

Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education

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The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education (December 2021)



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Contents

About This Resource	4
The Indigenous Context	4
Policy	5
Purpose of Supervised Ministry Education.....	6
Elements of Supervised Ministry Education	7
1. Learning Site.....	7
2. Lay Supervision Team	7
3. Educational Supervisor	8
4. Learning Covenant	9
5. Evaluation.....	9
Requirements by Stream of Ministry.....	11
Diaconal Ministry	11
Designated Lay Ministry.....	11
Ordained Ministry.....	12
Supervised Ministry Education Programs for Ordained Ministry.....	13
SME Integrated into Program of Study.....	14
SME Separate from Degree Program.....	15
Financial Support to Learning Sites.....	17
Moving Grant	17
Process for Terminating SME	18

About This Resource

The requirements of Supervised Ministry Education (SME) intersect with many aspects of the church. This resource is for all those involved in the formation of candidates during SME including Candidacy Boards, theological schools, communities of faith, educational supervisors, and Lay Supervision Teams. In order to appoint a candidate to a pastoral charge for their SME experience, those involved in pastoral relations processes must also refer to this resource.

Candidates for ordained ministry and designated lay ministry (DLM) must read this resource. It is important that the Candidacy Board discuss plans with the candidate for fulfilling learning needs through the Supervised Ministry Education experience early in their Candidacy Pathway process.

The Indigenous Context

The [Calls to the Church](#) that were adopted at the 43rd General Council 2018 included the following in relation to Supervised Ministry Education:

We, the Indigenous faith communities of The United Church of Canada, as an expression of the United Church's adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, call for:

- a. Indigenous community and region approved ministry placement options outside of the church context;
- b. Agencies outside of the church to be educated to work cooperatively in assisting the Indigenous ministry formation accompaniers to supervise these placements;
- c. Programs to be established to provide clinical, helping, and healing skills for ministry students, and community development and networking;
- d. Reporting to and celebration from the church concerning this work of ministry students in such placements.

All United Church documents that are referenced may be found at united-church.ca/handbooks.

Policy

The policies about Supervised Ministry Education are found in [The Manual](#) under H. Entering Ministry, section H.5.2, Developing Competency:

Each candidate for ordained and designated lay ministry must satisfactorily complete a Supervised Ministry Education program that involves learning goals based on the Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership, reflection on the practice of ministry, and regular supervision and evaluation.

The Candidacy Board determines a candidate's readiness for Supervised Ministry Education.

The Candidacy Board determines completion of Supervised Ministry Education by assessing a candidate's competence for ministry leadership based on the Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership.

The Candidacy Pathway Policy resource includes the following additional policies:

1. Before the Candidacy Board authorizes readiness for Supervised Ministry Education, approval as a candidate is required.
2. The Candidacy Board discerns and assesses readiness for Supervised Ministry Education through an interview.
3. The candidate is responsible for developing learning goals for Supervised Ministry Education in consultation with the Candidacy Board and in relation to the Learning Outcomes, the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice, feedback/reports from their theological school/program, and their vocational assessment report.
4. The Candidacy Board recommends the type of Supervised Ministry Education program and learning site to best address the candidate's learning goals. *For SME appointments that are not integrated into the program of study, the normal length of the SME is two years. The minimum length of a SME is 34 weeks at 40 hours per week. Supervised Ministry Education can be fulfilled through either a pastoral charge appointment, a specialized ministry setting, or a combination of both. The minimum period in one place is 13 weeks. One exception is that the period may be less in the case of a Clinical Pastoral Education program.

This resource gives further policies and procedures as well as best practices and resources to support the implementation of Supervised Ministry Education.

Purpose of Supervised Ministry Education

Ministry is a complex and demanding vocation that requires depth of character and numerous competencies. The policies and procedures for Supervised Ministry Education aim to support candidates in their formation for the challenging and rewarding role of ministry leadership through a practical learning experience. They also aim to support the church in assessing a candidate's competence for ministry leadership.

Supervised Ministry Education is not simply an arbitrary period of time for a candidate to practise the mechanics or the "doing" of ministry. It is not about putting in a certain number of hours to gain experience.

