

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**SUPERVISED MINISTRY
LAY COMMITTEE HANDBOOK**

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INTRODUCTION

In my seminary days, I did the equivalent of Supervised Ministry in two different churches. One was a suburban congregation on Long Island. The second was a large downtown congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Both experiences were life changing for me. They reoriented my direction in ministry and they helped to shape me as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. I remember my supervisors. They became mentors and life-long friends. But I also remember a bevy of people in those congregations. I remember Henry from the Long Island church. "You've got to have a little fun in your life!" he said to me after I told him I couldn't go to a Jets game because I had to do a Thanksgiving service. I remember working with Marge to build an integrated middle school youth program; a program that included music and recreation and a meal together and a learning time. She taught me what to expect from these pre-teens. (One of who, by the way, is now the senior pastor of a relatively large Bucks County, Pennsylvania Church. You never know!) I remember Jeannie from my second church. She showed me a depth of spirituality that I still work to grow into. And I remember Al who, by talking about how seemingly inconsequential words in a sermon deeply hurt his wife, reminds me even now to recognize the power of words to heal and to hurt.

Researchers who study things churchly tell us that good pastors learn from congregations. Those of us who have served congregations know sense that the trade is not equal. Congregations teach us much more than we seem to teach the congregation. Whatever may be the case, in this exciting adventure of raising up leaders for Christ's Church, we at New Brunswick Theological Seminary need congregations. It's within the context of the congregation that our scholars become pastors. Much of that transformation happens because of the good work of your pastor as a supervisor and mentor to your student. Much of it happens because you as dedicated members of Christ's Church share life and learning with your student.

It's in that context that you have been asked to serve on your student's Lay Committee. Through the work of the Lay Committee, you will, in a more intentional way, help your student learn what it means to be a pastor. You will reinforce the learning your pastor shares with your student. But you will also add insight and perspective from the pews. It's this perspective that your student needs. After all, your student has accepted a call to minister to the people in the pews, not the pastor in the pulpit.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK

Serving as a Lay Committee is very likely a new experience for you. It is my hope that this handbook will help make sense of your calling. There are parts of it that are identical with the student's and supervisor's handbooks. There are parts that are unique to lay committees. My hope is that it will be reader-friendly enough that it will be "a good read" and will give shape and direction to your calling to mentor a seminary student. While it will be repeated, please be aware that I am always available to you and your ministry setting. Generally, I will visit new lay committees for a time of orientation and training. While our time together is too brief to cover all the bases of lay committees, at least it gives us a chance to meet face to face. This meeting also gives me a feel for the setting in which our students will be ministering and I hope it also opens the door so that you will feel free to call me if I can be of any help whatsoever.

Finally, I am first a pastor myself. As I live out this calling from God as the Director of Supervised Ministry, I have found that I am not a teacher but rather someone who pulls together people in ministry and we learn from each other. I invite you into this adventure, with our students, with your pastor and with one another as we all teach and learn in the broader Church of Jesus Christ.

MISSION STATEMENT

New Brunswick Theological Seminary is a teaching institution of the Reformed Church in America, called by God to be a servant of the whole church of Jesus Christ. The Seminary's mission is to continue the ministry of Jesus in our time and place by enabling persons to translate their calling and gifts into faithful Christian ministry.

THE PURPOSE OF SUPERVISED MINISTRY

Supervised Ministry is one of the ways that New Brunswick Theological Seminary carries out its mission statement. Our curriculum provides a solid foundation in the classical theological disciplines and offers a wealth of practical courses that enable students to learn the skills of ministry. Supervised Ministry offers students an opportunity to reflect on hands-on experiences in actual ministry settings and "...to translate their calling and gifts into faithful Christian ministry." With the guidance of trained supervisors and lay committees, the students **integrate classroom learning with the practice of ministry.**

Supervised Ministry has three major goals.

