

NEW BRUNSWICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**SUPERVISED MINISTRY
STUDENT'S HANDBOOK**

Mark A. Kraai
Director of Supervised Ministry
New Brunswick Theological Seminary
17 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
732-247-5241 X109
mak@nbts.edu
Fax 732-249-5412

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INTRODUCTION

When I began attending seminary in the fall of 1970, I had no intention of becoming a pastor. I certainly knew I was called by God into ministry. I had grappled with that calling through my teenage and college years and concluded that I could do nothing else, so I headed off to seminary. But, while I was willing to follow God's call into ministry, I was not willing to follow that call into the church. Even at that tender age, I saw the Gospel live in the church but I also saw some of the heartache that the church can cause. I envisioned myself becoming a college chaplain or a Christian counselor, wearing turtleneck sweaters and tweed sports coats with patches on the elbows. My first year in seminary didn't change that expectation much except that I expanded my horizons. I figured I could wear blue jeans and run a Christian camp or I could occupy a city storefront as I ministered to the people on the streets.

My second year in seminary changed all that. To be perfectly honest, I began doing Supervised Ministry (called a "Concurrent" at that time) because I needed some money. I worked with the youth groups and participated in worship each Sunday. There was nothing exceptional about that. But my bond with the congregation began to grow and grow until I found, in that experience, a fulfillment in ministry that I never knew possible. I was hooked. I graduated from seminary in 1974 and served parishes until June of 1998 when I joined the faculty here.

The heart of my Supervised Ministry changed my heart and the experience of Supervised Ministry gave shape and direction to my calling from God. It did much more than that, of course. In my next setting, I worked with a very large church and experienced programming and planning and pastoral care. I sat with a staff of theologians who helped make divine sense out of ministry. I began to sense the unique calling in what it means to be a pastor.

In my last years in the parish setting, I sat in the other chair, supervising students from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and was delighted to see these students change, at least a little, and to find that this part of ministry continues to change me. I am committed to Supervised Ministry because I have seen how such experiences have prepared me for service in the Church and how such experiences prepare others as well. I pray that your experience in Supervised Ministry will give you the same joy I found and that it will lead you to the fulfillment of your calling from God.

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. It is much more than an avenue through which students learn skills for ministry. 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 the pastorate as 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. Generally, Supervised Ministry happens in a church setting, but some of the most exciting growth in ministry happens wherever ministry happens and wherever a caring supervisor can be found. The student needs to enter the Supervised Ministry setting with an enthusiasm to do actual hands-on ministry but 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.

Registration

Registration for Supervised Ministry is a two step process and is not complete until both steps are finished.

- ❖ First, with the registrar, the student must register for Supervised Ministry. (SM-00301 and SM-00302. For the convenience of the students, the registrar has listed Supervised Ministry on the registration blank and, to register, the student needs to simply check the appropriate box.)
- ❖ Second, each student must submit a completed Learning/Serving Covenant to the Director of Supervised Ministry. The office of Supervised Ministry will note the date that the covenant has been submitted. Registration is complete only when the covenant has been turned in. Because of this two-step process, the due dates for the

covenant are extended beyond the normal registration process but these dates are vitally important. They are:

- **April 1st** for summer Supervised Ministry.
- **April 15th** for covenants that begin in the fall. (This includes those covenants that will cover one unit, from September through December, and those that cover two, from September through May of the following year.)
- **October 15th** for new students registering in the fall.
- **December 15th** for those doing Supervised Ministry during the spring semester.

Please note that it is the seminary's policy that a **\$100 fee is levied for late registration**. This applies to Supervised Ministry as well therefore, if the deadlines for Learning/Serving Covenants are missed, students will be subject to this late fee.

Once the student has submitted the Learning/Serving Covenant, the Director of Supervised Ministry may require revisions. These revisions do not effect the date the covenant was submitted.

Placement

Placements in Supervised Ministry settings generally begin in one of two ways. First, the student may have a likely Supervised Ministry site. If so, the student will discuss the site with the Director of Supervised Ministry and together they will determine if this is an appropriate setting for the student. Second, if the student does not have a likely Supervised Ministry site, the Director of Supervised Ministry will suggest a placement.

While it is not prohibited, **it is strongly suggested that a student not do Supervised Ministry in the student's home church**. Roles, responsibilities and expectations can easily become blurred when a student does Supervised Ministry in his or her home congregation and often learning can be limited. **It is also not recommended that a student's pastor become the student's supervisor**. In such a relationship, the pastor necessarily ceases to be the student's pastor so the student is without a home pastor as the student progresses through seminary training. Every student (and every pastor, for that matter) needs a pastor.

Remuneration

The suggested rate of remuneration for a student is as follows:

- ❖ For a junior student (from 0-32 hours of academic credit) \$75/week
- ❖ For a middler student (from 33-64 hours) \$100/week
- ❖ For a senior student (from 65-96 hours) \$125/week

Reimbursement for mileage and expenses incurred as a result of service required in the Learning/Serving Covenant is also recommended. The mileage is to be at the rate established by the IRS for business travel.

While it should be noted that the above rates are suggested, any deviation from these rates needs to be negotiated with the Director of Supervised Ministry. Supervised Ministry is certainly a learning situation for the student, but it is also an arena in which the student will perform significant ministry and issues of justice require some recognition of this ministry.

A Supervised Ministry Assignment Requires...

- ❖ Registering for Supervised Ministry (SM-00301) on the student's registration form.
- ❖ A **supervisor** who is both engaged in some kind of ministry and has a theological degree. A Supervisor must also have three years experience in the ministry. Supervisors are recognized by the seminary as Teachers in the Field and are so listed in the seminary's catalogue.
- ❖ A **setting** (church, institution or an agency) where a student can practice ministry in its many forms and functions and a setting in which the student and the supervisor can negotiate a supervised ministry covenant. Congregations that assume this calling are recognized as Teaching Churches.
- ❖ A **lay committee** whose members agree to meet regularly with the student. (While there is always value in having a lay committee, this requirement may be waived in certain specialized ministries.)
- ❖ A **Learning/Serving Covenant** that outlines the goals and objectives of the student. The Learning/Serving Covenant is the student's final step in the registration process.
- ❖ **Approval** from the Director of Supervised Ministry and the Academic Dean. This approval completes the student's registration process.

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 120-180 hours of involvement per semester. This equates to about 8-12 hours per week in a parish/site.
- ❖ Generally, Learning/Serving Covenants are submitted that cover either the two units of the academic year or the one summer unit.
- ❖ Two units of Supervised Ministry can be earned for over 36 hours per week of a summer assignment, but this option is generally restricted to those working full-time in a ministry setting.
- ❖ Two units of Supervised Ministry are granted for participation in an accredited Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program. The student registers with the CPE site and simply submits the supervisor's final evaluation to the Director of Supervised Ministry to be awarded credit. The Director will then notify the registrar and the registrar will grant the student credit for Supervised Ministry and will assess registration fees.
- ❖ Four units of Supervised Ministry are given for completing a nine to twelve month internship during which the intern is involved full time (a minimum of 40 hours per week) in the work of a parish or site.
- ❖ A student can receive credit for only one Supervised Ministry assignment at a time.

Texts

- ❖ The Supervised Ministry Student is required to read *Experiencing Ministry Supervision* by William T. Pyle and Mary Alice Seals, editors, {Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN., 1995.}
- ❖ The Supervisor is required to read *The Supervision of Ministry* by Regina Cole, C.S.J., {The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1992.}

Learning/Serving Covenants

In many ways, Supervised Ministry is like an independent study. The 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, the student and the supervisor 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 available in the Supervised Ministry setting. The Director of Supervised Ministry and the Academic Dean of the Seminary must approve all Supervised Ministry covenants.