The goal of Supervised Ministry Education is to develop and deepen a candidate's competence for ministry leadership based on the Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership.

This goal is achieved when SME is understood as a significant learning experience where:

- learning goals are the focus;
- reflection on the practice of ministry leads to learning rather than simply the practice of ministry itself;
- the candidate develops and integrates the spiritual habit of theological reflection into the regular rhythm of life as a minister;
- all involved deepen their commitment to mutuality in ministry;
- the church fosters an appreciation for life-long learning and the candidate identifies areas for ongoing growth and development; and
- the Candidacy Board is provided with the necessary information to measure and assess a candidate's competence for ministry leadership in order to ensure that the leadership of the church is faithful and effective.

Elements of Supervised Ministry Education

A Supervised Ministry Education experience includes the following five elements:

- learning site
- Lay Supervision Team
- educational supervisor
- Learning Covenant
- ongoing/regular evaluation

1. Learning Site

A SME learning site is a community of faith that has been established as an appropriate setting for a candidate's learning and where the requirements for Supervised Ministry Education can be accomplished.

Communities of faith that participate in the formation of candidates provide a valuable resource for nurturing the future leadership of the church. Supervised Ministry Education is also an opportunity for the people of God to grow in faith and in a deeper understanding of the practice of ministry.

A pastoral charge that is interested in becoming a SME learning site can refer to the [Pastoral Relations resources](#) for more information.

2. Lay Supervision Team

The Lay Supervision Team is a group of lay people associated with the learning site who are dedicated to the ministry and mission of the church. The team supports the candidate as they seek to develop competency for ministry leadership.

Refer to the [Learning Covenant resource](#) for more information on the role and responsibilities of the Lay Supervision Team.

The learning site is responsible for establishing a Lay Supervision Team.

The Lay Supervision Team is appointed by the governing body of the community of faith.

It is recommended that three to seven people serve on the team. The team should be representative of the congregation and of the community in which ministry occurs. It should include people of various ages and genders.

It is not appropriate to appoint a paid staff person; the chair of the official board, session, or council; the treasurer; any member of the Ministry and Personnel Committee; or anyone who may have a conflict of interest with the candidate.

The Lay Supervision Team does not replace the Ministry and Personnel Committee of the congregation. The Lay Supervision Team does not provide disciplinary oversight of the student minister. That is the role of the Ministry and Personnel Committee, which has oversight of all staff in the pastoral charge. In any situation where there appears to be a conflict of roles, consult the Office of Vocation for advice and guidance.

Some key skills for the Lay Supervision Team include the following:

- a vision of ministry as a shared endeavour between the laity and the minister
- listening
- confidentiality
- a willingness to share their faith
- knowledge of different aspects of the congregation
- the ability to observe behaviour and offer constructive feedback and encouragement

The Lay Supervision Team is accountable to

- the candidate to assist their process of learning;
- the governing body that appointed the team; and
- the Candidacy Board for the quality of the education on the site, the evaluations of the work undertaken, and for the oversight of the learning and formation of a person for ministry leadership.

3. Educational Supervisor

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

The Office of Vocation sets standards and approves trained educational supervisors.

The Office of Vocation is responsible for appointing an educational supervisor for a candidate's SME.

An educational supervisor is expected to do the following:

- Meet with the candidate at the beginning of the SME experience to clarify what they hope to learn during the experience.
- **Meet with the candidate for the equivalent of an hour each week** to discuss, analyze, theologically reflect, and engage in shared reflection on ministry experiences that emerge in the candidate's learning site. Meetings can take place every other week for two hours or in another equivalent manner as mutually arranged or as required by the type of SME. Meetings may be conducted by telephone or online.

- Explore with the candidate ways of analyzing and reflecting theologically on concrete experiences in ministry. Using situations brought by the candidate, a supervisor draws on all the intuitive, emotional, analytical, and theological understanding they have developed over the years and encourages a candidate to do the same.