- ❖ *To help students develop the skills for ministry,*
- ❖ *To teach the art of theological reflection, and*
- ❖ *To enable students to grapple with ministerial identity.*

In many cases, Supervised Ministry also helps students **discern God's particular call to a specific ministry.** By experiencing service in the pastorate, students continue to weigh if the pastorate is their particular calling. When students experience ministry in a college or hospital setting, when they work in a social service agency or with a local police force, when they minister in a hospice or in an interfaith, ecumenical ministry, they more clearly listen to God's call in their life.

Finally, Supervised Ministry enables students to **learn about other denominations and other expressions of the Christian faith** as they minister in settings that go beyond their particular religious background. In such a light, we see the power of the one Church of God in Jesus Christ.

SUPERVISED MINISTRY OVERVIEW

General Expectations

If, as some claim, it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a parish to raise a pastor. To carry out the purposes of the seminary and graduate with an understanding of and experience in the actual practice of ministry, all students enrolled in the Master of Divinity degree must participate in Supervised Ministry. This is a partnership between the seminary and actual ministry sites. **The student** needs to enter the Supervised Ministry setting with an enthusiasm to do actual hands-on ministry but an openness to learn about the subtleties of serving among the People of God. **The supervisor** must appreciate the service the student provides but must also be excited about helping to shape one who is called to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. **The church** must look forward to the ministry of the student and it is hoped will pay the student for her or his ministry. (See "Remuneration") The church must also accept the calling to be a teaching church; a setting in which one who is called by God can be shaped by God's people into a worthy servant and pastor. **The lay committee** must commit itself to telling the truth in love; to sharing openly and honestly with the student, the impact that the student's actions have on the members of the congregation.

Expectations of the Lay Committee

Specifically, you will be expected to:

- ❖ Assist with the **entry of the student into your congregation**. (See Appendix D.)
- ❖ **Interpret and explain** the ministry of your student to the rest of the congregation.
- ❖ Be an **advocate** and a **support** for your student.
- ❖ **Commit an hour to an hour and a half each month to supervision**.
- ❖ Provide to the Director of Supervised Ministry **written evaluations at the end of each semester**. (See "Evaluations")
- ❖ **Contact the Director of Supervised Ministry** if there are any difficulties with the student during the Supervised Ministry placement.

How Supervised Ministry Units are earned

- ❖ A unit of Supervised Ministry carries no academic credit toward the completion of the Masters of Divinity Degree but six units are required for graduation.
- ❖ A Supervised Ministry unit is 128-196 hours of involvement per semester. This equates to about 8-12 hours per week in a parish/site for each of the following:
 - September through December
 - January through May
 - June through August

Learning/Serving Covenants

In many ways, Supervised Ministry is like an independent study. Your pastor as a supervisor, is appropriately known as the Teacher in the Field. The Learning/Serving Covenant becomes the curriculum for the course. In the Learning/Serving Covenant, your pastor, your student, and you formulate learning goals and objectives. (See "Learning/Serving Covenants") These goals and objectives are based on the areas of learning needed by the student and the areas of service needed by your congregation as a Supervised Ministry setting.

Realistically;

- ❖ The student will develop a rough draft of the Learning/Serving Covenant
- ❖ Your pastor and the student will develop the final form.
- ❖ You will receive a copy of the covenant for review.
- ❖ The student will submit it to the Director of Supervised Ministry for approval,
- ❖ Who will submit it to the Academic Dean for approval.

The student, supervisor and chair of the lay committee should all keep copies of the Learning/Serving Covenant. As a lay committee, it is wise to take the Learning/Serving Covenant seriously. It will be a valuable tool when it comes time to evaluate the student. (See "Evaluations.") The Director of Supervised Ministry and the Academic Dean of the Seminary must approve all Supervised Ministry covenants.

Evaluations

As a lay committee, at the end of the program year in May, you will be asked to fill out an evaluation form. These evaluations help the Director of Supervised Ministry to catch a glimpse of the student's progress through your eyes and to monitor the fulfillment of the goals and objectives included in the Learning/Serving Covenant agreed upon by the student, supervisor, and lay committee. As such, evaluations are a critically important component of Supervised Ministry. While copies of all evaluations are included in this manual, (See Appendix B) all evaluations will be mailed to students, supervisors, and lay training committees at the appropriate time.

