



Bachelor of Theology Program

Information and Handbook for General Track and Specialized Track (Church Context) Students

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Program Information

INTRODUCTION OF ATLANTIC SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND THE B.TH. PROGRAM

Atlantic School of Theology (AST) was founded in Halifax in 1971 by the amalgamation of three antecedent institutions: Pine Hill Divinity Hall (United Church of Canada), King's College Faculty of Divinity (Anglican Church of Canada), and Holy Heart Seminary (Roman Catholic Church). Its primary mission has been training ministers and priests for the United, Anglican, and Roman Catholic Churches and it is fully accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.

AST's **Bachelor of Theology Program (B.Th.)** can be completed in three years, or sooner with year-round study, and is available in both online and on-campus formats.

This model of theological education provides accessible undergraduate theological education for students who have completed high school or equivalent and are seeking to explore their faith, prepare for ministry, or pursue work in community service and nonprofit sectors. Through meaningful engagement with scripture, theology, ethics, history, and pastoral leadership, the program supports academic rigor, vocational exploration, and spiritual growth, equipping students to serve in diverse contexts of faith, justice, and community life.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS

The B.Th. offers two academic tracks to support a range of vocational goals: **B.Th. General Track** is designed for students seeking broad theological formation and personal or academic enrichment. **B.Th. Specialized Track**—which includes preparation for ministry in **(a) church contexts or (b) the United Church of Canada**—is intended for students preparing to serve in faith communities, social service organizations, non-profits, and similar vocational contexts. This track may also serve students preparing for denominational ministry.

The B.Th. comprises 30 credits (equivalent to 90.0 credit hours) and can be completed over three academic years, or in a shorter timeframe through year-round study. Students are normally required to complete 25 credits at AST and are required to take 5 credits at another accredited university in disciplines beyond theology, in order to broaden their academic and vocational formation. These external electives are approved by AST through the Letter of Permission process. Students should first discuss their plans with their Faculty Advisor before enrolling in courses at another institution. Letter of Permission request forms are available at the Registrar's Office.

The following outline of courses is the standard program structure, with possible adaptations based on the student's chosen track – either the **General Track** or the **Specialized Track (Church Context)**. Students preparing for ministry in the United Church of Canada should refer to the separate *B.Th. United Church of Canada Ministry Track Handbook*, which outlines additional requirements for Testamur, in-person coursework, and post-graduation Supervised Ministry Education (SME). All students are encouraged to consult with their Faculty Advisor,

and, if applicable, with denominational bodies to ensure that their academic plan supports their vocational goals.

B.Th. General Track Requirements:

Required AST Courses (5 credits)

RM 1000	Research Methods and Practices
BF 1001	Biblical Foundations HB/OT
BF 1002	Biblical Foundations NT
PF 1001	Pastoral Foundations
TF 1000	Theological Foundations

Restricted AST Electives (10 credits)

- 2 - Biblical (HB/NT)
- 1 - Ethics (ET)
- 1 - History (CH)
- 3 - Pastoral Theology (PT)
- 3 - Theology (ST)

Unrestricted AST Electives (10 credits)

Chosen from any AST department

Courses at Another University (5 credits)

In non-theological disciplines

B.Th. Specialized Track (Church Context) Requirements:

Required AST Courses (7 credits)

All five General core courses, plus:

PF 1002	Preaching Foundations
WF 1000	Worship Foundations

Restricted AST Electives (10 credits)

Same distribution as General Track

Unrestricted AST Electives (6 credits) *

Chosen from any AST department

Supervised Field Education (2 credits) **

MAP 1000	Ministry Action Plan I
MAP 2000	Ministry Action Plan II

Courses at Another University (5 credits):

In non-theological disciplines

* **Unrestricted AST Electives:** Students seeking a specific vocational direction (e.g. service within the Church, a social agency, or a social enterprise) may be advised to take certain courses within their unrestricted electives in order to be well-equipped for these contexts and/or to meet the expectations of their denominational tradition. Students should consult with their Faculty Advisor for guidance.