The qualities desired in an educational supervisor are as follows:

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

The educational supervisor must successfully complete a program designed to train for the ministry of supervision. The purpose of the program is to

- provide participants with a basic knowledge of and skill in the supervisory process;
- enable participants to experience and identify their learning needs and prepare a Learning Covenant;
- enable participants to practise supervision skills and receive feedback;
- enable participants to claim and develop their skills in theological reflection;
- help participants to discover their own patterns of supervision in ministry; and
- encourage participants to articulate a theology of ministry grounded in their experience of supervised learning.

Refer to the [Learning Covenant resource](#) for more information on the role and responsibilities of the educational supervisor.

4. Learning Covenant

In Supervised Ministry Education, the Learning Covenant articulates the agreement between the participants in the experience. It is a commitment to work, learn, and grow together. It includes practical considerations, such as meeting times, the types of theological reflection models that will be used, the learning goals that shape the experience, the processes for feedback and evaluation, agreed procedures for conflict resolution, and the rituals that celebrate the participation, learning, and growth of all involved.

There is a [Learning Covenant resource](#) that provides guidelines and support for developing a Learning Covenant.

5. Evaluation

Evaluation is a key component of Supervised Ministry Education. It is used by the Candidacy Board to assess a candidate's proficiency in the Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership and determine completion of Supervised Ministry Education.

Evaluation reports are submitted to the candidate's Candidacy Board. The timing of reports depends on the type of SME the candidate is undertaking. Typically, there is a "check-in" report within the first four to six months of the SME. A fuller report is submitted halfway through, and a final report submitted at the end. The parties involved in the SME follow the direction provided by the Office of Vocation Minister in relation to the number and timing of evaluations.

Programs at theological schools that incorporate the SME requirement may require additional evaluation and reporting processes.

The evaluation takes time to complete. Time should be allotted during the SME experience. The final evaluation must be complete before the candidate leaves the learning site.

The Lay Supervision Team, supervisor, and candidate are required to read one another's comments and indicate that they have read the evaluation. No new information or surprises should be presented in the evaluations. If in sharing the comments there is disagreement about wording or an observation, the contentious point may be changed by mutual agreement, or a comment can be added to indicate the disagreement.

Requirements by Stream of Ministry

Supervised Ministry Education differs depending on the stream of ministry a person is pursuing and their program of study.

Diaconal Ministry

Candidates for diaconal ministry at the Centre for Christian Studies complete field placements through an integrated program of study. The policy about Supervised Ministry Education does not apply to candidates for diaconal ministry.

When a field placement is being arranged, the Centre for Christian Studies notifies the pastoral relations staff of the regional council where the learning site is located and the Office of Vocation Minister of the candidate to ensure that the community of faith is a suitable setting for the candidate's learning.

Designated Lay Ministry

DLM candidates complete three years of Supervised Ministry Education in a pastoral charge appointment while attending learning circles at St. Andrew's College. This appointment must be a minimum of half-time.

DLM candidates at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre complete Supervised Ministry Education requirements as a part of their program of study.

Pastoral Charge Appointment

An SME appointment is an experience that takes place in a pastoral charge setting. It provides a candidate with the opportunity to experience the full breadth of ministry leadership.

The appointment must be a minimum of half time.

Pastoral charges must follow the United Church's minimum salary scale regarding salary, pension, benefits, and other reimbursements and benefits.

This type of SME experience intersects with pastoral relations policy and processes. After the Candidacy Board approves the candidate as ready for SME and indicates that the SME may take place within the context of a pastoral charge appointment, the candidate is given access to the listing of available learning sites in ChurchHub. The candidate follows the pastoral relations process to secure an appointment to a learning site.

Before the candidate submits an application to a pastoral charge, the Candidacy Board must indicate whether the learning site will be a suitable context for the candidate to fulfill their learning goals.

Ordained Ministry

There are various options for those in the ordained ministry stream to undertake the SME requirement.

Some theological schools include SME as a part of the program of study. Candidates who complete a program of study that does not include SME must pursue SME as a distinct component of their formation for ministry.

The same information about pastoral charge appointments (noted above) applies to those candidates in the ordained ministry stream.