Documentation Responsibility

EACH STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL DOCUMENTATION in his or her file in the Office of Supervised Ministry.

While each student is responsible for all documentation in his or her ministry file in the Office of Supervised Ministry, you can help your student by **finishing all evaluations and mailing them in on time**. The Director of Supervised Ministries will conduct an annual review of each student's file and will inform the student if any necessary documentation is missing.

THE LEARNING/SERVING COVENANT

The Name

It's called a Learning/Serving Covenant. In times past here at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, we've called it a Learning Agreement. At other seminaries, it's called everything from a Work/Learning Agreement to a Covenant of Agreement to a Learning Contract. All these names are appropriate and helpful in their own way. I have chosen Learning/Serving Covenant because it captures what I hope will happen in your Supervised Ministry setting.

In a healthy setting, the student will *learn*. In fact, the Learning/Serving Covenant form asks the student to plan for learning and it forces the student to give some shape and direction to what you hope to learn. This is the formal part of the Supervised Ministry assignment. It is the curriculum of Supervised Ministry. It is also the basis for evaluations and the grist for much of what the student will do in Ministerium, a class taken in conjunction with Supervised Ministry.

In a healthy Supervised Ministry setting, the student will also *serve*. In many ways, this can be the most satisfying part of Supervised Ministry. Your student is in seminary because he or she is called by God to serve God's people in a unique way. The Supervised Ministry site is a major part of your student's present ministry. It is doing what God has called your student to do.

Finally, because we are together the People of God, you and your student, your lay committee, the people of your Supervised Ministry site, and I believe God as well, have all entered into a *covenant* relationship. It is a relationship that reaches beyond formal written contracts. It is a representation of what it means to be the Body of Christ and is a sign of the Kingdom of God. (Reflect theologically on that, for a while!)

The Learning/Serving Covenant

- ❖ As I noted before, one of the purposes of Supervised Ministry is to “enable persons to translate their calling and gifts into faithful Christian ministry.” With that in mind, I expect that, over the total of six Supervised Ministry units, each student will have had **experience in all the major areas of ministry**. Restating them, these areas are:

- Worship and Preaching
- Pastoral and Church Administration
- Christian Education
- Pastoral Care and Counseling
- Outreach and Evangelism
- Personal Nurture

Notice, I said, “experience in all six.” I didn’t say that the student was expected to learn all there is to know about all six areas. That takes a little longer than a semester each. However, it is important that each student have experience in all six areas so that he or she will have a taste of what ministry is like and how the student’s classroom learning can apply. It should also help you to help your student to identify you’re her or his passion in ministry and those rough areas that need some additional work.

- ❖ The Learning/Serving Covenant covers four (and sometimes five) areas. These are:

- Personal Growth and Faith Development
- Relationships with Others
- What it means to Function as a Minister
- Developing Skills for Ministry
- The Problems and Opportunities present in Non-parish Organizations. (This is the “sometimes” one. It’s designed for students working in specialized ministries.)

I look for one and perhaps two objectives in each of these areas. Therefore, your student will have four and perhaps as many as six objectives for the duration of the Supervised Ministry covenant. Any more than six is more than most students can hand. You can help by ensuring that your student limits her or his objectives to six and that the four (and sometimes five) areas mentioned above are represented.

- ❖ Here's one final word about the Learning/Serving Covenant. It is certainly a tool for learning and measuring that learning in the seminary setting, but it also functions as a tool to instill healthy practices for pastors and ministers in ministry. My brother-in-law, who knows a lot about golf, tells me that the muscles learn to repeat a particular swing. It's almost like you've imprinted the pattern in them and they will then automatically follow through. That means that if you teach your muscles right, you'll hit your drive straight and far and you won't have to think much about it along the way.

