

Learning Covenant

A Resource for Supervised Ministry Education

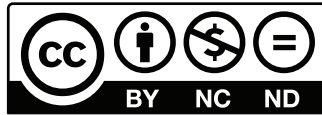
January 2018



The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada



Copyright © 2018
The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada



The content of this resource is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd) Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include the United Church copyright notice and the Creative Commons licence. Care has been taken to trace ownership of copyright material contained in this text. The publisher will gratefully accept any information that will enable it to rectify any reference or credit in subsequent printings.

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200
Toronto, ON
Canada M8X 2Y4
1-800-268-3781
www.united-church.ca
Design: Ian Ball, Graphics and Print



Supported by
Mission & Service

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| About Learning Covenants | 4 |
| How to Create the Learning Covenant | 4 |
| Participants in the Learning Covenant | 7 |
| Theological Reflection | 13 |
| Developing Learning Goals for the Learning Covenant | 19 |
| Providing Feedback | 25 |
| Procedure for Resolving Conflicts | 28 |
| Formal Evaluation | 29 |
| Celebrating the Covenant | 29 |
| Sample Covenanting Service | 30 |

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource describes the roles, responsibilities, and the covenant relationship between the candidate, the Lay Supervision Team (LST), and the educational supervisor during a supervised ministry education (SME) experience. It replaces SME 222 Lay Supervision Team and SME 226 Learning Together.

During a SME experience, a Learning Covenant creates the framework for the learning that will take place and how it will be evaluated. This resource will assist participants in the Learning Covenant to give shape to the agreement and articulate the learning goals. Please use it in tandem with the Supervised Ministry Education resource.

For the purposes of this document, “student minister” refers to a candidate for ordained ministry who is fulfilling a SME placement, a candidate for ordained ministry who is appointed as part of a ministry-based education program, or an applicant for designated lay ministry fulfilling the supervised ministry education requirement for recognition. The language of “student minister” and “supervisee” is used interchangeably to refer to a candidate or a DLM applicant.

About Learning Covenants

What Is a Covenant?

The dictionary defines a covenant as a contract, a written agreement between participants. In the biblical tradition it has a richer and deeper meaning, building on God's ancient promise:

I will be your God, and you shall be my people. (Jeremiah 7:23)

Covenant, in this sacred sense, refers to the binding together of people in mutual trust and loyalty with God and within the community of faith.

What Is a Learning Covenant?

In supervised ministry education, the Learning Covenant articulates the agreement between the participants in the experience. It is a commitment to work, learn, and grow together. Covenant is rooted in faith. It assumes and encourages mutual respect, support, openness, and honesty. It anticipates difficulties and offers help in a constructive way. It is intended, primarily, to support learning and growth in ministry.

How to Create the Learning Covenant

The Learning Covenant includes a signed statement (see the example below) plus attachments. The total package might cover the topics outlined in the chart that follows.

| Topic | What to Include | Resources |
|-------------------------|---|----------------|
| Educational Assumptions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your common understanding of supervision and the roles of the participants?• What does mutual respect mean to the parties in the covenant? How will you be intentional about developing trust?• What does confidentiality mean in this context? What is your agreement on how confidentiality will be maintained? | pp. 7–8, 11–12 |

| Topic | What to Include | Resources |
|---|---|----------------------|
| Practical Considerations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Logistical details of the agreement including where and how often meetings will take place for supervision. Who calls and facilitates the meetings? 2. Structure of your time together: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Who is responsible for the agenda? b. What ought to be included in your agenda? c. Things which, by agreement, will not be dealt with during supervision d. What are the boundaries? e.g., time, space, topics, frequency of meetings | pp. 7–12 |
| Models of Theological Reflection | What agreed upon models of theological reflection will be utilized during supervision sessions? | pp. 13–18 |
| Learning Goals | <p>Learning goals and action plans including a listing of planned activities and desired outcomes of the following parties in the covenant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supervisee’s learning goals, action plans, and methods of evaluation • supervisor’s learning goals • Lay Supervision Team’s learning goals | pp. 19–24 |
| Feedback & Evaluation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a mutually agreeable process for feedback and evaluation. Include methods and tools to be used during supervision: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Verbatims or case studies b. Tapes or sermon manuscripts c. Specific reading assignments d. Journals kept by supervisee e. Other... 2. Basis for revising or renegotiating the Learning Covenant. How will you review the Learning Covenant to ensure that it is being honoured? How might you modify your covenant if it is no longer satisfactory? 3. When and how will formal evaluation be carried out? Who needs to receive reports? | pp. 9–10, 20, 25, 29 |
| Agreed Procedures for Conflict Resolution | How will you address conflict if it arises between/among you? Who will you consult with, alone or together, if things arise which cause you to seek outside advice? | pp. 28 |
| Rituals | How will you celebrate the covenant at the beginning and how will you close the Learning Covenant at the end of the experience? How will the wider community be involved? | pp. 29–31 |

Sample Learning Covenant Format

Learning Covenant

This Learning Covenant covers the period from: _____ to _____

Name of Supervisee _____

Name of Supervisor _____

Supervision will take place on _____ (date) at _____ (location)
with opportunities to reflect on learning goals.

Name of Lay Supervision Team representative _____

Lay Supervision Team meetings will take place at _____ (location)
with opportunities for reflection on learning goals.

Evaluation will occur at the mid-point and end-point of the SME through the following
process:

Acknowledging our humanity, we agree to the following process for conflict resolution:

This Learning Covenant with attached learning goals is agreed to by all participants,
with opportunities for revision as learning unfolds.