The following section provides additional information regarding the various SME programs for candidates for ordained ministry.

Supervised Ministry Education Programs for Ordained Ministry

The following chart shows programs of study at United Church theological schools that integrate the SME requirements and those that do not.

United Church Theological School	Program of Study	SME Requirement
Atlantic School of Theology Halifax, NS	3-year on-campus Master of Divinity degree	SME is not included in the degree.
	5-year Master of Divinity summer distance program	SME is integrated into years 3 and 4 of the program of study.
Emmanuel College Toronto, ON	3-year on-campus degree	SME is not included in the degree.
Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre Beausejour, MB	People preparing for ministry in an Indigenous Ministry setting complete a diploma in Indigenous Ministry.	SME is integrated into the requirements of the program of study.
St. Andrew's College Saskatoon, SK	4-year Master of Divinity degree includes on-campus study, a Ministry Residency, and a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education.	The Ministry Residency and the unit of Clinical Pastoral Education are considered the SME experience.
The United Theological College/Le Séminaire Uni Montreal, QC	3-year on campus Master of Divinity degree	SME is not included in the degree.
Vancouver School of Theology Vancouver, BC	3-year on campus Master of Divinity degree	SME is not included in the degree.

SME Integrated into Program of Study

The following provides additional information on the SME programs that are integrated into the degree at a theological school.

Atlantic School of Theology Summer Distance Program

Candidates undertake SME as a part of this five-year ministry-based education program. The program allows candidates to engage in the integration of the practice of ministry with learning from academic courses. Two years of the program, years 3 and 4, are considered to be the period of SME.

Candidates serve in a pastoral charge appointment. The appointment must be a minimum of half time and no more than three-quarters time. The appointment must be in place no later than September 30 every year of the program.

Candidates are required to attend a six-week summer term on the AST campus. The candidate and the Ministry and Personnel Committee must negotiate the use of continuing education and vacation time to ensure that vacation time is not used to meet the demands of the program. Creativity and genuine compromise are required in order to provide the time the candidate needs for both study and vacation.

Refer to resources through AST for additional details.

Pastoral Charge Appointment

An SME appointment is an experience that takes place in a pastoral charge setting. It provides a candidate with the opportunity to experience the full breadth of ministry leadership.

The appointment must be a minimum of half time.

Pastoral charges must follow the United Church's minimum salary scale regarding salary, pension, benefits, and other reimbursements.

This type of SME experience intersects with pastoral relations policy and processes. After the Candidacy Board approves the candidate as ready for SME and indicates that the SME may take place within the context of a pastoral charge appointment, the candidate is given access to the listing of available learning sites in ChurchHub. The candidate follows the pastoral relations process to secure an appointment to a learning site.

Before the candidate submits an application to a pastoral charge, the Candidacy Board must indicate whether the learning site will be a suitable context for the candidate to fulfill their learning goals.

Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre

Candidates for ordination at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre complete Supervised Ministry Education requirements as a part of their program of study.

St. Andrew's College Ministry Residency

Candidates complete a two-year, half-time pastoral charge appointment after the second year of studies as part of the Master of Divinity degree. The college enters into a cooperative partnership with the Candidacy Board for the supervision of ministry residents.

Ministry residents use their paid continuing education leave to attend St. Andrew's College Learning Circles and may use their continuing education allowance for travel and accommodation.

Refer to resources through [St. Andrew's College](#) for additional details.

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Before the candidate submits an application to a pastoral charge, the Candidacy Board must indicate whether the learning site will be a suitable context for the candidate to fulfill their learning goals.

SME Separate from Degree Program

When a candidate pursues a degree program for ordination that does not include the SME requirement, the degree is typically completed before the candidate begins SME. In rare circumstances the Candidacy Board approves readiness for SME before the candidate has completed their academic program.

The Candidacy Board determines the type and length of SME required of the candidate on a case-by-case basis in order for the candidate to develop competency based on the Learning Outcomes. The Candidacy Board keeps the purpose of SME, as stated above, at the forefront when making the determination. The Candidacy Board uses the Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership as the primary way to assess competencies the candidate demonstrates and the competencies the candidate will work on over the course of the SME.