** **Supervised Field Education:** These 2 courses (MAP 1000/2000) require a paid or unpaid ministry placement under supervision, involving a minimum of 8 hours/week of service from September to April for 2 years. A practicum can be undertaken in 1 site in both years (preferred), or a different site in each year. However, it must be arranged and approved **by September 30th**, and preferably by the end of August. If the student is seeking ordination, the denominational authority to which they relate (district, synod, region, credentialing board, etc.) should be consulted about appropriate practicum sites. Home congregations are normally not permitted, and full-time ministry appointments are discouraged, as students must reserve sufficient time for academic study. (See Appendix A)

B.Th. Handbook for General and Specialized (Church Context) Tracks

Students enrolled in the B.Th. program, especially those engaged in field education, participate in an action-reflection model of learning that integrates ministry or community practice with intensive academic and theological reflection. Questions arising from ministry or community-based contexts can frame attention to academic learning, and insights gained through academic learning can, in turn, deepen and inform faith and vocational practice.

FIELD-BASED LEARNING

Throughout this document, the term “Field-Based Learning” refers to a program that includes:

- Supervised Ministry Practicum appointments in Learning Sites
- Academic courses
- An emphasis on the integration of field-based and academic learning

SUPERVISED MINISTRY REQUIREMENTS

Students completing **MAP 1000 and 2000** are required an approved Learning Site, Educational Supervisor, and a Lay Supervision Team.

THE LEARNING SITE

A Learning Site for **MAP 1000 and 2000** is typically a congregation. However, appropriate alternatives can also be a faith-based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) or a chaplaincy/spiritual care position. Student may be appointed to these roles either in a volunteer or paid, accountable ministry. All placements must be approved as a learning site by AST, including the Educational Supervisor assigned to oversee the student’s work. Confirmation of the Learning Site and Educational Supervisor should be completed no later than September 30th. *(See Appendix A)*

There are shared expectations of Learning Sites and students. Learning Sites serve as partners in a student’s learning process by encouraging and supporting the student’s full participation in academic courses, as well as by providing time for educational leave and holidays. Likewise, students are appointed to a Learning Site with responsibilities as laid out in a Ministry Position Description, offering worship leadership, spiritual support, and pastoral care for the Learning Site.

Patience and flexibility are useful as Learning Site and student establish their relationship and clarify mutual expectations. For students, an important part of this process is the creation of a Learning Covenant. Learning Covenants articulate the student’s learning goals for each year, providing both a framework and a reference point for their ministry. These covenants are reviewed and renewed during, and at the completion of, each year. *(See Appendix B)*

EDUCATIONAL SUPERVISOR

For **MAP 1000 and 2000**, an Educational Supervisor must be approved by the Coordinator of Contextual Education Program. Educational Supervisors often serve as an off-site supervisor at a distance from the Learning Site. An Educational Supervisor may function, at various times, as mentor, friend, colleague, model, coach, consultant, and co-learner, but the primary role is **educational**. Being a supervisor requires, among other things:

- Self-awareness and an awareness of one's own learning style
- A commitment to mutuality in ministry
- A willingness to participate fully in an action-reflection learning process
- The ability to work with the student's identified learning goals
- A desire to cultivate the art of theological reflection

This adventure in intentional learning is rooted in relationship. Therefore, the Educational Supervisor must attend not only on the various tasks of ministry, but also to the intentional cultivation of relationship with the student. Such a goal is not easily achieved, especially amid the pressure of urgent ministerial tasks to be done. The Learning Site understandably holds legitimate expectations in this regard.

Yet, for vocational formation to be truly *educational*, it must provide breathing space for these relational and reflective dimensions as well. Drawing on situations brought by students, supervisors engage their intuitive, emotional, analytical, and theological understanding that they have developed over the years and encourage students to do the same. When each person sees the insight and experience the other brings, the learning process becomes genuinely enriching and fulfilling.