It is recommended that, before students enroll in Supervised Ministry, they take Introduction to Ministries Studies (MS-00301). This is a foundational course that helps students develop skills of theological reflection for the practice of ministry. Further, an approved Supervised Ministry site and Learning/Serving Covenant is a requirement to be enrolled in Ministerium (IN-00401 & IN-00402). This is a two semester course which must be taken over the Fall and Spring Semesters in one academic year.

Learning/Serving Covenants must be completed, signed by the student and the supervisor, and, where applicable, by the chairperson of the lay committee. Generally, Learning/Serving Covenants will cover the academic year from Fall (September) through Spring (May). These covenants are for two units. Covenants must be returned to the Office of the Director of Supervised Ministries according to the following schedule:

- ❖ For the **Academic Year**:
 - By **April 15th** for all students except new students.
 - By **October 15th** for new students matriculating in the fall semester.
 - By **December 15th** for the second semester for those who have not submitted a covenant in the fall.
- ❖ For **Summer Assignments**: by **April 1st** prior to the summer of service. Summer covenants generally cover one unit of Supervised Ministry.

Please note that Supervised Ministry units will not be granted for any field education experience unless the Learning/Serving Covenant is submitted on time.

(The Director of Supervised Ministry can provide instructions for nine-month and yearlong internships and the policies that cover internships.)

Evaluations

Evaluations enable the Director of Supervised Ministry to maintain written contact with each student throughout the Supervised Ministry placement. These evaluations also help the Director of Supervised Ministry monitor the fulfillment of the goals and objectives included in the Learning/Serving Covenant. 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 committees at the appropriate time.

- ❖ **Mid-year evaluations** will be mailed to supervisors and students the Monday following Thanksgiving. These mid-year evaluations will be due in the Office of the Director of Supervised Ministries *the last day of classes of the First Semester.*
- ❖ **End-of-the-year evaluations** will be mailed to supervisors and students the last Monday of April. These end-of-the year evaluations are due in the Office of the Director of Supervised Ministries *the last day of classes of the Second Semester.*
- ❖ **End-of-the-summer evaluations** will be mailed to the supervisors and students during the first week of August. These end-of-the-summer evaluations are due in the Office of the Director of Supervised Ministries by *August 15th.*

Documentation Responsibility

EACH STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL DOCUMENTATION in his or her ministry file in the Office of Supervised Ministry. It is ultimately the student's responsibility to see that Learning/Serving Covenants, self-evaluations, supervisor's evaluations and lay evaluations are completed and submitted on time. Each student and supervisor is to retain a copy of all these documents. 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.

Billing Procedures and Course Credit

Students are billed for Supervised Ministry assignments at the beginning of each semester, in the same manner as they are billed for academic/classroom credit. ***Students receive credit for the Supervised Ministry units only after the Office of Supervised Ministry receives all the required documentation. Since registration for Supervised Ministry is not complete until a Learning/Serving Covenant is submitted, any covenants submitted after the due date will be assessed the seminary's late registration fee of \$100.00.*** The Director of Supervised Ministry is responsible to give each Supervised Ministry student a grade of pass or fail for each unit. Much of this determination comes from the written Learning/Serving Covenant and evaluations the director receives. Therefore, failure to submit a Learning/Serving Covenant and/or evaluations is the equivalent of failing a course. It is imperative, then, that students, supervisors and members of lay committees return their evaluations to the Office of Supervised Ministry by their due dates.

Other Policies

- ❖ No supervised ministry units will be awarded for ministry that a student does with a relative.
- ❖ Students are required to engage in Supervised Ministry assignments in at least two different settings with two different supervisors.
- ❖ A student who fails to maintain the Supervised Ministry responsibilities as set forth in an approved Learning/Serving Covenant will receive no credit for that Supervised Ministry unit. This determination will be made at the discretion of the Dean of the Seminary, in consultation with the Director of Supervised Ministry, the student, and the student's supervisor. Such action usually includes the termination of the relationship between the student, the supervisor and the ministry setting.
- ❖ No Learning/Serving Covenants will be accepted after the beginning date of the proposed Supervised Ministry assignment.
- ❖ A student's Supervised Ministry files are confidential. No information from them may be released without the written consent of the student. All such files are in the custody of the Director of Supervised Ministry. (See the policy entitled "Faculty Access to Supervised Ministry Reports.")
- ❖ Persons supervising New Brunswick Theological Seminary students, including members of lay committees, are subject to the Seminary Sexual Misconduct Policy. (See Appendix C)

Faculty Access to Supervised Ministry Reports Policy

Supervised ministry evaluations will be available to the faculty for the purpose of assessing a student's development in preparation for pastoral ministry and determining overall suitability for the pastoral office except when a student refuses faculty access by signing a statement of confidentiality (See form below.). In such a case the faculty will waive its right to review the student's supervised ministry reports which then will be available only to the Director of Supervised Ministry. A student claiming confidentiality will be notified that other kinds of evidence demonstrating satisfactory progress in the preparation for ministry may be required, e.g., vocational testing, psychological assessment, additional supervised ministry assignment, CPE. The director will offer the student the option of confidentiality each time supervised ministry evaluations are reviewed (for the assignment and period covered by the review.). The names of student electing to keep their supervised ministry evaluations confidential will be reported to the faculty.

Request for Confidentiality Statement

I understand that the faculty of New Brunswick Theological Seminary assess all M.Div. candidates to provide guidance for their ministerial preparation and to determine their suitability for pastoral leadership in the church (p. 8 of the 2002-2003 New Brunswick Theological Seminary Catalogue). I further understand that supervised ministry reports provide a valuable source of information for the faculty in the exercise of this responsibility. In declining to make my supervised ministry evaluations available to the faculty, I am aware that I may be required to demonstrate satisfactory progress in the preparation for ministry through other means, e.g., vocational testing, psychological assessment, additional supervised ministry assignments, CPE. I recognize that the faculty will be notified that I have declined to release the supervised ministry reports for the period specified below.

Assignment _____ Inclusive dates _____.

Student _____ Director _____.

Date _____.

GETTING STARTED

So you want to do Supervised Ministry? Well, if you find a good site in which to do Supervised Ministry, get ready for some of the hardest and most exciting learning you will have during your seminary years. If it's good, you'll be frustrated because you'll want to spend all your time at the Supervised Ministry site and simply give a passing nod to your studies. Don't yield to temptation. Your studies are the backbone of your seminary work so give them their due. But, get used to the feeling. Ministry is like that. You'll always want to spend more time doing than preparing. If it's good, Supervised Ministry will push you into areas you never imagined you would go. Get used to that too. Ministry, whatever may be the setting, seldom has a clear, concise job description and even if it does, precious few among us will be prepared to fill it. If it's good, a Supervised Ministry setting will give you a glimpse of what it means to wear the mantle of God as you enter a hospital room or speak the Word of God as you preach. This should scare the daylights out of you. If it doesn't, you may want to reconsider going into ministry. Supervised Ministry, if it's good, will give you a sense that you are doing God's work while you continue to learn God's ways. Get used to that too, because if you're good at ministry, this will always be the case.

So, having said all that, what do you need to do to get started? Read on My Friend, read on!