Signatures _____ (Supervisee)

_____ (Supervisor)

_____ (Lay Supervision Team
representative)

Date _____

Attachments: The learning goals and action plans of all participants to the covenant are
attached as well as additional documents to describe the covenant agreement.

Participants in the Learning Covenant

Three parties are involved in the Learning Covenant: the Lay Supervision Team, the educational supervisor, and the supervisee/student minister.

Although a SME involves three-way conversation among the supervisee, supervisor, and Lay Supervision Team, the principal relationships are between the Lay Supervision Team and the supervisee and the educational supervisor and the supervisee.

The following sections describe the roles and responsibilities of the Lay Supervision Team and the educational supervisor, and their relationship with the supervisee.

The Lay Supervision Team

The Lay Supervision Team is a representative group of lay people associated with the learning site who are dedicated to the ministry and mission of the church. Their role is to support the student minister as the student minister seeks to grow personally, intellectually, professionally, spiritually, and in social awareness.

LST members function as interpreters about the life of the congregation. They also interpret the process of education and supervision to the congregation.

Lay Supervision Team members are active participants in the Learning Covenant that is made with the student minister and supervisor. Therefore, individuals chosen to be members of the LST need to be open to their own learning about the wider processes of the church; the functions of ordained, diaconal, and lay ministers; and their own Christian calling as disciples.

The LST fulfills its role by

- sharing perceptions and knowledge of the site and the community. LST members reflect with the student minister on the practice of ministry experiences and the learning opportunities that take place.
- offering feedback to the student minister. The LST contributes to integrating the learning and fulfilling the Learning Covenant.
- engaging in conversation and reflection on experiences. The LST members grow in their own understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God.
- helping the student minister gain skills for ministry leadership, deepen awareness of pastoral identity, enhance their spirituality, and gain interpersonal awareness.

Lay Supervision Team Meetings with the Supervisee

Through planned times for conversation, prayer, and reflection, the Lay Supervision Team and the supervisee learn together. During meetings, members are to offer support, give feedback, and share in theological reflection with a supervisee.

Depending on the type of SME experience (e.g., 8-month placement, student supply appointment, DLM applicant appointment, and so on—see Supervised Ministry Education resource for information regarding the various type of SMEs), the Lay Supervision Team will meet roughly every three or four weeks. For student ministers who are appointed for a year or more, meeting once a month is sufficient. The LST may need to meet with the supervisee more often at the beginning of the SME to get to know them and develop the Learning Covenant. Additional meetings may also be required to finalize evaluations.

Other details to consider:

- The convener or chair of the committee should be someone who can encourage all members of the LST to take part in the discussion and express their points of view.
- Meetings are held in a comfortable place with no distractions, such as a church room or in the homes of LST members.
- The agenda of meetings should be decided ahead of time by the LST convener or chair and the student minister, or by the whole committee at its previous meeting.
- The length of meetings will depend on how long you need in order to deal with the concerns and agenda of the student minister and the members of the LST. It is recommended that about two hours be set aside for each meeting. This will allow time for people to probe the issues of ministry to some depth, as well as allow some time for worship and socializing.
- Since the meetings are intended to focus on the learning goals and experiences of the student minister, it is *not* appropriate for their partner or other family members to be present. The LST may invite the student minister's partner/family to a social gathering, however, to welcome and get to know them.

Timeline of Meetings

| Timing | Purpose/Tasks/Guidelines |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Before the Student Minister Arrives | <p>The LST meets with a representative from the Conference Internship & Educational Supervision (CIES) Committee (in some Conferences, this may be a consultant or a liaison) for an orientation and training regarding their role. During this time the LST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gets to know fellow LST members • clarifies the role of the LST • plans to attend the orientation event provided by the CIES Committee • discusses how you will work together to determine an agenda for each meeting • discusses the available learning experiences and the task needs of the congregation • begins to share learning goals and action plans. <p>The LST takes an active role in welcoming the student minister:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write to the student minister welcoming them. You might include a copy of your community's annual report, newsletter, bulletin, and so on. You might also encourage members of the congregation or site to send notes of welcome. • If necessary, discuss how you can help with any housing concerns. • Plan for how you can introduce the student minister to the community. Pre-introduce the student minister to the congregation through notes in the bulletin, newsletter, and so on. • Plan to appropriately share the Learning Covenant with the whole congregation and begin to plan a ritual to introduce the student minister and mark the beginning of the Learning Covenant. |
| First Meeting with Student Minister | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be intentional about getting to know one another. • Clarify the role and purpose of the LST. • Talk about how the meetings will be conducted (timing, location, prayer, facilitation). • Discuss the meaning of confidentiality and commit to how you will (or will not) share information during and outside the meetings. • Ensure all members have a copy of this booklet and the appropriate evaluation form. • Begin the process of preparing the Learning Covenant, and set a date for completion. <p>Make plans to recognize the Learning Covenant and the participants in worship.</p> |
| Ongoing Meetings | <p>Guidelines for a typical meeting of the Lay Supervision Team with the supervisee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make sure that during the meeting <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. someone takes notes b. all participants have an opportunity to speak and share c. everyone practises active listening 2. Open with a devotion/worship time: prayer, reading, singing, or centring meditation. |