Through the Learning/Serving Covenant in Supervised Ministry we hope to teach that same kind of imprinting in our students. It offers a systematic approach to ministry. The Learning/Serving Covenant can become a way of approaching projects and problems that are a part of ministry. I advise our students that the more seriously they take the Learning/Serving Covenant, the more likely that this particular pattern of planning ministry will be second nature to them. And the more planning they put into ministry, the more likely they will be to find it blessed by the Holy Spirit and enriching for their own spirits.

Now, to specifics, keep reading:

THE LAY COMMITTEE

Who?

In the best of all worlds, before your student begins formal Supervised Ministry, your pastor will have selected a group of *three to six people* from the congregation or ministry setting to serve as your student's Lay Committee. As the lay committee you need to be people who are **knowledgeable of the people** with whom your student will work and sensitive to what **adult learning** means. It's also helpful if you have some acquaintanceship with **pastoral responsibility** and possess something of a **pastoral nature** yourself. As I noted earlier, you need to be able to "tell the truth, in love," and will need to be able to support your student through the ups and downs of parish work.

In the best of all worlds, early in your student's time with the Supervised Ministry site, I will meet with your Lay Committee. Obviously this should be done at a mutually convenient time. For parishes, I like to do it on a Sunday so that I can worship with the congregation before or after I meet with you. I also appreciate this meeting so that I can get to know your ministry site, get to know you (at least a little) and help train you in your responsibilities.

Below I've listed some of the details you will need to know to do a good job as a Lay Committee.

How?

Once a month, I expect that the student to have a **supervisory session with you**. These are the characteristics of this session:

- ❖ **The student sets the agenda.** I suggested that these sessions include a ministry reflection, distributed ahead of time. The issues for discussion are set by the student.
- ❖ Your pastor, as a supervisor, **is not a part of the discussion**. As the pastor of the church, your pastor's voice carries a great deal of authority and what your pastor says and thinks can skew the discussion of any meeting. Therefore, your student needs an opportunity to meet with and to hear from you on a face to face, one on one (or three to six, as the case may be) basis.

- ❖ The session should last at least an **hour and a half** but could easily go to two hours.
- ❖ Some students and Lay Committees include a **shared meal**. I like the sacramental feel of this.
- ❖ I encourage you as a committee to **save all written material**. Once again, this material will be helpful in identifying common themes or issues and is very helpful when it comes time to fill out your formal evaluation.
- ❖ Everything the committee does and says must be held in **strictest confidence**.

Why?

The Alban Institute studied the work of Lay Committees and seminarians in over 80 parishes and summarized the results in this way:

- ❖ The seminarian receives experience in having theological dialogue with lay persons in the congregation. She or he learns to articulate issues of faith in a manner that promotes clarity and understanding and that does not rely simply on textbook, in-house seminary jargon.
- ❖ From the lay training committee, a seminarian can learn a sense of the history of the parish and an understanding of the community in which he/she is to minister. The seminarian can learn how to go about understanding the community in later placements.
- ❖ The committee is a vital link between the seminary and the local parish. Faculty, seminarian, supervisor, and congregation all have an investment in the process of theological education.
- ❖ Lay members of the committee begin to see the complexity involved in the various roles that the clergy person must assume and there is an appreciation that develops for high professional standards in the ordained ministry.
- ❖ The congregation gains a better understanding of itself, in discussing and facing realities of parish life rather than holding on to mythologies of the community.
- ❖ Lay persons make discoveries about their own vocations and ministries in the church.

- ❖ Having a student operating with a lay committee can give the supervisor the opportunity to observe someone else in the role she/he normally fills. New visions for ministry can emerge from such an experience.
- ❖ Lay members of the committee develop relationships and networks with each other that are often deeper and more meaningful than routine committee work in the parish.