**The normal length of the SME is two years.
The minimum length of a SME is 34 weeks at 40 hours per week.**

Supervised Ministry Education can be fulfilled through either a pastoral charge appointment, a specialized ministry setting, or a combination of both.

The minimum period in one place is 13 weeks. One exception is that the period may be less in the case of a Clinical Pastoral Education program.

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Before the candidate submits an application to a pastoral charge, the Candidacy Board must indicate whether the learning site will be a suitable context for the candidate to fulfill their learning goals.

Supervised Ministry Education that takes place under appointment presents a dual expectation of the pastoral charge and the candidate. The pastoral charge has a responsibility to participate in the candidate's growth and formation for ministry. Yet, the candidate is responsible for fulfilling the role of ministry personnel with the pastoral charge as outlined in the ministry position description. Navigating the vulnerabilities of learning about the practice of ministry with a community of faith while providing leadership, spiritual nurture, and pastoral care for its members requires openness, flexibility, and humility by all involved. In any situation where there appears to be a conflict of roles with the various parties involved in the SME appointment, consult the Office of Vocation minister for advice and guidance.

Specialized Ministry Setting

A specialized ministry SME experience takes place outside of the pastoral relations system. Examples include a Clinical Pastoral Education program, a chaplaincy position, or an outreach setting. A specialized ministry setting provides opportunity for a candidate to experience and deepen their understanding of particular aspects of ministry leadership. The candidate makes the arrangements for a SME in a specialized ministry setting. The Candidacy Board must approve the candidate's plans for a specialized SME prior to the candidate making final arrangements.

Financial Support to Learning Sites

Some grants are available to support pastoral charges to participate in SME as a learning site. The funds are made available through Mission and Service. Pastoral charges can submit an application to the Office of Vocation at the General Council Office at any time. New criteria and applications for these grants are forthcoming in 2024.

Moving Grant

Up to \$5,000 per year may be granted to pastoral charges who appoint a candidate for SME who will move more than 500 km to the learning site. The grant will pay for actual moving costs up to \$5,000.

Process for Terminating SME

In the event that the candidate displays inappropriate behaviour during the SME, their Candidacy Board is to be notified. The Candidacy Board determines the course of action for the candidate's formation for ministry. If the candidate is not able to change the inappropriate behaviour, the points outlined below may be followed to terminate the SME.

There are also times when the difficulties encountered in the Supervised Ministry Education experience lead to a decision to dissolve the Learning Covenant and end the experience. All possible action should be taken to avoid terminating the experience.

In the case of conflict arising between members of the covenant relationship, please refer to the Learning Covenant resource, which outlines a process for dealing with conflict during the SME. Steps should be taken to seek to resolve conflicts before considering terminating the SME.

During a time of conflict, the Office of Vocation Minister should be notified. This individual ensures that pastoral care is available to all parties involved.

The supervisee may contact their Candidacy Board at any time and is strongly encouraged to draw upon the support of their Circle of Accompaniment. Candidates are also eligible for the United Church's Employee Family Assistance Program. They may want to make use of this valuable resource during a time of conflict or crisis.

If the conflict cannot be resolved, the following action will be taken:

- The Candidacy Board makes a decision about continuing or terminating the SME. The Candidacy Board determines the end date of the SME in consultation with the learning site and any other administrative details or conditions.
- The decision of the Candidacy Board is communicated to all parties involved.
- If the SME is taking place within the context of a pastoral charge appointment, the regional council is consulted. Appropriate pastoral relations processes are followed to terminate the appointment.
- The three parties to the Learning Covenant (supervisor, Lay Supervision Team, and candidate) each write a report based on the experiences to date. A specific evaluation form for SMEs that are terminated is available from the Office of Vocation Minister.

In the case of students in a learning program who are withdrawn, suspended, or terminated from the academic program, the school must notify the candidate's Candidacy Board. In some circumstances, candidates who withdraw from the academic program while under appointment may be eligible to continue in their appointment at the discretion of the Candidacy Board and the regional council.