An Educational Supervisor is expected to:

- Meet with the student to clarify their learning goals during the year in ministry (focusing on the period from September to April).
- Meet regularly with the student for the equivalent of 1 hour each week to engage in discussion, analysis, and theological reflection on ministry experiences that emerge from the Learning Site. These meetings can take place every other week for 2 hours or follow other equivalent format by mutual agreement. While virtual meetings (via phone or digital platforms) are permitted, face-to-face meetings should be prioritized whenever possible.
- Work with the student to establish a mutually agreeable time and place for reflection sessions and determine how materials for reflection will be shared (e.g. narrative reporting, verbatim, journal writing, recordings).
- Be available to meet with the Lay Supervision Team (LST) upon invitation. The Educational Supervisor is not a regular member of the LST.
- Explore with the student various ways of analyzing and reflecting theologically on concrete experiences in ministry.
- Develop a mutually agreeable process for feedback and evaluation.

- Provide written evaluations as required by AST and/or the student's denominational body.

LAY SUPERVISION TEAM

For **MAP 1000 and 2000**, the student is responsible for recruiting a Lay Supervision Team (LST). The LST consists of 3–6 people from the Learning Site who agree to meet monthly, from September through April, for approximately 90 minutes to 2 hours. The purpose of the LST is to meet for conversation and mutual reflection.

The student is a catalyst in forming this group, yet the focus is not primarily the student. It is an opportunity for the student to listen and learn from the faith, views, contexts, values, and wisdom of a smaller group—a microcosm of the larger congregation.

The role of the LST is to accompany the student through the process of formation for the practice of ministry. This includes a commitment to regular meetings for exploration, discussion, and implementation of assigned work from the student's online seminar at AST that accompanies each year of the program, along with theological reflection and evaluation of all learning experiences. A successful group cultivates a sense of mutuality in sharing and discussion and a sense that everyone is learning together.

Who is a Member of the LST?

When a congregation agrees to become a learning site, it provides the names of at least three persons willing to be members of the LST. Some members may be chosen because of their knowledge of or connection to the student. However, a family member or partner of the student is not an appropriate member of the team. Members are expected to commit to 1 year, with the possibility of continuing their participation into the following year.

Ideally, the team reflects diversity in age, gender, skills, cultural or ethnic background, and experience in the faith community. An Educational Supervisor may serve as a consultant where necessary but is not to be involved in the LST on a regular basis.

The student takes the initiative in inviting individuals to be part of the LST, doing so in consultation with their Educational Supervisor and with key congregational leaders. These members may include those initially assigned to the LST by the Learning Site.

One team member may be designated as Chair to work alongside the student in preparing for regular meetings. For ease of communication between the Learning Site and AST, one member should be designated as the main contact for AST, responsible for sharing evaluations and receiving further program information.

When the team has been established, it is helpful to have a covenanting liturgy during a worship service to recognize and celebrate the ministry of the student and LST. This celebration could include the Educational Supervisor, if possible. In this way, members of the Learning Site

are made aware of the formational role of the LST in the student's learning process.

Role and Responsibilities of the LST

A Lay Supervision Team:

- Supports the vocational formation of someone preparing for the practice of ministry.
- Offers personal insights and perceptions of the ministry setting (e.g. through sharing stories/ histories).
- Reflects on and engages complex issues in the practice of ministry as partners in the teaching-learning process.
- Develops a deeper understanding of the nature of Christian vocation for all God's people through conversations about lived faith.
- Provides constructive feedback to the student and AST regarding the traditions and practices of their ministry setting. *(See Appendix D)*
- Understands and respects diverse viewpoints and demonstrates a willingness to work through situations of disagreement or conflict.
- Provides written evaluations as required by AST or the student's denomination.

EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Evaluation is an important part of field-based education. At the end of each academic year, evaluations are submitted by the student, the Educational Supervisor, and LST. Evaluation forms are designed by AST and are incorporated into the coursework for **MAP 1000 and 2000**. These are shared with judicatories as appropriate.

In MAP 1000 and 2000, the evaluation form used by the LST is provided by the course instructor and submitted directly to the course instructor. These evaluations are kept in the student's file and shared with the appropriate denominational judicatory as part of the student's ongoing formation and assessment process.

NOTE: All students taking the MAP 1000 and 2000 must send a copy of an up-to-date Police Records Check, including a Vulnerable Persons Check/Level II, to AST prior to the commencement of a practicum placement.