| Timing | Purpose/Tasks/Guidelines |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Ongoing Meetings (cont.) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Check in to see how people have been doing since the last meeting. 4. Invite the student minister to share some aspect of ministry they have been engaged in, and discuss the experience as a group. Engage in conversation and theological reflection regarding the supervisee's learning goals and experiences. Offer feedback, insight, and support. 5. End the meeting when you decided it would end. 6. Determine which aspect of the Learning Covenant you will discuss at your next meeting, and set the date. 7. Share brief closing remarks and offer a closing prayer or blessing. |
| Mid-point Evaluation | <p>Hold a meeting without the student minister present to complete the mid-point evaluation. Discuss and respond to the evaluation questions and arrange for someone to type up the evaluation responses.</p> <p>The three parties of the Learning Covenant are then called together to share evaluation responses. In some Conferences, there may be a CIES consultant or liaison present for this meeting.</p> <p>This may be a time to also review the Learning Covenant and make changes, if necessary.</p> |
| Third-to-Last Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make plans for the final evaluation. • Discuss how the student minister will say goodbye to the many people who have become important to them. • Plan a ritual and party to end the relationship. |
| Second-to-Last Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet without the student minister present. • Discuss and respond to the evaluation questions and arrange for someone to type up the evaluation responses. • Finalize the arrangements for the farewell event(s). |
| Final Meeting with Student Minister | <p>The three parties of the Learning Covenant are called together to share final evaluation responses. In some Conferences, there may be a CIES consultant or liaison present for this meeting.</p> <p>As a committee, with the student minister, have a rite of closure for the end of the Learning Covenant to celebrate the experience.</p> |
| After Final Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the experience of the Lay Supervision Team and evaluate the team's work. • Prepare a report for the church committee to whom the LST is accountable. |

The Educational Supervisor

In the context of supervised ministry education, the educational supervisor provides a disciplined opportunity for intentional reflection. The role of the educational supervisor is to assist the supervisee to reflect theologically on the present call and current practice of ministry. This intentional practice of reflection helps shape individuals toward integrated faith, and develop ministers who are aware of themselves, others, social context, and the big questions of theology and spirit.

Forming the Relationship between the Educational Supervisor and the Supervisee

The educational supervisor and the supervisee will want to consider the following points as they meet together to clarify roles and expectations and create the Learning Covenant:

- The educational supervisor and the supervisee are expected to meet for the equivalent of an hour each week (or less depending on the nature of the SME; see the Supervised Ministry Education resource for more information on expectations related to the educational supervisor) to discuss, analyze, theologically reflect, and engage in shared reflection on ministry experiences that emerge in the candidate's learning site.
- Make arrangements for the format of the meetings and the logistics of how they will take place. Some meetings may be conducted by telephone or Skype, but supervisees and supervisors should plan for as many face-to-face meetings as possible. Discuss location, timing, format, and agenda for meetings together.
- At the beginning of the supervised ministry education experience, it is helpful to identify the learning needs and styles of both the supervisor and the supervisee. This may include discussing hopes, fears, and expectations. For instance, some like to plunge in, while others may wish to observe or to read some material before engaging in some tasks.
- For both parties to deepen their learning, the supervisor and the supervisee must develop trust. You may want to reflect on ways to develop trust and how power dynamics work within the supervisory relationship. For instance, the supervisor has power to evaluate the supervisee, yet the supervisee carries personal power through the self-evaluation process. The supervisor may be in a familiar setting, yet the supervisee has power to speak from a different perspective. Or the supervisee is the pastor in a pastoral charge and the supervisor is seen as an outsider.
- Not all issues can be discussed in the initial stages of forming a relationship, but it may be helpful to identify how each person works through difficult issues, who each may talk to, and how resolution may occur. If other staff members are involved, they may also need to discuss how to resolve conflicts.
- Initially, the supervisee will spend time writing their learning goals. The educational supervisor will support this process by meeting with the student minister to help clarify what they hope to learn during the supervised ministry education experience and how that learning can be achieved and evaluated.

- As a member of the Learning Covenant, the educational supervisor is expected to develop learning goals as a commitment to the ongoing learning and growth that is required in ministry. These will be shared with the supervisee.
- Once goals are in place, the supervisee can use the supervision time to reflect on how incidents that arise relate to the stated learning goals. It may be helpful for the supervisee to write a critical incident report or a theological reflection to give to the supervisor before the supervision time. This will help each person prepare for that time and contribute to deeper reflection. The educational supervisor and supervisee will want to review together some models for theological reflection found later in this resource and agree to a format that will facilitate learning and growth.
- Where a staff team exists, it is important to discuss working styles, expectations, and responsibilities for the whole staff. Some areas of learning may involve working with a staff person other than the educational supervisor (e.g., a chaplain at a local hospital or another ministry personnel). The nature of this relationship needs to be discussed—in particular, how a staff person who is not in a direct supervisory relationship may comment on the supervisee's work.
- If the educational supervisor is also a member of the ministry staff team or an active lay person in the congregation, the time set aside for intentional supervision must not be used to do regular weekly planning or church business in general. That kind of work needs its own time set apart from supervision, such as at the weekly staff meeting. If church business arises during a supervision meeting, arrange another meeting to deal with it.
- Off-site supervisors may not be able to observe tasks and offer direct feedback. In those cases, it is helpful to discuss how the supervisee can seek feedback from people on the learning site. Identify ways the supervisee can report to the supervisor about overall work and specific incidents that arise.

Theological Reflection

What Is Theological Reflection?

The purpose of theological reflection is to discern how God is present and active in our lives. We are theologically reflecting when we ask “Where is God in this?” and “How is God active in this?”

When we theologically reflect on events and experiences in our lives, we are not seeking to fix the situation or to problem solve. The goal is to understand the Divine more deeply.

Theological reflection asks us to consider what the sources of our faith (Bible, theology, traditions...) say about our experiences. It invites us to consider what our experiences are teaching us about God, ourselves, our theology, our assumptions, and our ministry with others.