Selecting a Supervised Ministry Site: Things to Consider

In looking for a Supervised Ministry site, you'll need to think about a number of things. For instance:

- ❖ ***Will this Supervised Ministry site help me test my calling to ministry?*** It's generally in the doing of ministry that we affirm God's call to us to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Your Supervised Ministry site should also help you to discern God's particular call to a particular ministry. Are you called to pastor a congregation? Are you called to chaplaincy in a prison, or a university, or in the armed services? Are you called to an urban setting or a rural congregation or a suburban church? Do you best serve the Kingdom of God as a solo pastor, a senior pastor or an associate pastor? If it's a good Supervised Ministry site, it will help you ask all these questions. On occasion, it may also help you answer one or two.

❖ ***Is this place too familiar?*** Your home church is likely not the best place for you to do Supervised Ministry. (See "Placements")

❖ ***Is this a place where I will have the freedom to learn all that I hope to learn?***

As you proceed through Supervised Ministry, you will need experience in six basic areas of ministry. You won't need to do all six in each Supervised Ministry setting, but through your six units you will need to cover them all. They are:

- Worship and Preaching (Including all the special services such as weddings, funerals, the sacraments and others in the church year.)
- Pastoral and Church Administration
- Christian Education (children, youth, and adults)
- Pastoral Care and Counseling
- Outreach and Evangelism
- Personal Nurture (all that it takes to remain physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy as well as caring for family commitments)

Churches, particularly, think of seminary students as youth workers and children education specialists. That's okay for a beginning but the church or Supervised Ministry site needs to recognize that you'll need a much broader exposure to ministry than simply youth work and education.

❖ ***Does this Supervised Ministry site see itself as a teaching site?***

Each site fairly expects you to lead programs and participate in that site's ministry. Do they also see themselves as helping you to learn the ropes of ministry? Do they see helping you to develop as a Minister of Word and Sacrament as a part of their mission and calling from God? These are important questions.

❖ ***Can this site provide a strong lay committee?*** Each parish ministry site and, where possible, in non-parish sites as well, the site is expected to provide a lay committee. The lay committee is expected to meet with the student at least once a month for at least an hour and a half. While the student sets the agenda for these meetings, the lay committee is an avenue of support and feedback from the congregation or clients to the student. A strong lay committee is a vital component of a student's learning experience in Supervised Ministry.

- ❖ ***Is this a strong supervisor?*** The quality of your learning hinges on the strength of your supervisor. Your supervisor must be willing to give you enough rope to stretch your limits but not enough to hang yourself. Your supervisor must be willing to spend a significant amount of time with you; at least an hour a week in supervision and most often much more in simple mentoring. Your supervisor must push you to think beyond the skills of ministry to the art of theological reflection. Your supervisor must enable you to see what it means to put on the mantle of a minister of God. Your supervisor is the key person to your learning in Supervised Ministry.
- ❖ ***Will this position make you uncomfortable?*** If so **GRAB IT!** Growth only happens when we reach our outside limits; our boundaries' edges. Growth necessitates change and change is uncomfortable. If, in your Supervised Ministry site, you feel comfortable and in control, you need to change. You're not learning.
- ❖ ***Does this Supervised Ministry site fit?*** The flip side of being uncomfortable is finding enough security to reach out into the unknown.

It's unlikely that you'll answer all these questions before you sign on the dotted line, but you should ask these questions about any Supervised Ministry site you consider.

Selecting a Supervised Ministry Site

The Steps

If you expect to do Supervised Ministry in the fall and spring semesters, I suggest that you begin in the previous January or February to arrange for your Supervised Ministry site. While, like doing income taxes, that may seem like a long time ahead of the deadline (April 15th), the more time you take, the more likely your placement will be rewarding. Likewise, begin in January or February for summer placements.

As was noted earlier ("Placements") there are generally two ways that you can set up a Supervised Ministry site.

First, you may have a possible site in mind. If so, this is what you'll need to do:

1. **Talk to me** about your Supervised Ministry site. I'm generally a nice guy and will do what I can to help it to happen, unless, of course, I sense that it would not be a helpful setting for you. Make an appointment and we'll explore the possibility.
2. Once I've given my approval, **talk with your supervisor**. Be sure that your supervisor knows what he or she is getting into. Take a *Supervised Ministry Manual for Supervisors* along on your interview. If your supervisor has not supervised before, your supervisor will need to agree to enroll in the Foundations in Supervision course that I teach here at the seminary. It's a course that runs on the first Monday of each month for six months beginning in October. This is a sizable commitment on your supervisor's part so please be certain your supervisor is willing.
3. When the basic questions are answered and it seems like a good placement for you in Supervised Ministry, **talk with your advisor**. Your academic advisor will help you make sure that you've got all the academic bases covered. As was noted earlier, try to have taken Introduction to Ministries Studies before you begin your Supervised Ministry.
4. **Register for the course**. It's SM-00301 for the first semester and SM-00302 for the second semester. (If you are taking a Ministerium as well, you will need to register separately for that course.)
5. With your supervisor, **put together a Learning/Serving Covenant**. (See "Learning/Serving Covenants") Be sure to pay particular attention to deadlines.
6. **Submit your Learning/Serving Covenant to me** and wait with bated breath for my approval. If your Learning/Serving Covenant is turned in on time, you will not need to worry about the seminary's late registration fee even if I send it back to you for some revisions.

Second, if you do not have a Supervised Ministry in mind this is what you'll need to do:

1. **Talk to me.** I consistently have more places asking for student ministers than I have students to fill those requests.
2. **Do steps 1 through 6, above!**

One final word. If this is a new site to the New Brunswick Theological Seminary Supervised Ministry program, please arrange a time for me to visit you at the site. That gives me a chance to get to know where you will be doing your Supervised Ministry and also a chance to meet with your supervisor.

Site Selection Summary

- Identify a site
- Clear the site with the Director of Supervised Ministry
- Meet with the supervisor
- Meet with your advisor
- Register for Supervised Ministry
- Develop a Learning/Serving Covenant
- Submit the Learning/Serving Covenant to the Director of Supervised Ministry

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, you will *learn*. In fact, the Learning/Serving Covenant form asks you to plan for learning and it asks you 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 your Supervised Ministry. It is also the basis for evaluations and the grist for much of what you will do in your Ministerium.

In a healthy Supervised Ministry setting, you will also *serve*. In many ways, this is the most satisfying part of Supervised Ministry. You are in seminary because you are called by God to serve God's people in a unique way. Your work at a Supervised Ministry site is a major part of your present ministry. You are doing what God has called you to do.

Finally, because we are together the People of God, you have entered into a *covenant* with your supervisor, your lay committee, with the people of your Supervised Ministry site and I believe with God as well. 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!)

What I look for in a Good Learning/Serving Covenant

- ❖ Since one of the purposes of Supervised Ministry is to "enable persons to translate their calling and gifts into faithful Christian ministry," I expect that, over your total of six Supervised Ministry units, you will have had **experience in all the major areas of ministry**. These were listed in "Selecting a Supervised Ministry Site," but let me repeat them: (*A good preparation for ministry. Learn to repeat often.*)

- 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 you were 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 to have experience in all six areas so that you have a taste of what ministry is like and how your classroom learning can apply. It should also help you to identify your passion in ministry and those rough areas that need some additional work. (Once again, you won't fix it all in Supervised Ministry. Supervised Ministry will simply help identify your areas of concentration.)

Notice also that there are six areas of ministry and you need six units of Supervised Ministry to graduate with a Masters of Divinity Degree. In your General Goal, there should be one of the six areas for each of your units of Supervised Ministry. If you're doing one unit of Supervised Ministry in the summer, you'll cover one area. Because most Learning/Serving Covenants cover two semesters, for the fall and spring, these Learning/Serving Covenants will include two of these areas in the General Goal. (But more of that later.) As each new Learning/Serving Covenant is submitted, I will be looking to see that it's General Goal contains new areas of learning until all six are covered.