SITE VISITS

The Coordinator or another AST representative will normally conduct a site visit for all students enrolled in **MAP 1000**, as well as for those who have moved from one Learning Site to another. During these visits, the representative will meet with students, their Educational Supervisor, and, if possible, their LSTs. These visits provide an opportunity for all partners in the student's learning journey to meet together. The representative will offer guidance in the application of the B.Th. processes and gather first-hand impressions of the learning site. Site visits may be conducted in person or through digital technology.

Attendance at these visits may be helpful, particularly for students serving in remote areas, and is especially recommended by AST during the first year of the Program. In order to participate

fully in the Program and all courses, each student must have a reliable computer and high-speed internet access at their Learning Site. As students often perform secretarial duties as part of their placement, a computer is also essential to their ministry work.

TERMINATION AND LEAVES OF ABSENCE

At any point, a student may withdraw or be withdrawn from the program. Resuming studies will require a new application process.

A one-year leave of absence may be granted upon written request under extraordinary circumstances. However, a leave of absence may delay the completion of the program by up to 4 years in order to complete the cycle of coursework.

If a student's appointment at a Learning Site is terminated through no fault of the student, the appropriate courts and committees of their denomination, in consultation with AST, will identify a second site or an alternative method for field-based learning and the accumulation of the required ministry experience.

WITHDRAWAL FROM PROGRAM AND APPOINTMENT STATUS

If a student is withdrawn, suspended, or terminated from the academic program, AST will notify the student's denominational judicatories. Students who withdraw from the academic program while under appointment may be eligible to continue in their appointment at the discretion of the appointing bodies.

LEARNING COVENANT AND PORTFOLIO

Beginning in **MAP 1000**, each student will develop a Learning Portfolio. Students should review their portfolio on a yearly basis with the appropriate judicatory overseeing their educational process. The Learning Portfolio will include:

- The Learning Covenant established for each year of Practicum, including student's Learning Goals for that year. First-year goals may include those identified by the student based on their perceived needs or those recommended by denominational bodies, referees, and other mentors.
The Learning Covenant should be reviewed each year and amended as needed (e.g. updating the names of new LST members, changes in the intended pattern of Educational Supervision, etc.).
As a living document, the Learning Covenant will be updated when feedback and evaluations are offered through self and peer assessment, as well as input from the LST, Educational Supervisor, church courts, the Coordinator of the Contextual Education Program, and instructors. All these information will shape future learning directions.
- Copies of all evaluation forms.
- Copies of academic transcripts provided annually by the Registrar.
- Other documents as required by the student's related judicatory.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Theological reflection is at the heart of the practice of ministry. In addition to academic courses, books read, and wisdom shared, the experience of ministry offers continual surprises. The question of where God's Spirit is leading the people of God is essential to growth in ministry. This question becomes more complex when experiences are analyzed through the lenses of theology, pastoral ministry, biblical witness, church history, faith, contextual frameworks, denominational polity, and so on. Theological reflection will be a constant aspect of all learning.

One of the Educational Supervisor's key tasks is to engage with the student in shared theological reflection. The Educational Supervisor must also feel free to challenge the student to go deeper, to pursue serious questions, and to question any easy answers the student may quickly grasp.

During supervision, theological reflection offers an opportunity to examine both the theological foundations of practice and the theological questions arising from practice. Meetings with the Lay Supervision Team will also include theological reflection as a part of the discernment process regarding the meaning and purpose of ministry.

Theological reflection within a group usually begins with personal storytelling. Responses to questions such as "Where is God in this?" or "What is the Spirit saying to us?" often express deep feelings. Genuine theological reflection values affect and experience as first steps on a deeper journey of questioning and exploration. Students will often be initiators and leaders of theological reflection or will provide a model for lay leaders. Every member of the group must feel free to speak, and to ask of anyone else, "Tell me more. I don't understand." A leader must not be afraid to ask of any and all, "Now that we have discerned this, what do we do?"

It may be helpful to have in mind what is sometimes called "Wesley's Quadrilateral." The experience that frequently first shapes our reflection is but one tool of discernment. As Christians, we also look to *scripture*, *tradition*, and *reason* as we discern meaning and trace the Spirit's movement. (See Appendix C)

Appendix A

Setting Up Your Placement for MAP 1000/2000

As practicum courses, Ministry Action Plan (MAP) 1000 and 2000 fulfill the field education requirements for the **B.Th. Specialized Track (Church Context)**. Each student must have a paid or unpaid supervised ministry placement, with a minimum of 8 hours/week from September to April for 2 years. In order to take MAP 1000 and 2000, students must have a supervised ministry placement.