Theological reflection affirms the statement from the United Church’s creed: “We believe in God: who has created and is creating...” Reflecting theologically on the events of our lives today invites us to consider how God continues to be a creative force in the world in our everyday experiences.

“Theological reflection is not a problem-solving process. Reflection is an open-ended process, with no right or wrong answers. Clear answers may not emerge, and we may not find quick fixes to life’s problems; yet we will find deeper meaning through conversation with God about everyday issues. Theological reflection is an opportunity to deepen a sense of God’s presence in our lives, and an opportunity to discover what we believe and how our faith and life intersect.”
(Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups by Abigail Johnson)

Resources for Theological Reflection

Johnson, Abigail. *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups*. Herndon Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2004.

Killen, Patricia O’Connell, and John de Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. Crossroad Classic, 1994.

Models for Theological Reflection

A Model for Theological Reflection on Experience

by the Rev. Dr. Abigail Johnson

1. Name the Experience

Briefly describe the ministry in which you are engaged. Think of several experiences/ events/situations in your current situation in which you have played a significant role. Select ONE, preferably one with which you were challenged or about which you have some questions or concerns.

2. Reflect on the Experience

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- What was my role?
- What were my reactions?
- How did others respond?
- Where did it leave me?

3. Analyze the Experience

- What factors were at work in the situation? (attitudes, emotions, assumptions, social and cultural issues, power dynamics, etc.)
- What was at stake for me? (How does it connect with my own history, family and/or life experience, convictions, values, etc.)
- How was I enriched or challenged by it?
- What did I discover about myself?
- What do I want to remember or forget about it?
- What questions or concerns remain with me?

4. Make Some Faith Connections

- What theological images/symbols/ concepts does it evoke?
- Who is God in this situation, for you and for others?

- What biblical, historical, literary, or other stories does it call to mind?
- What learning from United Church tradition is applicable?
- How does it relate to other faiths/ cultures/traditions?

5. Reflect on Your Learning

- How has my faith been enriched or challenged by it?
- What have I learned or discovered about the practice of ministry?
- What have I learned or discovered about my own pastoral identity?
- How does all this relate to my learning goals?

6. Pray

As you conclude your reflection on this situation, take time to pray, giving thanks for the learning arising from this situation, letting go of hurts and concerns, and greeting new opportunities for pastoral depth and sensitivity.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

Using this experience and your reflections on it, suggest some open-ended themes or questions that might open up a broader discussion of the theology and practice of ministry for discussion in a group or with a mentor.

Spiral Model of Theological Reflection

Action/Reflection Learning Model in Theological Education

(Used with permission from the Centre for Christian Studies)

In the Spiral Model you start by thinking about a **concrete experience** you have had. You then explore the **emotions and senses** associated with that experience. Following this you think about the **patterns, ideas, and connections** arising from this experience. Finally you determine a course of **action** (leading to new experiences to be reflected upon).

Concrete Experience (C.E.) DESCRIBE AN EXPERIENCE

- meaningful
- impactful (+ or -)
- an “aha” (insight)
- one specific activity
- one concept

Active Experimentation (A.E.) HOW CAN I ACT?

- In what situations can I test this understanding/ insight /awareness?
- Are there follow-up actions I need to take in terms of relationships (e.g. addressing conflict)?
- How would I adapt/modify my behaviour or actions in the future?
- What blocks and supports are there to action?
- What alternative strategies are there for action?
- What are the implications (for me/ others) in not taking action?
- What reading/research/ resources can I discover for more depth and understanding?
- What skills/knowledge/ values do I need to acquire?



Reflective Observation (R. O.) EXPLORE EMOTIONS AND SENSES

- My feelings/behaviour/ leadership
- What did I see and hear in the environment of the setting?
- How I saw/see others in this experience.
- How do I perceive others see themselves?
- What are the tensions in me/ others/the situation?
- How does this experience affirm my prior assumptions /ideas/ skills/ experience/ knowledge?
- How does this experience unsettle and challenge my prior assumptions/beliefs/ experiences/ skills/ knowledge?

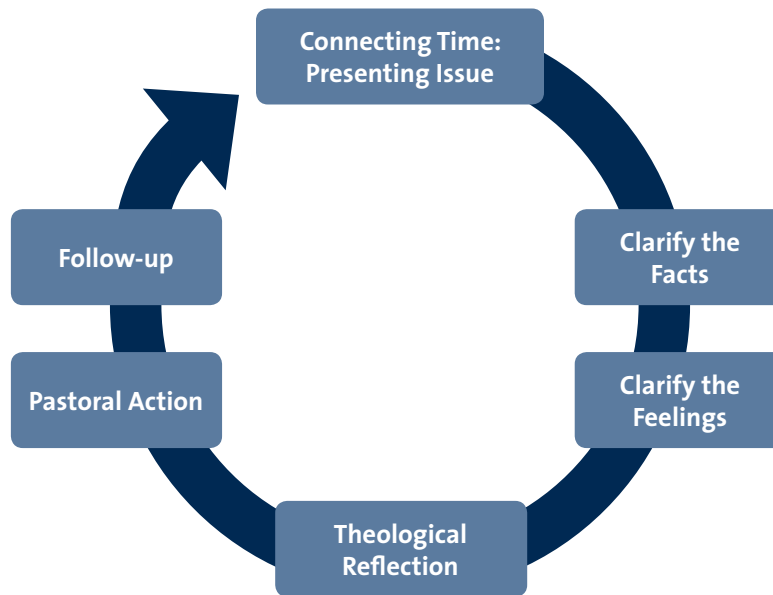
Abstract Conceptualization (A.C.) NAMING IDEAS, PATTERNS AND CONNECTIONS

- What does this experience mean/say to me?
 - personally/professionally

Explore:

- theoretical readings, articles, scholarship/research
- biblical connections, stories, images, teachings
- theological reflections... sin, grace, presence of God, hope & resurrection, incarnation, mission, ecclesiology, etc.