- ❖ Now let's get down to specifics. Appendix A has a sample of the Learning/Serving Covenant. Make two copies of this form. The first will be your rough draft. This is what you and your supervisor will work on. The second will be the final copy that you will sign and will be signed by your supervisor and the head of the Lay Committee.

- ❖ **Part I** asks for the details of your Supervised Ministry setting. It should be straightforward and clear. The details of the actual day, time and place of your *Supervisory Session* are included on this portion of the form. That should tell you how important it is. (See *The Supervisory Session*.)
- ❖ Once you've finished Part I, move on to **Part II**. (Isn't the logic of this progression staggering?) Part II deals with the game plan of your Supervised Ministry assignment. It focuses on what you hope to learn and it attempts to give some order and shape to that learning.

The General Goal

The order and shape begins with your **General Goal**. Your *General Goal* should be broadly stated but also give a focus to your Supervised Ministry experience. I will ***reject*** a *General Goal* that says,

"I would like to use this Supervised Ministry experience to learn what it means to be a pastor of a church."

This goal is too broad to be of any use.
I would happily ***accept*** a *General Goal* that says,

"From serving as a student minister in this congregation, I will participate in worship, and will develop my understanding of and practice in pastoral care and counseling."

As was noted above, if your Learning/Serving Covenant covers two units of Supervised Ministry (as most do), your *General Goal* should include two of the six areas of ministry. This one gives you experience in Worship and Preaching and Pastoral Care. I'll move then to your **Learning Objectives**.

The Learning Objectives

- ❖ If your **Goal** and **Learning Objectives** make up the "curriculum" for the course of Supervised Ministry, the primary question you need to answer is, "Specifically, how will my supervisor, my lay committee, and the Director of Supervised Ministry know if I've accomplished my plans?" If your *General Goal* is the broad focus of your Supervised Ministry, your Learning Objectives are the steps you will need to take to accomplish your goal. As such, they narrow the focus and make the scope of your learning concrete. You will have one *General Goal* (with, perhaps, two foci). Your objectives should flow out of your *General Goal*.

- ❖ Good objectives have a number of **specific characteristics**. Objectives are:
 - *Achievable* (You're not going to remake a congregation in two semesters. Be realistic in what you hope to do.)

 - *Specific* (Steer clear of emotions in your objectives. It is exceedingly difficult to prove that you "feel more confident preaching" after a year of Supervised Ministry.)

 - *Measurable* (While it's difficult to prove that you "feel more confident preaching," it is possible to count the number of times that you've preached in a year's time. It's also possible to use sermon feedback questionnaires after each sermon to measure the congregation's perception of your growth and development. After all, confidence tends to be a by-product of preaching that speaks to God's People. "By the first of January, I will have preached two sermons and led worship twelve times and will have gotten organized feedback from twelve congregation members.")

 - *Time-bound* (Make ample use of the perfect tense. That's the "By the first of January..." part of the objective.)

- ❖ Finally, I'd like you to develop three specific objectives for each of you foci in your *General Goal*. These objectives coincide with the three major goals for Supervised Ministry noted at the beginning of this handbook. (Page 1)
 - **Objective A: Skills for Ministry.** What skills will you learn in this setting? Please note. I'm asking what you will learn; not what you will do. Frankly, in many ways, the skills for ministry are the easiest objectives to define, however, don't define "skills" too narrowly. One of the most important challenges in preparation for ministry is to grow in your understanding of diverse cultures and your ability to serve a variety of people in the name of Christ. Such diversity spans ethnic backgrounds, age, and sexual preference. There is room within this area for learning strategies for resolving personal conflict, listening skills, trust development, and appropriate leadership styles within such a wide variety of people. If your Supervised Ministry site is a challenging one, you will not only learn specific ministry skills, you will also learn to analyze the context of ministry within the congregation or site and within a wider society. Finally, you will be challenged to think systemically about ministry and to act ethically as a representative of the Gospel.
 - **Objective B: Theological Reflection.** What theological themes will present themselves in this Supervised Ministry setting? What issues with God or the church or yourself will you confront in this experience? Where will you be challenged in your journey of faith? These are the broad questions that need to be addressed in this objective. Obviously, you can't predict all the ways that God's Spirit will impact you in this unit of Supervised Ministry. But you can take some time in the shaping of this covenant to look at yourself, at your own pilgrimage in the Christian faith, at the uniqueness of the setting in which you will be doing Supervised Ministry and to anticipate where you will be stretched theologically. You might even identify an area where you want to be stretched. (One of our students sought out a prison setting because he wanted to explore the meaning of forgiveness in his own theological journey.) For more concrete direction in theological reflection, check out Pages 30-31 in the handbook.

- **Objective C: Ministerial Identity.** One of the miracles of God's continuing work of salvation is that God uses humans to continue the work of Jesus. As you step into ministry, you will need to identify and celebrate how God uses your own uniqueness to do God's work. You will need to define your identity, as a person, as a Christian, and as a minister and you will need to ask how all that fits together in what is uniquely you. You will need to explore areas of ministerial authority; that which is given to you because of your position and that which you must earn as a servant of God's people. You may want to identify areas of personal, spiritual growth. (If your General Goal includes the area of Personal Nurture, it must!) All this is part of the constellation of issues surrounding "Ministerial Identity." (See pages 31-32 for more about identity.)

At this point, in your General Goal, you have identified one of the six areas of ministry for each unit in your covenant, and you've fashioned three objectives for each of these areas. That means that, if your covenant covers two units (i.e. fall and spring), you will have six objectives.

Tasks

While I don't want to seem glib about it, if you write a well-crafted objective, the **tasks** essentially write themselves. The tasks are simply the steps you will need to take to accomplish your objective. Having said that let me ask you to keep a few things in mind.

- ❖ The tasks you include should be a *complete and logical progression* of activities from start to finish. I should be able to see with clarity what you will be doing and how you will do it. There should be no gaps in the activities you propose to carry out your objective.
- ❖ I *don't need to know everything* you propose to do, down to the last detail. If, for instance, you plan to preach two sermons, it would be helpful to know how you will schedule them and how you will develop their themes (lectionary based, seasonal, continuing series, etc.) but I don't need to know every step you take in sermon preparation.

- ❖ Your list of tasks *doesn't need to be absolutely complete*. One of your tasks in planning to preach twice in a semester could be, "In consultation with the pastor and the worship committee, identify two Sundays in which I will preach."
- ❖ Once you have your list of tasks, it would be wise for you to assign *due dates* for each activity. I DO NOT need these in your learning agreement. It's simply a good way to plan and it will impress the daylights out of your supervisor.

Resources

Life gets simpler. Next you will need to develop a list of **Resources** growing out of each step in your list of tasks. Each step along the way you will need to ask, "What will I need to accomplish this task." Once again, I don't need every minute detail. I need enough of a list of resources to show me that you've thoroughly thought through your steps and if you don't have what you need to do the job, you know where to get it.

Oversight and Feedback

The final step in developing your Learning/Serving Covenant is to identify those people who can help give you **Oversight and Feedback** in the process. This is simply a reminder that we never do ministry alone. There are always people who can help us hone our abilities and refine our understanding of any situation. That list can include any or all of your supervisor, your Ministerium, your pastor, your lay committee, your mentor, your classmates, your friends, your spiritual director, your pastoral relations committee, your spouse, your parents, your children, and maybe even the family dog. (They can give us marvelous feedback when we're tense and when we need to relax.)