A placement can be undertaken at the same site for both years (preferred) or at a different site each year. Students cannot complete their placement in home congregation. The student will develop learning goals, and all parties (student, supervisor and Lay Supervision Team) will complete evaluations at the end of the winter term. The Educational Supervisor is appointed by AST in consultation with the appropriate judicatory and the student.

If the ministry placement is a paid appointment, the appropriate judicatory must approve the appointment. Full-time appointments are strongly discouraged to ensure sufficient time for academic studies. Annual evaluations will be shared with the appropriate judicatory.

In MAP 1000 and 2000, agreements are arranged between AST and the site to facilitate student learning. It is important to begin this process well in advance of the start date for the course, following these steps:

1. Read the B.Th. Handbook and schedule a conversation with the Program Coordinator to discuss the placement process and available options.
2. Research potential placement sites, either unpaid or as a pastoral appointment, and identify a possible Education Supervisor. Make sure that any judicatory that needs to provide approval is kept in the conversation.
3. Email your suggested placement to the Contextual Education Coordinator, who will contact the site and speak to the potential supervisor about what the placement entails and the role of the Supervisor.
4. Once the site and supervisor have been approved, the student is responsible for completing the Practicum Agreement Form and submitting it to the Contextual Education Program Coordinator, Wing Yi Wong (Wing.Yi.Wong@astheology.ns.ca). The student must also have a Police Records Check on file at AST.

**Atlantic School of Theology Practicum Site Agreement
MAP 1000/2000**

This site agreement must be completed and signed by both the student and the Educational Supervisor and submitted to AST before the placement can begin. Please email the completed form to the Contextual Education Program Coordinator, Wing Yi Wong at Wing.Yi.Wong@astheology.ns.ca and to the Academic Dean, Susan MacAlpine-Gillis, at Susan.MacAlpine-Gillis@astheology.ns.ca.

Student Name:

Course: ☐ MAP 1000 or ☐ MAP 2000

Judicatory Contact:

Judicatory Email:

Placement Name:

Placement Address:

Placement Details

Is this a Paid Student Appointment or a Volunteer Position?

How many hours per week? (Minimum 8hrs/wk)

Are you in a team ministry or a solo position?

Educational Supervisor

Name:

Email:

Phone:

General Agreements

We hold the following understanding for our work together in MAP 1000/2000:

- If the placement is a volunteer position, the student commits a minimum of 8 hours per week at the placement for 13 weeks each term, planned in consultation with the supervisor.
- Normally, the student and the Educational Supervisor will meet weekly for 1 hour, or biweekly for 2 hours. This time is dedicated primarily to theological reflection on current pastoral experiences arising from the student's placement and connected to the student's learning goals.
- The student will meet 2–3 times each term with the LST.
- The student and the supervisor agree to prepare evaluations for submission to AST as outlined in the course syllabus, using the evaluation form provided by the instructor.
- Should conflict or difficulties arise that threaten the learning potential of the student at the Learning Site, all parties agree to first work together to resolve or clarify the situation. If the situation cannot be resolved on site, then either the student, the Educational Supervisor, or both together will approach the MAP Instructor and the Coordinator of the Contextual Education for consultation and assistance.
- A Learning Covenant with agreed-upon learning goals will be submitted to the MAP 1000/2000 instructor(s) in accordance with the scheduled outlined in the course.

Signatories

Student:

Date:

Educational Supervisor:

Date:

Appendix B

Guideline for Developing Learning Covenant and Goals

The Learning Covenant clarifies for AST, the student, the Educational Supervisor and the Lay Supervision Team (LST) the specific commitments and responsibilities undertaken during a field education placement. This statement, to be signed by all parties, is a way of holding each other accountable during their time working together in relation to the ministry site. Although many other aspects of learning will occur for all involved, the goals and undertakings named in the Learning Covenant form the basis for evaluation in meeting the curricular goals of MAP 1000/2000 as part of the student's **B.Th. Specialized Track (Church Context)** program.