Educational Supervision Model Theological Reflection “Loop”



Connecting Time: Presenting Issue

- Why is it an issue?

Clarify the Facts

- Who, what, when, where, how?
- What are you still questioning about the situation?
- Be clear what “the issue” is.

Clarify the Feelings

- What emotions are you aware of?
- How do they make you feel (positive/negative)?
- What do you fear?

Theological Reflection

- So what? analysis
- Meaning in the event: Where do you see the Holy? hope? What are positive/negative points?
- Does this remind you of a story from the Bible/from your culture?
- Where is God in this situation?

Pastoral Action

- What next?
- What’s in the way?
- What are the alternatives?

Follow-up

- Plan for next session
- Review Learning Covenant
- How does the issue fit into the Learning Covenant?

The Wesley Quadrilateral

(Source: Confessing Our Faith, a project of The United Church of Canada, circa 1983)

Theological reflection begins by identifying the issue to be considered. It could be setting the budget, planning an anniversary, preparing a sermon, even confronting a dispute.

Now choose one of the areas of the quadrilateral: scripture, experience, tradition, and reason. You may begin with any one of the four quadrants. Write down ideas and questions as you look at the issue from each of the four perspectives. What does experience teach you? What does scripture have to say to this issue? Are there traditions surrounding this topic? Are we reasoning clearly?

| | |
|--|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">SCRIPTURE</p> <p>In matters of faith and practice scripture is essential for theological reflection. Its authority becomes apparent when we appreciate the richness of the many kinds of writing in the Bible and learn their original source and purpose.</p> <p>Scripture is relevant to our life experience. It also tests the past—such as the tradition of the church and the changing ideas of right and wrong.</p> <p>It reminds us that we are the people of the living word. Writings that grew out of experiences of faith are now treasured by the community of faith.</p> <p>Turning to scripture to discern God’s will is a stimulating spiritual exploration well known to many and new to others.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">EXPERIENCE</p> <p>Experience is the soil out of which life grows and takes on meaning. The story of faith is the story of reflection and experience.</p> <p>Think of experience as putting things together, making sense of them, seeing patterns and purposes emerge. For people of faith this includes experience of the presence of God. It involves our sense of ourselves as made in the image of God and as inhabitants in a world God loves.</p> <p>Christian experience is varied and while all may be valid, none can claim to be absolutely right, overriding the experience of other faithful people. The experience of love is both our safeguard and our liberation.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">TRADITION</p> <p>We are shaped by the past in ways that are subtle but powerful. We have received the faith from others. It has been expressed in acts of worship, in music, in convictions about personal conduct, and in responsibilities toward our neighbours.</p> <p>Some of our tradition is set out in confessions of faith, in credos, which are efforts to say publicly what we believe. Often these come in times of crisis, or from wilderness experiences.</p> <p>We have oral traditions also, as did those very young churches in the first Christian centuries.</p> <p>A living church has a lively memory, linked to a world of faith, which is discovered in and through tradition.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">REASON</p> <p>Reason is God’s gift to the church as well as to the individual. Reason (or intellect) brings order to our theological thinking and therefore to our decisions and ultimately to our actions. We become more consistent, constant, dependable, and steadfast.</p> <p>Reason is necessary when dealing with new situations. It is the “common” sense that makes the obscure clear.</p> <p>Reason helps to guard against misguided interpretation of scripture, or faulty interpretation of experience. It respects innermost thought and individual insights, while recognizing the interdependence of the whole of creation.</p> |

You will likely discover as you work (individually or together) that once you have put down the obvious points in each quadrant, new insights emerge. Sometimes completely new views of the issue come forward when you read over the four quadrants. You will find that scripture pushes against scripture, and that people's experiences differ radically.

As the work continues, the insights from one quadrant flow into the others and the lines begin to disappear. Something else happens. We discover that we are led into larger fields of truth (John 16:13). When we talk about scripture, we contribute what we do know, and we search for further knowledge, understanding, and insights. When we apply reason, it takes everything we've got, plus the contribution of our neighbours. The quadrilateral makes us aware of both what we know and what we need to know. It opens up areas of spiritual growth for us.

The use of the Wesley Quadrilateral moves us toward the awesome conviction that our life is set in the presence of God, a greatness beyond our understanding (Psalm 145). Theological reflection does not reduce the profound mysteries of God to formulas or slogans. Out of it may come clarity about pressing current issues. Out of it may come creeds, confessions, statements, hymns, liturgies—all of them attempts to express what we believe.

When undertaken as a spiritual exercise, theological reflection quickens our faith, sets our daily concerns in a larger context, and reminds us what we are called to be. It is a way of engaging in life.

Developing Learning Goals for the Learning Covenant

Based on the concept that we are all lifelong learners, it is assumed that every participant (members of the Lay Supervision Team, educational supervisor, and supervisee) will develop learning goals.

The time and energy that LST members and the educational supervisor put into their roles will not only help the United Church train future leaders, but it will also be an experience of enrichment and personal challenge. Members of the LST and the educational supervisor may focus their learning goals on growing in their faith, understanding of ministry and the United Church, or personal goals of relationship, dealing with conflict, giving feedback, and so on.

The supervisee, Lay Supervision Team, and supervisor may have some goals in common. All of these participants may also have individual learning goals. These goals should relate to the realities of the learning site, including tasks and responsibilities outlined in the pastoral charge's application to be approved as a supervised ministry education site or in a position description, as well as those discovered during the supervision time together. It is important to be realistic about what each participant can expect from the experience.