Covenant Arrangements

Page 3 of the covenant is labeled "Covenant Arrangements." The *beginning date* and *ending date* is self-explanatory. Looking at your *weekly schedule*, use your best judgment. I've included this to give you, your supervisor and your lay committee a general idea of how you will be spending your time. Obviously, it's not written in stone. You have a great deal of flexibility in your weekly schedule, but I want you to think about how you spend your time so that you can set some appropriate boundaries around your Supervised Ministry. If you find that you are putting in many more hours than you've agreed to, you need to reassess your responsibilities. Likewise, if you find yourself bored and twiddling your thumbs, talk with your supervisor. You need to do more.

Let me say a word about what I've labeled *Vacation periods*. First, you may have three periods specified or you may have none. It's for you and the ministry site to determine. However, it is my recommendation that you work with your site to free you from Supervised Ministry responsibilities during those times when you have final exams here at the seminary. I believe that this is good stewardship of your time and emphasizes the cooperation between the seminary and your site.

It's under *Compensation*, that you list whatever arrangements you've made for "Remuneration." (See Page 4)

Comments on the Learning/Serving Covenant

This is my miscellaneous page. It's essentially included to give all of you involved a chance to say anything else you'd like to say but haven't had a space to say it. The final page is included for information and need not be included when the Learning/Serving Covenant is submitted. Speaking of which....

Final Steps

When you have joyously finished the final touches to your covenant and after all who need to have signed Part I, you should make copies for yourself, for your supervisor and for your lay committee chairperson, and then turn a copy in to me. I'm happy to receive these by fax or email, but if you email the covenant to me, make sure I get a hard copy of Part I with the signatures for my official records.

Final Word

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.

The Learning/Serving Covenant in Supervised Ministry hopes to teach that same kind of imprinting. 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. The more seriously you take the Learning/Serving Covenant, the more likely that this particular pattern of planning ministry will be second nature to you. And the more planning you put into your ministry, the more likely you will be to find it blessed by the Holy Spirit and enriching for your own spirit.

Learning/Serving Covenant Summary

- Develop a broad, **General Goal** that still has one focus for each unit of Supervised Ministry. (Two foci for the academic year and one for the summer.)
- Identify three **Learning Objectives** for each foci, that are achievable, specific, measurable, and time-bound for each Ministry Area in your *General Goal*. These objectives should focus on areas of skills for ministry, theological/reflection and ministerial identity. (Three for one unit; six for two units)
- List the **Tasks** necessary to accomplish each learning objective.
- List the **Resources** necessary to accomplish each task.
- List those people who will give you **Oversight and Feedback** along the way.

On the following page, you will see an example of a part of a Learning/Serving Covenant. It states a *General Goal*, a *Learning Objective* for Area A, and the supporting *Tasks*, *Resources*, and *Oversight and Feedback*. You will note that it only scratches the surface of pastoral care but it does so from the area of personal growth and faith development. It focuses on an important issue in the life of the student; one that must be grappled with because it will (does) have a major impact on how the student deals with people who are dying. This *Learning Objective* offers the student a growing experience in the area of pastoral care and counseling.

LEARNING/SERVING COVENANT (Sample)

General Goal

Through this year of Supervised Ministry, I will develop my understanding of and practice in pastoral care.

Learning Objective B: Theological Reflection

By the end of the year in my Supervised Ministry, I will have researched and articulated my understanding of death and life after death.

Tasks:

1. Research social science and theological writings concerning death and life after death.
2. Conduct a biblical study of death and life after death.
3. Discuss eschatology with my theology professor.
4. Interview three older people from the congregation concerning their understanding of death and life after death.
5. Write a detailed outline of my understanding of death and life after death.
6. Make my report the focus of at least two supervisory sessions.
7. Share one of my interviews with my Ministerium.

Resources:

1. Consultation with my biblical professors concerning the relevant passages about death and after life in the Old and New Testaments.
2. The Bible
3. Review Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's On Death and Dying.
4. Examine Jürgen Moltmann's writings concerning the issues of death and the after life.
5. Review The Focused Interview, by Merton, Fiske, and Kendall.

Oversight and Feedback:

1. My Supervisor
2. My Ministerium
3. The older interviewees from the congregation

THE SUPERVISORY SESSION

Overview

Now then, you've found the right setting to do Supervised Ministry, you've immediately bonded with your supervisor and have found your supervisor to be insightful, caring, and theologically deep. You've met with your lay committee (more about that later) and they've made you feel welcome and at home in your site. You've put together a dynamite Learning/Serving Covenant that challenges you but also helps you to offer your greatest gifts to the ministry. How do you get started?

Your Role in Supervised Ministry

It's important to be clear about what you can and should expect from Supervised Ministry. In your ministry setting, you will enter into a Learning/Serving Covenant. That means that you can and should expect to:

- ❖ Learn. That's how your covenant begins. As an adult learner, you will learn from every aspect of your experience. Specifically, you will be learning from
 - your supervisor,
 - the lay committee of your setting,
 - from colleagues on staff
 - and from those you serve.
- ❖ Serve. You are a skilled person in ministry. You come into your ministry setting with gifts for ministry therefore you will contribute to the total ministry of your Supervised Ministry site.
- ❖ You are not a staff member but in many ways, you fill this role. You don't have the longevity of a staff member and, ironically, you are evaluated more closely.
- ❖ You are not a consultant but in many ways, you fill this role as well. You come with a set of skills and expertise that can contribute to the total ministry of your site but you certainly are not paid like a consultant and you aren't given the authority of a consultant either.

Inappropriate Roles for the Student

Having said something about what you are in a Supervised Ministry setting, it might be wise to say a thing or two (or seven) about what you are not. You are not:

- ❖ **A Messiah.** You are not going to save the church, the pastor or both.
- ❖ **A Rebel with a cause.** You can't champion one particular issue or crusade.
- ❖ **A Rebel without a cause.** It's not appropriate to be defensive, hostile, suspicious, or to express anger at something or everything. If you look in a mirror some day and see that this is what you've become, talk with your supervisor and certainly with me. We'll help.
- ❖ **A Missionary to the pagans.** If you see yourself as the only one who is preserving orthodoxy, once again, you'd better talk with your supervisor and me.
- ❖ **A Gofer.** If you're simply running errands for the pastor or anyone else in the ministry setting, say something. It's not good for you and not good for the setting either.
- ❖ **An Empty Servant.** If you believe that all you can offer to a ministry setting is service, empty of skills and leadership, you need to reassess your calling.
- ❖ **A Rescuer.** Look at yourself closely. If you find that you need to be needed, check your motives in going into ministry.

Your Supervisor

Your supervisor is, in the words of an esteemed colleague, "a skilled practitioner in the art of ministry."¹ That means that in your weekly supervisory session, you can expect to receive helpful criticism on how well you are carrying out your tasks in ministry. This is someone who's done it and has good handles on how to do it better. You can expect to deepen your theology as you draw your theology out of your experience; as you grow to see more clearly how God acts in your particular life and in the Church. You can also expect to explore what it means to be a minister; to put on the mantle of one who has been set apart by God as a Minister of Word and Sacrament within the Church. These are high expectations but they are absolutely realistic. Through your supervisory sessions you will also find that this is one of the most enjoyable ways of learning so this aspect of your Supervised Ministry will teach you what you need to know and be and will help you have fun along the way.

¹ Thanks to the Rev. Dr. Harry A. Freebairn, the Director of the Office of Field Education at Princeton Theological Seminary for this one.