Entry¹

In the best of all worlds, you will be intimately involved in your student's entry into the ministry setting. This should include:

- ❖ Announcing to the congregation or the ministry site that a student will be coming on board and explaining to them why.
- ❖ Explaining to the congregation or those served in your site what they can expect from the student.
- ❖ Interpreting to the congregation or ministry site their role as a "Teaching Congregation" or a "Teaching Site."
- ❖ Introducing your student (and her or his family, if that family will be involved)
- ❖ From a lay perspective, discussing with your student:
 - The purpose and scope of the ministry and those with whom the student will work
 - The mission and goals of the church or institution
 - Your student's roles and expectations
 - How your student will fit into the mission of the church or ministry site
- ❖ Orient the student to the structures and systems of your setting, including:
 - The layout of the facility
 - Various committees, organizations, and key lay people
 - Community people

¹ Appendix D contains a number of very helpful, concrete suggestions for this process. I've included this page in the Supervisor's Manual as well, but you might want to make a copy of this page and give it to your Lay Committee.

What?²

It's helpful to think of the Lay Committee's responsibility in four areas:

- ❖ **Covenant-building.** You will bring to the covenant-building process the following gifts and skills:
 - Knowledge of and commitment to the church or site and its mission
 - Openness to your student's unique gifts for ministry
 - The ability to set realistic priorities
 - The willingness to work with the student in forming the Learning/Serving Covenant that brings together the church's mission and the student's learning needs
 - The capacity to be accountable to the student, you, as a supervisor, and the people of the site and to be able to hold the student accountable as well.

- ❖ **Feedback.**³ This is the "telling the truth in love" part. To do so, you must have a number of gifts and skills.
 - You must be familiar with your student's ministry and you must participate in it in some constructive way.
 - You must be able to think reflexively (in the model of theological reflection) rather than in preconceived ways.
 - You must be willing to level with the student, to share honestly and openly what's happening and how your student's ministry is impacting (positively and negatively) the mission of the church.
 - You must be willing to learn as well as to teach. (In a healthy relationship we are all adult learners.)
 - You must be patient (with the congregation, and at times with your student and perhaps, even with your pastor).

² This section is adapted from the Field Education manual of Union Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio.

³ Appendix E offers specific criteria for helpful feedback.

- ❖ **Evaluation.** There is a formal evaluation you will fill out at the end of each year, but there is the informal evaluation that should take place throughout your student's ministry with this Supervised Ministry site.
 - You should help your student to find her or his "growing edges."
 - You need to be sensitive to your student's values and opinions but also be able to express the values and opinions of the congregation.
 - You must be able to hold in confidence what is said and done in the monthly Lay Committee Session.
 - You must be willing to challenge as well as affirm your student.
 - You can be a resource to help your student make responsible decisions about his or her future ministry.

- ❖ **Support.** In many ways, this is the most important aspect of the Lay Committee's responsibilities.
 - You should help your student keep a healthy balance between personal needs, family responsibilities, seminary education and work in the ministry site.
 - If your student's family is involved (and often, even if it is not) you can be of support to them.
 - You can become a trusted group within your site and this is always an important part of ministry.
 - Through working with the Lay Committee, your student will grow in the ability to share personally and spiritually.
 - Through you work, your student will experience the ministry of the whole people of God; a ministry of laity and clergy, working together.

CONCLUDING WORDS

One of the great gifts from God that I have received since joining the faculty here at New Brunswick Theological Seminary is the inspiration I get from hearing the stories of our students. Almost all of our students are second or perhaps third (occasionally fourth) career people. They are responding to a call from God that they heard years ago in their younger days or they are responding to a call that has grown out of their life and service in the Kingdom. They are making tremendous sacrifices to answer that call from God. And they bring into ministry a wealth of life experience that begs to be used in the service of God.

As you supervise a student from this fine, old institution, I believe that God will give you the same kind of gift that God has given me. From your life and experience, you have much to teach our student. As a seminary, we thank you for your willingness to enter into this adventure in teaching. On the other hand, as you supervise, I pray that you will be open to the gift your student can be for you and for your ministry setting. There is a sense of mutual ministry that happens in this miracle of teaching and learning that comes only from the hand of God. Look for that miracle and enjoy the ride!

Grace and Peace,