Remember: We do not learn from experience; we learn by reflecting on experience. The Learning Covenant enables all participants to reflect both during and after an experience.

The following format and guidelines may assist in creating learning goals:

Learning Goal (What do I need to learn?)

- Learning goals identify what you want to learn and why. They should be as specific as possible.
- Learning goals are usually stated with an awareness of where you are beginning and how far along you hope to be by the end of the process. You might use phrases such as “begin to,” “increase my skill in,” or “develop more understanding of.” Learning in ministry is lifelong; this Learning Covenant is one phase of that learning.
- Begin by assessing your current strengths and weaknesses.
 - What strengths need further development?
 - What areas are challenging for you and where do you need experience?
 - Identify things about yourself personally, such as your sense of self, your relationships with others, and your spirituality. What areas do you need to develop?
 - What theological questions do you have, e.g., how do you understand and apply your understanding of the Bible, theology, justice? How does your understanding of theology influence your practice of ministry? Are your actions consistent with your beliefs?

- What skills for ministry do you need to obtain, e.g., theological reflection (exploring where God is for you in the midst of ministry), leading groups, communicating as an effective listener and speaker? Be specific about what you need to learn in regards to skills for ministry. It is not enough to say that you simply need to gain experience.

Action Plans (How will I go about learning?)

- How will you work on your goals? How will you know that you have accomplished them?
- Action plans are specific to each learning goal; they refer to how learning goals will be achieved. Be as concrete as you can.
- Action plans include an agreement on how much work/time is appropriate to spend on tasks, how tasks are assigned/accepted, to whom the supervisee is accountable for the various tasks, and what resources are available (e.g., people, materials, and space).

Methods of Evaluation (How will I reflect on the experiences of learning?)

- Evaluation of the learning goals should be ongoing in any accountable learning process.
- Evaluation usually works best when it takes place at agreed times and in previously agreed ways. It involves growth in understanding and competence in a spirit of trust, openness, honesty, and mutual respect.
- The emphasis is on what the participants have learned together, taking into account all the discussions that have happened over the duration of the period of supervised learning. The process includes self-assessment, feedback, critical reflection, and future planning.
- Action plans may be evaluated by using
 - case studies
 - written verbatim (reports of conversations or visits)
 - a journal of reflections
 - a theological reflection
 - evaluation questionnaires
 - reflections on specific tasks, such as visiting patients in hospital or leading Bible study

Sample Learning Goals

Example 1: This goal could be for the supervisee

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Learning Goal: I want to begin to learn how to offer pastoral care that enables individuals to feel supported and better able to reflect on their faith and understanding of God.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be assigned specific individuals with whom to relate on visits • practise active listening skills and be intentional about creating space for faith conversations • reflect on how I relate to people who are different from me in age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, economic class, and educational background • share four written verbatims with my supervisor | <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observe whether some people are reflecting theologically as a result of our pastoral conversations • keep a journal to record my reflections and learnings • request feedback from the supervisor and the Lay Supervision Team • request feedback from those experiencing my pastoral care |

Example 2: This goal could be for the supervisee, or Lay Supervision Team members with some different action plans

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Learning Goal: I want to develop my leadership skills in facilitating learning and discussion in a group setting.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify skills I already have and specific skills I want to work on • rotate leadership in Lay Supervision Team meetings for planning and leading discussion • lead an adult Bible study group for six weeks during Lent • test different educational methods (experiential, storytelling, audiovisuals) to discover my own comfort and convictions about learning and the responses of adults to different methods • work to integrate my academic learning in biblical and theological understanding with the experience/understanding of lay people | <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the changes in my skills • keep a journal to reflect on my learnings • identify the educational methods that were most effective |

Example 3: This goal could be for Lay Supervision Team members, the supervisee, and/or the supervisor

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Learning Goal: I want to learn more about how to give useful feedback, both affirming and critical, in a way that enables growth and openness to trying new methods.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> work with the information provided in this resource and identify ways of implementing the guidelines for offering feedback ask the feedback recipients what could have made the feedback more helpful | <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> assess which methods were effective and comfortable |

Example 4: This goal could be for the supervisor, supervisee, and/or Lay Supervision Team as a group

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Learning Goal: I/We want to learn to identify moments of God’s grace.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reflect with others on the meaning of God’s grace and on specific experiences in the SME that can be interpreted as grace-filled identify how I understand myself as a spiritual being in the experiences of life | <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> articulate the meaning of God’s grace |

Example 5: This goal could be for the Lay Supervision Team and the supervisee, with additional focus for the supervisee on enabling others to learn.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Learning Goal: We want to understand and learn to do theological reflection and learn how to enable others to reflect theologically.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> discuss what theological reflection means and include a time of theological reflection in each Lay Supervision Team meeting and supervisory session find tools for doing theological reflection read books (name them here) about theological reflection | <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe what theological reflection means assess the various tools/methods used and their effectiveness |

Example 6: This could be a goal for the supervisee.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Learning Goal: By the end of the Learning Covenant, I want to discover my gifts in preaching and grow in my ability to preach using various styles..</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss my understanding of preaching with my supervisor and the Lay Supervision Team • try various preaching styles (storytelling, teaching, evangelistic, drama, using no notes, etc.) • create a response sheet/feedback form for the Lay Supervision Team to use • keep a journal of my discoveries and learnings | <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss my reflections with my supervisor, including sharing written copies of my sermons and video or audio tapes • meet with my Lay Supervision Team soon after the worship service to share their written reflections on the reaction sheet/feedback form • on a regular basis, share my journals of self-discovery and learning |