Because each student has unique areas of experience and inexperience, learning goals tailor the curriculum emphases to the particular student and site. Clarifying specific learning goals helps the student develop pastoral skills, pastoral identity, and confidence in the ministry they plan to pursue. Goals, drafted by the student, are discussed with the Educational Supervisor and the LST in the fall and should be reviewed in January to identify any new goals that may have emerged from the Fall Term's experiences.

The following guidelines and examples can help the student prepare learning goals and can help the Educational Supervisor and LST clarify those goals and articulate ways of working towards them.

Learning Goals are most helpful when they:

- Are concrete and specific
- Include the opportunity for observation by both the student and others
- Are intentional, time-limited and invite specific feedback and evaluation
- Address both pastoral identity and skill development
- Are realistic within the given context and timeframe.

Action plans for learning goals should:

- Name concrete and specific occasions, functions, and programs through which objectives may be tried, experienced over time, or practiced
- Be developed in consultation with others at the ministry site, taking into consideration the planning and permission that may involve other people or groups
- Propose the nature of supervision, consultation and evaluation that will help the student measure progress on the goal
- Include the kind of tool(s) to be used for reporting or reflecting on events

Evaluation of learning goals should:

- Be experienced, worked on, and reflected upon within a particular context by both the student and others
- Take place at agreed-upon times and in previously agreed-upon ways

- Be undertaken in a spirit of trust, openness and mutual respect, knowing that learning is a lifelong process, and that perfection is not the measure for ministry.

Sample Learning Goals

Example 1

Learning Goal: To develop my leadership skills and confidence in facilitating learning for adults in a small group setting.

Action Plan: I will

- Identify with my supervisor the skills I already have and those I want to work on
- Lead a session on the value of pastoral care with my Lay Supervision Team this fall
- Lead an adult Bible study group for four 1.5-hr sessions in February, based on the NT course I am taking this fall
- Test different educational methods in the Bible study and ask participants to evaluate which methods work for them
- Talk with my supervisor about my comfort using these educational methods, after journaling my reflections on the Bible study sessions

Evaluation: I will

- Identify changes in my skills in my journal and discuss them with my supervisor
- Invite members of the LST and the Bible study group to reflect on my confidence using different educational methods
- Video record at least one group session and watch it in order to observe how I present information and respond to questions

Resources: Books on adult education methods and Bible studies; Ms. X, a teacher in my LST; Course notes and texts from biblical courses; Class discussion on educational design

Example 2

Learning Goal: To offer pastoral care to people I don't know very well, facing situations outside my experience, and to overcome my shyness in praying aloud

Action Plan: I will

- Be assigned specific individuals with whom to connect and visit
- Practice active listening skills and asking open-ended questions
- Talk with my LST about their experiences of pastoral prayer and how they pray with and for others
- Talk with my supervisor about when and why I feel shy, and engage in theological reflection on how I understand God's presence and care in pastoral situations
- Write verbatim reports of my visits to discuss with my supervisor

- Talk with my MAP Instructor about expectations around prayer and pastoral care in my church

Evaluation: I will

- Request feedback from my supervisor and LST about the prayers I lead
- Request feedback from those I visit
- Get feedback on a case study from one of my visits presented in class
- Get feedback from classmates on my prayer leadership in chapel

Resources: Books on pastoral care; my MAP instructor, Educational Supervisor, LST, classmates and pastoral faculty at AST

MAP Learning Covenant

Please submit the completed learning covenant, including learning goals, to your MAP instructor in accordance with the course syllabus

Student: _____ Email: _____

Learning Site: _____

Supervisor: _____ Email: _____

Contact for LST: _____ Email: _____

We hold the following understanding for our work together:

- If the placement is a volunteer position, the student commits to a minimum of 8 hours/week at the placement for 13 weeks each term, planned in consultation with the supervisor. In a congregational site, weekly participation in worship is expected.
- Normally, the student and the supervisor will meet weekly for an hour, or biweekly for 2 hours, for supervision and theological reflection on current pastoral experiences arising from the student's placement and connected to the students' learning goals.
- The student will meet 2–3 times each term with the Lay Supervision Team.
- The student and the supervisor agree to prepare evaluations for submission to AST as outlined in the course syllabus, using the evaluation form provided by the instructor.
- Should conflict or difficulties arise that threaten the learning potential of the student at the learning site, all parties agree to first work together to resolve or clarify the situation. If the situation cannot be resolved on site, then either the student, the Educational Supervisor, or both together will approach the MAP Instructor and the Coordinator of the Contextual Education for consultation and assistance.

