



ATLANTIC SCHOOL
of THEOLOGY



Lay Supervision Team (LST) Handbook

(also for Lay Resource Teams)

Revised July 2023

Atlantic School of Theology

660 Francklyn Street

Halifax, NS B3H 3B5

Academic Office

academic@astheology.ns.ca

Acting Academic Dean

Susan.MacAlpine-Gillis@astehology.ns.ca

Acting Coordinator, SD M.Div. Program

Andrew.ONeill@astheology.ns.ca

INTRODUCTION

You are most likely reading this handbook because your congregation/parish has agreed to be a learning site for a M.Div. student of AST, and someone has asked if you would be willing to serve on the Lay Supervision Team (LST) to support this student as they engage in supervised field education. The student may be volunteering their time in your site, working with your priest/minister, or they may be in a paid appointment to serve as your student minister while they continue to study at AST.

Every Student must have an educational supervisor who meets weekly or biweekly with the student as well as a Lay Supervision Team. Both the educational supervisor and the LST are essential components of the learning circle for a student.

LAY SUPERVISION TEAM

A Lay Supervision Team (LST) is composed of 3-6 people from the Learning Site who agree to meet monthly, from September through April, for approximately ninety minutes to two 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. The LST offers an opportunity for the student to listen to the faith, views, contexts, values, and wisdom of a smaller group within a larger community, a microcosm of the pastoral charge.

The role of the LST is to accompany the student through the process of formation for the practice of ministry. This accompaniment will include commitment to regular meetings for exploration, discussion, and implementation of assigned work within the student's online seminar at AST, as well as theological reflection and evaluation of all learning experiences. A successful group will have a sense of mutuality in sharing and discussion and a sense that everyone is learning.

Who is a Member of a LST?

In a new Learning Site: When a congregation, parish, pastoral charge, or NGO agrees to become a learning site, it agrees to identify at least three people willing to be members of an LST. In some cases, because conversations may begin early in the process, a student will be aware of these persons and their willingness to serve. In other locations, an LST may be in place before any conversations with students. In every situation there should be openness to change the initial membership, and to allow a student to invite others to join the LST.

In an established Learning Site: A new appointment to an established site calls for the appointment of a new or intentionally renewed LST. Some members of the group may be chosen because of their knowledge of or connection to the student. A family member or partner of a student is not an appropriate member of the group. Ideally, the group will be balanced with such qualities as age, gender, skill, cultural or ethnic background, and experience in the faith community.

An Educational Supervisor may function as a consultant where necessary but is not to be involved in an ongoing basis.

Members are expected to make a commitment to serving on the LST for one year with the possibility of continuing as participants in subsequent years. Opportunities for members of the congregation, parish, pastoral charge, or NGO to alternate participation in this group may offer lively learning for the pastoral charge. Whatever the nature of a particular group, a LST functions as an important part of the learning process.

One person from the group 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, designate one member of the group as a contact person for sharing evaluations and further program information.

When the membership has been established, it may be helpful to have a covenanting liturgy during a worship service or in some other way recognize and celebrate the ministry of this group and the student. This celebration could include the Educational Supervisor, if possible. In this way, members of the Learning Site are made aware of the role of the LST in the learning process.

Lay Supervision Team Role and Responsibilities

A Lay Supervision Team:

- Supports vocational formation of someone preparing for the practice of ministry.
- Offers personal perceptions of the ministry setting (sharing stories / histories).
- Reflects on and struggles with important issues in the practice of ministry and function as partners in the teaching-learning process.
- Develops a fuller understanding of the nature of Christian vocation for all God's people through conversation about their lives of faith.
- Offers feedback to the student and AST on the traditions in their setting.
- Understands and acknowledges differences of viewpoint and conviction and is willing to work through situations of disagreement or conflict.
- Provides written evaluations as required by AST or the denomination.

EVALUATION AND REPORTING

During all years in practicum, evaluations shall be completed. For students in MAP 1000/2000, evaluation forms are provided by AST's online seminar instructor and, once completed, are submitted back to the instructor. Evaluations are kept in the students file and will be shared with the appropriate denominational judicatory.

For students in SME 3000/4000, the evaluation process is the responsibility of the Candidacy Board. Those completed evaluations are to be shared with AST's United Church Formation Director and the Coordinator of the Summer Distance Program.

The Work of the LST

1. BEGINNING YOUR PROCESS TOGETHER

It is very important that the LST meets with the student as early as possible in the Fall to begin work together. It is very helpful to determine your monthly meeting dates early so that people can put them in their calendars. Meeting over a meal can be a helpful way to create community.

Each Fall, the student will also need to create learning goals. The LST can be helpful in crafting learning goals and discerning the best way to help the student to work toward them. Learning goals are central to the student's work and should be reflected on in some way at each meeting. It can also be helpful to have the members of the LST establish their own learning goals for the year so that everyone is involved in a learning process.

The student will have more information about the timeline for learning goals and a learning covenant.