Example 7: This goal could be for the supervisee, or supervisor with some different action plans

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Learning Goal: I want to deepen my understanding of how to offer administrative leadership that is theologically grounded and contextual.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • find and read the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel and identify which standards relate to the leadership of administration • find and read <i>The Manual</i> and related resources online, specific to ministerial leadership: the M&P resource, congregational governance resources, trustees’ resource • engage with the governance structure of the pastoral charge and learn about upcoming issues and changes • prepare a theological reflection for two different contexts in which United Church policy is used (e.g., a governing body meeting, a presbytery meeting, an Education and Students Committee meeting or interview) | <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observe and receive feedback on what effect prepared theological reflection has on policy decision making processes • receive feedback on my ability to live out the standards that relate to the leadership of administration |

Example 8: This goal could be for the supervisee, supervisor, or Lay Supervision Team members with some different action plans

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Learning Goal: I want to deepen my understanding of the organization, policies, and governance of The United Church of Canada and my role in administrative leadership.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learn and discuss the definitions of polity and policy • find and read the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel and identify which standards relate to the leadership of administration • identify and share with Lay Supervision Team / supervisor skills that need further development from the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice • find and read <i>The Manual</i> and related resources online, specific to ministerial leadership: congregational governance resources, trustees' resource • engage with the governance structure of the pastoral charge, and with the presbytery; attend meetings, become familiar with agenda items and learn about upcoming issues and changes | <p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the changes in my skills • keep a journal to reflect on my learnings in relation to the identified Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice • request feedback from my governing body about my leadership through policy conversations |

Providing Feedback

Feedback is an ongoing process of comment offered to all participants in the Learning Covenant in response to their learning goals. Particular attention is given to providing feedback to the supervisee. This happens formally in regular meetings.

Feedback is a way of helping someone to consider making changes by offering information about how they affect others. It involves naming both positive areas and those that need more growth. Feedback should be ongoing. The regularly scheduled assessment or evaluation time provides an opportunity to summarize the feedback.

Lay people can often give helpful feedback on sermons, pastoral visiting, small group leadership, “presence” at church events, and so on. Sometimes the best sharing comes out of our own experiences. For example, how helpful (or unhelpful) was the church/minister in a time of illness or grief? What are your expectations in such situations?

Follow these guidelines to provide useful feedback:

Descriptive

Be descriptive rather than judgmental. By describing your own reaction, you leave the other person free to use the feedback as they see fit. By avoiding judging language, you reduce the likelihood of a defensive reaction. It is important to use “I” language in offering feedback, thus owning your observations, perceptions, and feelings.

Example: “When you use the word ‘girl’ when referring to me, I feel put down and not recognized as an adult woman.”

Specific

Be specific rather than general.

Example: To tell someone they are “dominating” is not as useful as saying, “Just now when we were deciding the issue, I felt you were not listening to what others said. I felt forced to accept your arguments.”

Appropriate

Take into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs. What we offer needs to be supportive and responsible.

Example: “I know that speaking in large groups is difficult for you, and I appreciated the effort it took for you to make your contribution at the board meeting. Your comments were helpful to me.”

Requested

If you want feedback, ask for it; if you have feedback to offer, wait to be asked. Feedback is most useful when the receiver has formulated the kind of question the observer can answer.

Example: Student ministers can create a worship feedback sheet listing the areas they want feedback about.

Usable

Direct your feedback toward behaviour the receiver can do something about. It is frustrating to be reminded of some shortcoming or characteristic over which one has no control.

Example: “I enjoyed your Children’s Time last Sunday, but I would have found it more helpful if you had used the microphone so the adults in the congregation could have heard it too.”

Timely

Time your feedback carefully. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after a given behaviour depending, of course, on the person’s readiness to hear it and the availability of support from others. Unless you are prepared to spend time with the person, it is not helpful to make a quick critical comment immediately following the observed behaviour.

Example: “The process you used in Bible study tonight was not as helpful to me as it might have been. Do you have time to sit down and talk about it a bit, or can we set up a time soon?”

Clear

Ensure you are communicating clearly. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.

Example: “Let me see if I understand what you are saying to me. Was it the specific word I used in the sermon that concerned you or the expression of my theology that you heard?”

Accurate

Check for accuracy. When feedback is given in a group, both the giver and the receiver have an opportunity to check with others about the accuracy of the feedback. Is this person’s impression shared by others?

Example: “In this evaluation time, one of you said that more printed resources would have been helpful. What do the rest of you have to say about that?”

Related to the Learning Covenant

Relate feedback to the Learning Covenant—its goals and action plans.

Example: “In relation to your goal to learn more about offering pastoral care, I noticed that when you responded to Jane in our Bible study group, she seemed to withdraw. What do you think was going on there?”

A Model for Non-violent Communication

Marshall Rosenberg (Director of the Center for Nonviolent Communication in Sherman, TX) has developed a form of communication that can empower people to exchange resources and resolve differences non-violently. His model is based on speaking honestly and responsibly about one's perceptions, feelings, values, and desires, as well as listening to the perceptions, feelings, values, and desires of others. This model is one way to give feedback as outlined above.

There are four basic pieces of information to exchange:

When you said/did _____,

I felt _____,

and because I value _____,

I would like _____.

Procedure for Resolving Conflicts

The Learning Covenant should spell out a process for resolving grievances and differences that cannot be resolved by those involved. As in all human relationships, tensions or disagreements may arise. It is hoped that these are dealt with face to face and resolved as soon as possible. However, sometimes difficulties arise that two people cannot work out themselves. In these cases, sometimes a third party is asked to assist in the process.