In this process, your supervisor must be willing to:

- ❖ Spend at least **an hour each week** (more likely, an hour and a half) with you in the process of supervision and take whatever time necessary to prepare for this session.
- ❖ If your supervisor has not had supervisory training for ministry students,² your supervisor must be willing to participate in the *Foundations in Supervision* course that I offer each fall. This course runs from 9:30 AM-2:30 PM on the first Monday of the month beginning in October and concluding in March. Participants can receive Continuing Education Credits for this course. There is no charge for the course, but each participant must attend at least five of the sessions to get credit for the course. Ministers who have been trained in supervision by other seminaries don't need to attend.
- ❖ Help you **put together your Learning/Serving Covenant**.
- ❖ **Recruit a Lay Committee** and work with you to arrange an appointment with me to train your committee.
- ❖ **Observe** you in your ministry and, taking into consideration your Learning/Serving Covenant, provide your mid-year and year-end **evaluations**.
- ❖ If any severe difficulties arise, your supervisor must be willing to **consult with me** to work on dealing with the issues.
- ❖ Be sure to provide you with **a variety of ministerial experiences**. (Remember the six areas of ministry experience I expect from you.)

It's important that you're aware of these requirements so that you can make sure that a prospective supervisor is willing to accept these conditions before you and your supervisor sign on the dotted line.

² Training for supervision in ministry settings is different from supervision in other fields. In addition to overseeing the development of skills in the helping professions (social work, counseling, etc.) the theological field supervisor must be skilled in helping the student to do theological reflection and ministerial identity.

Inappropriate Roles for your Supervisor

Just as it's important for you to understand what you are and what you are not in Supervised Ministry, so it's important to know what not to expect from your supervisor. Your supervisor should not be:

- ❖ **A Dictator.** You need a colleague not an authoritarian.
- ❖ **A Counselor/Therapist.** Your supervisor can be a listening ear from time to time but if you need therapy, you'll need to see someone else.
- ❖ **A Pal.** While it's likely that you'll form a friendship with your supervisor and will enjoy being with your supervisor, your supervisor is not one to chum around with.
- ❖ **A Peer.** One of the reasons that your supervisor is your supervisor is because your supervisor has something to teach you and some where to lead you.
- ❖ **A Father or Mother.** We all need nurturing and occasionally protection, but it's inappropriate to expect that or to find it from a supervisor.
- ❖ **A Rescuer.** Just as it's not a healthy relationship if you look to rescue the ministry or the supervisor, it's inappropriate to look for rescue from your supervisor.
- ❖ **A User or Abuser.** This is vitally important. If you sense that you are being taken advantage of by your supervisor or if you are being abused psychologically or sexually, **I NEED TO KNOW IMMEDIATELY.**
- ❖ **A Supervisor who is AWOL.** If you are getting no supervision and/or expected to do more than your covenant says, talk with me. We need to talk with your supervisor.
- ❖ **An Archetype.** This is a supervisor who expects you to do everything exactly as the supervisor would do it. You are an individual and are unique. God made you that way, therefore your ministry will be unique. Your supervisor must respect that.

Getting Started

The first agenda that you and your supervisor have is getting to know one another. Take the first two or three sessions together to explore:

- ❖ What's your sense of **call to ministry**?
- ❖ What's your **spiritual and intellectual journey** been like?
- ❖ What's your **family** like? (Remember to use a broad definition of "family.")
- ❖ What **courses** are you taking?
- ❖ What do you **hope to be** when you grow up? (Okay, what do you hope to do when you graduate? Is that better?)

After the "getting to know you," phase, you need to move into a more formal method of reviewing your skills in ministry, growing in theological reflection, and exploring the meaning of ordained ministry and how you fit into it.

The Supervisory Conference

The weekly Supervisory Conference is the heart of Supervised Ministry. It's here that ministry is examined. It's here that the learning proposed in the Learning/Serving Covenant is most intentionally pursued. It's here that you and your supervisor will delve more deeply into the theological heart of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. It's here that you'll talk about what it means to be an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament.

With such high expectations on the Supervisory Conference, it's important that they are scheduled weekly and that there be some structure to them.

- ❖ Your Supervisory Conferences should be **routinely scheduled** so that both you and your supervisor know exactly when they will happen. In this way, both of you can put the conference on your calendar and very little will get in the way.
- ❖ This time should be **dedicated exclusively to Supervised Ministry**, not for staff planning, or informal, friendly chats.
- ❖ Having said that, if you haven't done so before, I believe it's a good thing to take a little time at the beginning to **check in**; to ask, "How are you doing?" and "What's happened in your life over the past few days?"
- ❖ The bulk of your time will focus on your **Ministry Reflection**. (See below.)
- ❖ I also believe that it can be helpful to take some time during your session or at the end to **pray** for each other and your mutual ministry.

Ministry Reflections

One of the cornerstones of your Supervisory Conference is theological reflection. In the words of Robert L. Kinast, "...experience and reflection, faith and works, personal conviction and official doctrine. The goal of theological reflection is to integrate these pairs rather than divide them."³ Such theological reflection begins with your experience. Therefore, to write a Ministry Reflection, you will need to:

1. Choose an experience that grows out of your ministry. For this to be a substantial learning experience, Kinast rightly insists that the experience you begin to focus on be of importance to you.⁴ It should have **significance** in your life and it should be **related to your Learning Objectives**. Most often, this experience will grow out of your Supervised Ministry setting. There are times, however, when the experience for your theological reflection comes through an experience you have had at work, or in the seminary setting, or within your family or simply in the ordinary "stuff" of your living. While such experiences should be significant, they don't have to be earthshaking. One of the most memorable reflections I had with a student I was supervising grew out of a six year old boy in the congregation simply saying to her "I like you."
2. When you've fixed on an experience from your life (ministry) that somehow pushes you to the growing edge of your Learning Objectives, you will need to write a **brief, (two or three paragraph) "Ministry Reflection."** This Ministry Reflection becomes the grist for each week's supervised ministry session, therefore, to be perfectly clear, *you are expected to write a Ministry Reflection each week that you are doing Supervised Ministry.* As you write your reflection, make sure you give adequate room for your supervisor to write comments.
3. While the style and use of language should be **clear and concise** and your thoughts should reach below surface issues, the emphasis is on your reflection and not literary immortality.
4. Occasionally you may choose to write a longer reflection but generally your Ministry Reflection will be **one to two pages at most**.
5. The format suggested here is a suggestion. From time to time you may want to take the freedom to change how you report. Your supervisor may also wish to have a reflection in a different form. **Do what works well for you.**

³ Robert L. Kinast, *Let Ministry Teach*, Collegetown, MN, The Liturgical Press, 1996, p. xii.

⁴ Kinast, pp. 2-4.

6. Audio tapes may be used once in a while to deal with a given situation but they are not practical for regular use. It simply takes too much time to review and digest their material.
7. In addition to becoming the agenda for your weekly supervisory session, your Ministry Reflection will help you **develop an analytical lens through which you will view your total ministry** for years to come. It's a little like the discipline of journaling. Through your Ministry Reflections, you are forced to stop what you're doing and to look at what's happening around you. That's not an easy thing to do when you're in the middle of meaningful ministry. You often get so caught up in the doing, that you don't take time to ask "How am I doing?" or more importantly, "Why am I doing what I'm doing?" Ministry Reflections also force you to identify experiences in ministry that are significant to you and then to begin to ask questions about why they are significant and if they are as significant to God and the Kingdom as they are to you.
8. Your Ministry Reflections should help you find **intersections** between your seminary classes, your life in the Christian Community, your experience in the world around you, and your service in your Supervised Ministry setting. This is integration and it is one of the most important aspects of your seminary education. You are being trained to do ministry and to do ministry well, (as God deserves) all that you're learning should point toward the continuous building of God's Kingdom.
9. A couple of days before your Supervisory Session, **give a copy to your supervisor**. This will give your supervisor a chance to read it, digest its wisdom, marvel at its eloquence, and identify the most important theological issues raised in your writing. While it's not always possible, it is often helpful if your supervisor can return your report to you with a written commentary. This gives you both time to prepare for your session.
10. Finally, your weekly supervisory session can lead to a **pattern of regularly consulting with a trusted colleague** in ministry for mutual evaluation, support, and encouragement. As ministry becomes more and more complex, it is clearer and clearer how much those of us doing ministry need each other. The pattern developed in weekly supervision is a healthy pattern for every Minister of Word and Sacrament. Through this kind of pattern, we become accountable to each other and better learn to share one another's joys and sorrows.