2. LEARNING TOGETHER: SUGGESTIONS FOR LSTs

What follows is based on the work of Abigail Johnson's *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute Press, 2004). In this small group process, begin by creating a Group Covenant. Share stories of groups that have been effective and groups that have been less effective. What values and common understanding is important as you form a group that is respectful, mutual, and confidential? Other aspects of the group covenant may be as follows:

- clarify the purpose of the group
- agree to respect personal confidentiality
- be supportive of each other in ministry and learning
- be willing to offer constructive feedback (see Appendix C)
- be faithful in attendance at the meetings

Suggestions for a First Meeting

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

Suggested Meeting Format

- Opening prayer, reading, or hymn
- Check-in (How are people doing since the last meeting?)

- Presentation of a theme or issue for discussion (*which may be assigned in the Student's MAP or SME course*)
- Time for discussion and connection to learning goals
- Wrap-up (How did you feel about this meeting? What was helpful or not helpful? What would we do differently next time?)
- Closing prayer, reading, or hymn

Suggestions for Subsequent Meetings

- Spiritual enrichment through readings, prayer, bible study, an opening or closing or centering ritual, and times of silence
- Discussion of experiences and issues in ministry brought by the student or other members
- Reflections on each person's understanding of ministry
- Use of a story or an event to focus discussion about a particular ministry issue including issues arising from the student's weekly reflection reports or classroom presentations
- Use of a book, article, current event, or issue in the news
- Theological reflection - individual or group sharing using the appended model or other available models
- Sharing and exploration of ministry issues and themes relevant to the student's learning goals
- Exploration of 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, challenges of justice-making, etc.
- Closure - celebration is an important part of community life. So is saying goodbye! Be intentional about it.

Group Facilitation

In order to encourage a sense of shared responsibility for the group, the LST is encouraged to rotate leading or facilitating a session although there could be one continual chairperson to oversee 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 become aware of those who are quieter. 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 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 to learn how to walk with people as a spiritual leader.

3. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Theological reflection within a group often begins with personal storytelling. Responses to questions such as, "Where is God in this?" or, "What is the Spirit saying to us?" are often expressive of 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?"

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 through analysis of experiences through the lens 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.

A Model for Theological Reflection

Abigail Johnston, *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups*
(Herndon, VA: Alban Institute Press, 2004)

Introduction

Briefly describe the ministry in which you are engaged.

Name the Experience

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

Reflect on the Experience

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

Analyze the Experience

- What factors were at work in the situation? (attitudes, emotions, assumptions, social and cultural issues, power dynamics, etc.)
- What was at stake for me? (how does it connect with my own history, family and/or life experience, convictions, values, etc.)

- How was I enriched or challenged by it?
- What did I discover about myself?
- What do I want to remember or forget about it?
- What questions or concerns remain with me?

Make some Theological Connections

- What images/symbols/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?
- What learning from our faith tradition is applicable?
- How does it relate to other faiths/cultures/traditions?

Reflect on your Learning

- How has my understanding of Christian discipleship been enriched or challenged?
- What have I learned or discovered about the practice of ministry?
- How does all this relate to my 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, 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 a broader discussion of the theology and practice of ministry for discussion in a group or with a mentor.

Additional Resources for Theological Reflection

Killen, Patricia O'Connell and John de Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 1994)

4. FEEDBACK

An important aspect of the Lay Supervision Team's work is providing feedback to the student. Many students are looking for feedback on worship leadership and preaching since these are central to ministry. However, each student is different and the learning goals that the student established should provide a framework for reflection.

It is helpful to look at the evaluation forms, which will be completed in the Spring, so that you are aware of the many areas of ministry you will be invited to reflect upon with the student.

Giving and Receiving Feedback from Abigail Johnson, *Reflecting with God*

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 often 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 experience and observations that offer valuable input in the learning journey.

Receiving feedback can be just as challenging. Hearing feedback from others might challenge 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 creating confusion. On the other hand, feedback is a valuable learning tool giving us insight about our actions, our context, and our selves. The process of feedback is to learn how to hear, receive and act on what we are 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 helpful. Beginning an in-depth analysis of the sermon while you are shaking hands with the minister at the door after worship, is too close the event for effective conversation and feedback. Having a conversation at a pre-arranged time when the immediacy of an event has passed is a good time to look back and reflect on what took place.

Useful

Following a teacher evaluation, I 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 actions. More description 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

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

Intentional

In looking for feedback it may be helpful to arrange or organize ways to solicit feedback. For instance, handing out feedback forms prior to a service is a proactive way to encourage response from the congregation about preaching. Asking for feedback can be difficult because it is a vulnerable moment. Yet seeking feedback helps us to focus on areas where we want to improve in relation to others. Often feedback is 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, in asking for specific feedback it might be helpful to ask people your question ahead of time so they can be sensitive to and aware of 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 ask, "What did you enjoy about my sermon?"

Negotiate

It may be useful to discuss, as a group, how we 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 present itself is very important in the learning relationship. Saving up feedback until the end of a learning experience does not give time for trying different styles, skill, 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 the final evaluation.

5. THANK YOU

Atlantic School of Theology is deeply grateful to all of you who accompany our students on the adventure of learning through participation on a Lay Supervision Team.

If you have any questions or require additional support, please contact the Coordinator of the Summer Distance Program, Andy O'Neill. (Andrew.ONeill@astheology.ns.ca)