Signatories

Student: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

LST Representative: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

A Model for Theological Reflection

Adapted from the work of The Rev. Dr. Abigail Johnson

Introduction

Briefly describe the ministry in which you are engaged.

Name the Experience

Think of several experiences, events, or situations in your current ministry where you have played a significant role. Select ONE, preferably one with which you were challenged or about which you have some questions or concerns.

Reflect on the Experience

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

Analyze the Experience

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

Make Theological Connections

- What images, symbols, or concepts of God does it evoke?
- Who/where is God in this situation, for you and for others? Where does God appear absent?
- What biblical, historical, literary, or other stories does it call to mind?
- What Christian doctrine or practice is relevant to it?
- What learnings from our faith tradition are applicable?
- How does this relate to other faiths, cultures, or traditions?

Reflect on Your Learning

- How has your understanding of Christian discipleship been enriched or challenged?
- What have you learned or discovered about the practice of ministry?
- How does this reflection relate to your learning goals?

Pray

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

Conclusion and Discussion

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

Resources for Theological Reflection

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

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

Appendix D

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Adapted from *Reflecting with God*, by Abigail Johnson

Giving and receiving feedback can be one of the most challenging areas of community learning. Offering feedback can feel invasive, treading on tender areas of self-esteem. People frequently say, “Who am I to offer my thoughts to another person?” In particular, people in ministry settings feel reluctant to offer feedback to ministry candidates because they feel less able to speak about theology, faith or God. However, each person has unique insights, life experiences and observations that provide valuable input in the learning journey.

Receiving feedback can be just as challenging. Hearing feedback from others might challenge our assumptions or create concerns about whether we are loved, appreciated or valued. Some feedback is not useful, or the timing is not right, so it can catch us off balance and creating confusion. On the other hand, feedback is a valuable learning tool, giving us insight into our actions, our context, and ourselves. The process of feedback helps us learn how to hear, receive and act on what is being offered in order to gain self-awareness and deeper insights about ministry.

The following are a few suggestions to assist the purpose and process of giving and receiving feedback:

Timely

Choosing the right time to offer feedback is important. Beginning an in-depth analysis of a sermon while shaking hands with the minister at the door after worship is too close to the event for effective conversation and feedback. Scheduling a conversation at a pre-arranged time, when the immediacy of an event has passed, creates a better space to look back and reflect on what took place.

Useful

Following a teacher evaluation, I once received the feedback, “If only you were a little taller, you would offer a better presence to the class.” Since I could not do anything about my 5 feet of height, I did not find this to be useful feedback. Finding ways to offer constructive suggestions for improvement gives useful ways for someone to improve.

Descriptive

Offering feedback may take a little effort to think about what you did and did not like, and why you responded in the way you did. For instance, saying “I just didn’t like it” does not give any clear indications of where another person might improve or increase awareness of their actions. More description feedback is helpful, such as “When you stood in the pulpit at the beginning of worship, your voice was so soft, and you looked down at your notes. I did not feel welcomed into worship.”

Positive and Growing Edges

When giving feedback, it is often helpful to name gifts and positive areas as well as identifying areas for improvement. However, try not to fall into the formula of saying, "You were great . . . but". Often, people do not fully hear the positive comments and instead wait for the "real" feedback or the learning edge comments.

Intentional

When looking for feedback, it may be helpful to arrange or organize ways to solicit it intentionally. For instance, handing out feedback forms prior to a service is a proactive way to encourage responses from the congregation about preaching. Asking for feedback can be difficult because it is a vulnerable moment. Yet it helps us focus on areas where we want to improve in relation to others. Feedback is usually given in a general way such as, "I really enjoyed your sermon." While it is wonderful to have such affirmation, you may want to hear more specific comments about a particular area. Learn to ask specific questions, such as "I was attempting to make a connection between the biblical story and our daily lives. How did I do?" Or, when asking for specific feedback, it might be helpful to ask people your question ahead of time so they can be attentive to the area you are trying to improve. Be careful not to ask questions that only require a "yes" or "no" answer, such as "Did you enjoy my sermon?" Perhaps you can rephrase the question to, "What did you enjoy about my sermon?" to invite more specific feedback.