Skills

You and your supervisor will take time to examine the skills you are developing in your ministry setting. As a reminder, the skills you examine should reflect the skills you've listed in your Learning/Serving Covenant. Your supervisor is a source for the actual, hands-on work of ministry, from the mechanics of a baptism to the running of a board meeting.

Let me offer one word of caution, however. Don't let the area of skills development dominate your supervisory session. Looking at how well you are performing the tasks of ministry is the easiest part of Supervised Ministry (although listening to "constructive criticism" may not be). Remember the three purposes of Supervised Ministry and save time for the other two.

Theological Reflection

I like Regina Coll's definition of theological reflection. She says that theological reflection is "the search for meaning, when done in the light of faith."⁵ The meaning she seeks, however, needs to include some kind of continued action in ministry. In its simplest form, theological reflection asks you to:

1. stop what you're doing,
2. describe what's happening,
3. ask, in the context of faith in God, why you're doing what you're doing,
4. finally, you need to ask what you need to do differently to be faithful to what God expects.

I believe that you can write this kind of disciplined reflection in a relatively brief two or three paragraph Ministry Reflection. Obviously it takes some thinking and even praying about the experience. But this is the essence of growing in theological reflection.

Having said that, let me offer you a more in depth method of doing theological reflection that can inform your Ministry Reflection or, can give structure to your reflection, if you choose to write a longer essay.

⁵ Regina Coll, *Supervision of Ministry Students*, Collegeville, MN. Liturgical Press, 1992, p.91. Coll offers a number of models for theological reflection in the rest of this chapter.

Robert Kinast offers a model for theological reflection based on the acronym NAME.⁶ In it, he identifies four relatively understandable steps I'd offer to you as a pattern for theological reflection in your Ministry Reflections.

1. **Narrate** the experience. Your narration should be factual and, as much as possible, value-less. Deal with basic information questions. ("Who?" "When?" "What?" "When?" "How?" Save the "Why?" for later.) In your narration, deal with "Just the facts, Ma'am. Just the facts."
2. **Analyze** your story. Look for the "Why?" of it all. Look at the story from different angles and from the perspective of those involved. Sociologically and psychologically, what's going on? There may be a lot of reasons for the events to unfold the way they did. Where do the issues of faith intersect with your narration?
3. **Look for the heart of the Matter.** What's the primary issue, theologically and relationally? It's in this step that you will incorporate all that you've learned from your Christian tradition, including the Bible, Christian history, your particular tradition, and the thinking of the world's greatest theologians. (We're packing a little in here, aren't we!)?
4. Finally, you're ready for **Enactment.** Now that you've identified the heart of the matter and you've consulted the depths of faith and have heard God call anew, what are you going to do about it? What new steps do you need to take?

Ministerial Identity

The third major goal for Supervised Ministry is helping you develop and grow in Ministerial Identity. What does it mean to step from the front pew as a faithful parishioner to stand behind the pulpit as the pastor? What's the difference between doing ministry and being the minister? Why should people listen to you even if you put on the robes and stand in the pulpit? These are all questions of ministerial identity.

You and your supervisor will need to talk about issues such as:

- ❖ **Role Expectations.** What do boards of congregations or ministry organizations expect of you when you come in as an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament? Which expectations are fair? Which are not? Which are realistic and which are not? It would be good to take time from time to time to talk about the expectations placed on your supervisor and to see how she or he deals with them.

⁶ Robert L. Kinast, *Making Faith-Sense*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1999, p. 20.

- ❖ **Boundaries.** Role expectations naturally lead to an examination of boundary issues. As you will discover (if you haven't already), most places of ministry can fill up a minister's life with expectations. It can be a 24/7 kind of responsibility. Most ministers also have family privileges and responsibilities. Finally, ministers are real people with real needs, so being responsible for your own health and wellbeing is a part of the equation. All of this needs to be discussed with your supervisor. Once again, it would be wise to hear how your supervisor juggles all these responsibilities and still maintains healthy boundaries.
- ❖ **Calling.** Expectations and boundary issues theologically relate to calling. What does it mean to be called by God to be a Minister of Word and Sacrament? How does this calling fit with the calling to be a spouse, a parent, or a child responsible for a parent's wellbeing? If these are all callings from God, which takes precedence? On another level, it's wise for you and your supervisor to periodically look at your calling to ministry. It's a part of continuously testing the Spirit.
- ❖ **Authority.** Seriously, folks, why should anyone listen to you when you say, "Thus says the Lord..." How is your calling to ministry verified by the community to which you are called? What can you do with the authority that comes when you don the collar and robes? What authority do you need to earn? What are the ethical exercises of that authority and what are misuses of it? All these authority issues need to be addressed through your ministry experiences with your supervisor.

All these and many more topics are the bases of ministerial identity. One of the primary values of doing Supervised Ministry with a Teacher in the Field is that this supervisor has had experience in all these areas. Your supervisor may not have thought about all these issues (The busy-ness of ministry can get in the way.) but, I found that my experience as a supervisor of students brought these issues to the surface and it made me a stronger pastor in the process. Like theological reflection, I hope that looking at issues of ministerial identity becomes a life-long, ministry-long discipline for you.

Odds and Ends

- ❖ Obviously, the Ministry Reflection is the primary focus for the session but it may move out of the spotlight if deeper issues arise. Often Ministry Reflections act as springboards to other topics.
- ❖ You and your supervisor should keep copies of all your reports and the written commentaries. By looking back over these reports, you'll get a chance to see patterns emerge, themes reoccur, and you'll be able to get a longer perspective on your Supervised Ministry. Your weekly reports also become important when it comes time to do your semester's end evaluations.

Summary of the Supervisory Session

- Meet with your supervisor for one or two **getting to know you** sessions.
- Weekly, **write** a one-to-two page Ministry Reflection.
- Submit your reflection to your supervisor a **day or two before your session**.
- Your supervisor will **write comments on your reflection** and return it to you.
- Your weekly session will **focus on these issues** and whichever ones grow out of your discussion.
- You will **save all reflections and comments** as tools for identifying patterns and reoccurring issues and for evaluations.
- Through the course of the Supervised Ministry, your reflections should cover issues of **skills development, theological reflection and ministerial identity**.
- Your Ministry Reflections should focus on the **learning goals and objectives** you identified in your Learning/Serving Covenant.

On the following page, you will find three samples of weekly Ministry Reflections with the format that I've found helpful.

Sample Ministry Reflections⁷
#1 "I don't understand myself."

Student's Report

Supervisor's Response

I don't understand myself. Sometimes I really want to be super minister, dynamic ministerial leader, pastoring the most spiritual (sic) alive church in the East, and sometimes I feel so weak and passive and want someone to take care of me and not to expect anything out of me. I am so reluctant to accept what I really am, which is somewhere in the middle. Is it that way for everybody? I guess what I'm really afraid of is waking up in 10 or 20 years and realizing that my ministry has been shallow, lukewarm, for reasons I can't even discern.

