field education committee should also exchange, discuss and sign evaluations and then submit them to the seminary. These evaluation forms are to be found on the website.

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, and legible and in a format that may be reproduced.

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 field education committee 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 C/NC (Credit/No Credit). The SPM instructor and/or 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 the field education committee's evaluation and your evaluation are completed and sent to the seminary. ***Thus, a student can be denied credit for SPM work if the field education committee's or your evaluation is 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 shape a junior colleague, you can often gain new ideas and insights into your own work, as well as collegial bonds of caring and support. Each party in the field education experience--the student, the field education committee, and supervisor--has the 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!

APPENDIX "A"

Guidelines for Helpful, Loving Feedback

1. 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.
2. Give feedback about things that can be changed. It must be directed to behavior which the receiver can do something about.
3. Give feedback 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.