A grievance or conflict procedure is like a spare tire on a car—you hope you will never have to use it, but you are glad to have it when you need it. The supervisee, supervisor, and Lay Supervision Team should discuss the procedures to follow should a conflict arise and at what point the third party, as named in the covenant, will be called upon. The Conference personnel minister and the convenor of the Conference CIES Committee are available to discuss any concerns or problems.

Please note that The United Church of Canada has guidelines to follow in cases of sexual harassment. These guidelines are available on the United Church website and from the Conference office. Each Conference has a committee that deals with cases of sexual harassment, and this committee is available to individuals through the Conference office.

Stages in Dealing with Conflict

- Stage 1:** The supervisee, supervisor, and Lay Supervision Team meet to try to resolve the issues. Depending on the nature of the conflict, the issues discussed in the meeting and a plan of action to resolve the issues are put in writing and given to all three parties.
- Stage 2:** If the issues are not resolved as a result of the first meeting and follow-up, a second meeting is called and the consultant or committee member named by the Conference CIES Committee or the third-party consultant named in the Learning Covenant is invited to attend. (*Note:* This meeting may be called by any one of the three parties to the Learning Covenant. The Conference personnel minister should be informed that this meeting is taking place.)
- Stage 3:** If the issues are not resolved as a result of the second meeting, a third meeting is called by the consultant, with a representative of the Conference Committee on Internship and Educational Supervision present. This representative needs to be clear about their mandate from the CIES. The Conference personnel minister and the home presbytery/district Education and Students Committee should be informed that this meeting is taking place.

There are times when the difficulties encountered in the supervised ministry education experience lead to a decision to dissolve the Learning Covenant and end the education experience. Please refer to the Supervised Ministry Education resource for guidelines related to terminating a SME.

Formal Evaluation

The Learning Covenant includes a description of how the evaluation process will take place with all participants in the covenant. The evaluation is the formal summary of the feedback that has already been offered. It is not a time to raise new concerns or surprises.

The evaluation form is available on the United Church website. All participants in the Learning Covenant must have their own copy of the form so they can prepare for evaluation at the mid-point and end-point of the Learning Covenant or at other specified times.

Share evaluation forms early in your meetings so that everyone will know what is expected. Take notes at every meeting rather than wait until the mid-point or end to complete the evaluation.

Discuss the process you will follow as you complete the forms. Many Lay Supervision Teams choose to write individual responses before completing a group response. After each party to the Learning Covenant has completed their own evaluation form, meet with the supervisor and the student minister to share and discuss your comments and then sign the completed forms.

Please forward the evaluations to the appropriate parties as indicated on the forms. These evaluations are important for the student minister's home presbytery/district Education and Students Committee to determine successful completion of requirements and to assess growth and formation. The Conference CIES Committee uses the evaluation to assess the suitability of the learning site and supervisor.

Celebrating the Covenant

Rituals are important in the learning process. Through appropriate liturgies, participants identify and celebrate the various stages of the covenant. A liturgy at the beginning of the Learning Covenant can help to clarify terms of the covenant and confirm the commitment of all participants. It is also a way of involving members of the pastoral charge.

An ending liturgy offers a way to celebrate the learning experience and acknowledge closure.

Your rituals can be created especially for the occasion or they can be borrowed from the traditions of the church. Usually, they can be included in a regular service of worship at the learning site. In some non-congregational settings, it may be necessary to create a special occasion or to use some regular occasion such as a board meeting.

What matters is that you acknowledge and celebrate the various rites of passage in the Learning Covenant in ways that are appropriate to the site and meaningful to you.

Sample Covenanting Service

Adapted from Trinity United Church, Nanaimo, BC

LST member Let us make a covenant together with God and with each other as we begin this journey of learning together.

LST member: Into this circle we welcome _____, who will be sharing our congregational life until _____.

Minister: A covenant is a promise we make with God and with one another, a promise to live God's way. Let us now make a covenant with God and with one another.

Congregation: In the presence of God and one another, we give thanks for the example and lasting love of Jesus Christ, who shows us how to live God's way.

LST member: The church recognizes the different paths that lead to ministry and celebrates the particular ministry of each person. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them.

LST member: There are different ways of serving, but the same God is served. Christ is like a single body that has many parts. All of us are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.

Minister: God has called _____ to learn and serve at _____ and they have accepted this call. _____, are you willing to share your God-given gifts for ministry as you work and worship with this faith community, and are you willing to serve as the Spirit enables you?

Student Minister: I will, God being my helper.

LST member: God has called you to be _____'s supervisor. Will you share with them your knowledge and passion for ministry and your love of God, supporting them throughout the experience in our faith community?

Supervisor: I will, God being my helper.

Minister: Members of the Lay Supervision Team (*name them*), you have accepted God's call to fulfill the role as lay supervisors. Are you willing to share your faith, offer wise counsel, and support _____ in their learning path and thus, by sowing seeds of the Spirit, participate in _____'s growth into ministry?

LST team: We will, God being our helper.

LST member or
Chair of Board: Members of the congregation, you have heard the promises of (supervisee), (supervisor), and the Lay Supervision Team, who have answered God's call to service. Let us pledge to them our support.

Congregation: **We promise to support you with love as we all try to live God's way.**

LST member: Let us say our United Church creed together...

LST member: Let us pray...

All: **Loving God, we have made a covenant with you and with one another. We are grateful for this opportunity to learn and grow in faith and understanding of your ministry in the world. Help us to encourage the gifts of all those involved in this covenant relationship. We pray in the name of the one who shows us the way. Amen.**



www.united-church.ca/handbooks