#2 "Ministry of Presence"

Report

Response

Thursday began when you showed me the set-up for the bazaar. You will recall that we chatted with some of the women who had come in to set up and decorate, and you introduced me to a few of them. As we headed for the office to work on planning a program together, I commented that it was time to end our playing and get to work, and you responded that what we had been doing was our work-it was ministry. I'm not quite sure how it was ministry...you keep talking about a 'ministry of presence,' but I'm never sure when my presence is a ministry and when it is just presence.

⁷ Permission to use the following samples is granted by Andover-Newton Theological Seminary Field Education Department. These are actually portions of students' weekly reports. They have been disguised and are used with the students' permissions.

#3 "God doesn't want me!"

Report

I started my weekend with a visit to the nursing home where I called on several of the parishioners. One of them was a lady whom I've seen several times and who seemed very lonely. She has had the flue and didn't feel very well. We chatted about this and that for a few minutes, and then she began to tell me about her granddaughter who had just come from England with her three children. She became very animated and pointed to her pictures and told me about them. Suddenly she started to cry and said that God didn't want her. She didn't know why. The people at the next bed stopped and frankly stared. I was dumbfounded and totally unable to respond verbally. I took her hand and held it but felt inadequate and clumsy. Later I thought of all sorts of things I could have said but at the time, I was speechless and very aware of the fact that the room was so crowded that the people nearest us were only a bed width away.

Response

THE LAY COMMITTEE

Who?

In the best of all worlds, before you begin your formal Supervised Ministry, your supervisor will have selected a group of *three to six people* from the congregation or ministry setting to serve as your Lay Committee. This group needs to be composed of people who are

- 1 **knowledgeable of the people** with whom you will work,
- 2 sensitive to what **adult learning** means.
- 3 It's also helpful if they have some acquaintanceship with **pastoral responsibility** and
- 4 possess something of a **pastoral nature** themselves. These are people who will need to be able to "tell you the truth, in love," and will need to be able to support you through the ups and downs of parish work.

In the best of all worlds, early in your time with the Supervised Ministry site, you and your supervisor will invite me to 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 the Lay Committee. I also appreciate this meeting so that I can get to know your ministry site, get to know your Lay Committee members (at least a little) and help train them in their responsibilities.

How?

Once a month, I expect that you will have a **supervisory session with your Lay Committee**. These are the characteristics of this session:

- ❖ **You set the agenda**. It's often helpful if you include a ministry reflection, which you have distributed ahead of time, but the issues you'll talk about are yours.
- ❖ Your **supervisor is not a part of the discussion**.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Save some time to ask the committee, "**How am I doing?**"
- ❖ While this may feel a little awkward, it's also good to include a time in which you tell your committee, "**This is how I'm doing.**"

- ❖ Encourage your 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 committee, a seminarian can learn a sense of the history of the parish and an understanding of the community in which he or 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 clergyperson 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 or 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.

Entry⁸

In the best of all worlds, your Lay Committee will be intimately involved in your entry into the ministry setting. This should include:

- ❖ Announcing to the congregation or the ministry site that you will be coming on board and explaining to them why.
- ❖ With your supervisor, explaining to the congregation or those served in your site what they can expect from you.
- ❖ Interpreting to the congregation or ministry site their role as a "Teaching Congregation" or a "Teaching Site."
- ❖ Introducing you (and your family, if your family will be involved) to:
 - Staff members other than your supervisor
 - The congregation or clientele of the ministry setting
 - Persons within the ministry setting you'll be working with
 - The community in which the ministry setting is set
 - The board of the congregation or ministry
- ❖ From a lay perspective, discussing with you:
 - The purpose and scope of your work with you and with those with whom you will work
 - The mission and goals of the church or institution
 - Your roles and expectations
 - How you fit into the mission of the church or ministry site
- ❖ Orient you to the structures and systems of your setting, including:
 - The layout of the facility
 - Various committees, organizations, and key lay people with whom you'll work
 - Community people you'll be working with

⁸ 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?⁹

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

- ❖ **Covenant-building.** Your Lay Committee 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 unique gifts for ministry
 - The ability to set realistic priorities
 - The willingness to work with you in forming your Learning/Serving Covenant that brings together the church's mission and your learning needs
 - The capacity to be accountable to you, your supervisor, and the people of the site but also to be able to hold you accountable as well.

- ❖ **Feedback.**¹⁰ This is the "telling the truth in love" part. To do so, your lay committee must have a number of gifts and skills.
 - They must be familiar with your ministry and they must participate in it in some constructive way.
 - They must be able to think reflexively (in the model of theological reflection) rather than in preconceived ways.
 - Your Lay Committee must be willing to level with you, to share honestly and openly what's happening and how your ministry is impacting (positively and negatively) the mission of the church.
 - Your Lay Committee must be willing to learn as well as to teach. (In a healthy relationship we are all adult learners.)
 - Your Lay Committee must be patient (with the congregation, and at times with your supervisor and even with you).

⁹ This section is adapted from the Field Education manual of Union Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio.

¹⁰ Appendix E offers specific criteria for helpful feedback.

- ❖ **Evaluation.** There is a formal evaluation your committee will fill out in the spring, but there is the informal evaluation that should take place throughout your ministry with this Supervised Ministry site.
 - They should help you find your "growing edges."
 - Your committee needs to be sensitive to your values and opinions but also be able to listen to the values and opinions of those you serve.
 - Your Lay Committee must be able to hold in confidence what is said and done in your monthly Lay Committee Session.
 - Your committee must be willing to challenge you as well as affirm you.
 - This committee can be a resource to help you make responsible decisions about your future ministry.

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

EPILOGUE

At the beginning of all this, I talked about my experience as a seminarian taking Supervised Ministry. As you recall, it was a life-changing experience for me. It refocused my calling. I had no Supervised Ministry manual and neither did my supervisor. I didn't have a Lay Committee, although, in retrospect, there were some issues that a committee could have helped me handle. I didn't have a Serving/Learning Covenant. There was simply a verbal understanding of those areas of ministry I'd be involved in. My supervisor and I had no formal sessions planned and there were no evaluations. Yet, it changed my life.

Seventeen years later, I was the senior minister of a congregation not far from New Brunswick Theological Seminary and I was sitting on the other side of the desk. Our congregation invited a gifted student to share in our ministry for a year. We had no Supervised Ministry manual. We didn't have a Lay Committee, or a Learning/Serving Covenant. We didn't have formal supervisory sessions planned other than our usual staff meetings, and we had no evaluations. I don't know if her life was changed. She is now a competent colleague in ministry; someone I deeply respect and admire. I know that, as I look back over that experience, I am embarrassed at what didn't happen in her Supervised Ministry experience.

Five years later, our congregation once again invited a student to share in our ministry but this time, I had a manual, and we worked on a Learning/Serving Covenant (Learning Agreement). We formed a Lay Committee, had formal sessions and evaluations, and, at the end of that time, once again, I know I was changed. My experience as a supervisor was rich and rewarding. I trust that it was the same for our student. He is now a colleague in ministry and I respect his work for the Kingdom.

The bottom line is that, whether it is formal or informal, whether it's structured or unstructured, whether it's Supervised Ministry or simply a student working in ministry, such hands on ministry can change lives. That's part of the privilege and miracle of ministry in God's Kingdom. The other side of the coin is that, with structure and planning, that life-changing experience can become a pattern through which such life-changing experiences continue through all your ministry. However it happens, I pray that God will use your experience in Supervised Ministry to confirm your calling and lead you to the fulfillment that comes with building God's Kingdom.

Grace and Peace,