Negotiate

It may be useful to discuss, as a group, how you wish to receive and offer feedback. Feedback may be easier to hear when it has been requested, rather than hearing unsolicited advice. When someone has clearly stated, "I want to hear your thoughts about my presence in the hospital as I visit," it is easier to jump in with thoughts.

No Surprises

Offering thoughts, insights and feedback as time and opportunity allow is very important in a learning relationship. Saving up feedback until the end of a learning experience does not give people time to try different styles, skills, or methods. Offering feedback along the way is preferred, with a final evaluation being a summing up of the whole experience.

There must be no surprises in a final evaluation.

Appendix E

Beginning the Learning Process: Suggestions for LSTs

Adapted from *Reflecting with God*, by Abigail Johnson

In this small group process, begin by creating a Group Covenant. Share stories of groups that have been effective and those that have been less effective. What values and common understandings are important as you form a group that is respectful, mutual, and confidential?

Other aspects of the group covenant may include:

- Clarifying the purpose of the group
- Agreeing to respect personal confidentiality
- Supporting each other in ministry and learning
- Being willing to offer constructive feedback (*See Appendix D*)
- Being faithful in attending meetings

Suggestions for a First Meeting

- Allow time for introductions, greetings, and storytelling
- Share a significant early-life experience of church, either negative or positive
- Invite each participant to share why they agreed to become a member of the group
- Clarify the purpose and process of a LST using this Handbook
- Invite members to bring an object or symbol that is personally meaningful and explain its significance

Suggestions for Subsequent Meetings

- Incorporate spiritual enrichment through readings, prayer, Bible study, an opening or closing or centering ritual, and times of silence
- Discuss experiences and issues in ministry brought by the student or other members
- Reflect on each person's understanding of ministry
- Use a story or an event to focus discussion on a particular ministry issue, including issues arising from the student's weekly reflection reports or classroom presentations
- Use a book, article, current event, or issue in the news to guide discussion
- Engage in theological reflection—individually or as a group—using the appended model (*See Appendix C*) or other available models
- Share and explore ministry issues and themes relevant to the student's learning goals
- Explore important and relevant themes in ministry, such as the meaning of faith, styles of leadership, the power of prayer, boundaries in relationships, dealing with grief and loss, anger at God, the challenges of justice-making, etc.
- Use resource materials such as books, articles, and videos on ministry issues
- Include intentional closure: celebration is an important part of community life and so is saying goodbye!

Suggested Meeting Format

- Opening prayer, reading, or hymn
- Check-in (How is everyone doing since the last meeting?)
- Presentation of a theme or issue for discussion (may be assigned in the student's SMP course)
- Time for discussion
- Wrap-up (How did you feel about this meeting? What was helpful or not helpful? What might we do differently next time?)
- Closing prayer, reading, or hymn

Group Facilitation

To encourage a sense of shared responsibility within the group, the LST is encouraged to rotate leadership or facilitation of sessions, though there could be one continual chairperson overseeing the entire year's process. Using the above meeting outline, the role of the facilitator is to monitor discussion. Discussion should be a blending of voices with time to hear from everyone. Invite quieter people to speak and gently suggest that more eager speakers to remain mindful of those who have not yet shared. Some ways to do this:

- Have speaking go around the circle so everyone has a turn. If someone has nothing to say, they can say "pass."
- Have a few minutes of discussion in pairs, with pairs bringing thoughts and ideas back to the group. This allows quieter people to offer their thoughts.
- Have a time of silence for a minute or so for people to reflect and gather their thoughts. This allows introverts a few moments to collect their thoughts.

Remember that **this is a learning experience for everyone**, where mutuality means being able to hear from everyone. Also, the student needs to learn to listen to the faith, values, and concerns of others in order to learn how to walk with people as a spiritual leader.