

Candidacy Pathway
The Learning Covenant:
A Resource for Supervised
Ministry Education

September 2019



Office of / Bureau de la
vocation

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada



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About This Resource

This resource describes the roles, responsibilities, and covenant relationship among the candidate, the Lay Supervision Team (LST), and the educational supervisor during a supervised ministry education (SME) experience.

During SME, a Learning Covenant creates the framework for the learning that will take place and how it will be evaluated.

This resource is intended for candidates, supervisors, and LSTs who are actively involved in SME. It will assist all participants in giving shape to the learning goal and making important agreements on the process for learning and for evaluation.

About Learning Covenants

What Is a Covenant?

The dictionary defines a covenant as a contract, a written agreement between participants. In the biblical tradition it has a much richer and deeper meaning, building on God's ancient promise:

I will be your God, and you shall be my people... (Jeremiah 7:23, NRSV)

Covenant, in this sacred sense, refers to binding together people in mutual trust and loyalty with God and within the community of faith.

What Is a Learning Covenant?

In supervised ministry education, the Learning Covenant articulates the agreement among the participants in the experience. It is a commitment to work, learn, and grow together.

Covenanting is rooted in faith. It assumes and encourages mutual respect, support, openness, and honesty. It anticipates difficulties and offers help in a constructive way. It is intended, primarily, to support learning and growth in ministry.

How to Create the Learning Covenant

The Learning Covenant includes a signed statement (see the example below) plus attachments. The total package might cover the topics outlined in this chart:

Topic	What to Include	Resources
Educational Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your common understanding of supervision and the roles of the participants? • What does mutual respect mean to the parties in the covenant? How will you be intentional about developing trust? • What does confidentiality mean in this context? What is your agreement on how confidentiality will be maintained? 	pp. 9–10, 13–14
Practical Considerations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Logistical details of the agreement, including where and how often meetings will take place for supervision. Who calls and facilitates the meetings? 2. Structure of your time together: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Who is responsible for the agenda? b. What ought to be included in your agenda? c. Things which, by agreement, will not be dealt with during supervision. 	pp. 9–14

Topic	What to Include	Resources
	d. What are the boundaries? E.g., time, space, topics, frequency of meetings.	
Models of Theological Reflection	What agreed-upon models of theological reflection will be used during supervision sessions?	pp. 15–21
Learning Goals	<p>Learning goals and action plans, including a list of planned activities and desired outcomes of the following parties in the covenant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidate’s learning goals, action plans, and methods of evaluation • Supervisor’s learning goals • Lay Supervision Team’s learning goals 	pp. 22–26
Feedback and Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a mutually agreeable process for feedback and evaluation. Include methods and tools to be used during supervision: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Verbatims or case studies b. Tapes or sermon manuscripts c. Specific reading assignments d. Journals kept by candidate e. Other 2. Basis for revising or renegotiating the Learning Covenant. How will you review the Learning Covenant to ensure it is being honoured? How might you modify your covenant if it is no longer satisfactory? 3. When and how will formal evaluation be carried out? Who needs to receive reports, and what are the deadlines? 	pp. 11–12, 23, 27, 30
Agreed Procedures for Conflict Resolution	How will you address conflict if it arises among you? Whom will you consult with, alone or together, if things arise that cause you to seek outside advice?	pp. 29–31
Rituals	How will you celebrate the covenant at the beginning, and how will you close the Learning Covenant at the end of the experience? How will the wider community be involved?	pp. 32–33

Sample Learning Covenant Format

Learning Covenant

This Learning Covenant covers the period from _____ to _____

- Name of candidate _____
- Name of supervisor _____

Supervision will take place on _____ (date) at _____ (location)
with opportunities to reflect on learning goals.

- Name of Lay Supervision Team representative _____

Lay Supervision Team meetings will take place at _____ (location)
with opportunities for reflection on learning goals.

Evaluation will occur at the mid-point and end-point of the internship through the following process:

Acknowledging our humanity, we agree to the following process for conflict resolution:

This Learning Covenant with attached learning goals is agreed to by all participants, with opportunities for revision as learning unfolds.

Signatures _____ (candidate)
_____ (supervisor)
_____ (Lay Supervision Team representative)

Date _____

Attachments: The learning goals and action plans of all participants to the covenant are attached as well as additional documents to describe the covenant agreement.

Participants in the Learning Covenant

Three parties are involved in the Learning Covenant: the Lay Supervision Team, the educational supervisor, and the candidate.

Although a SME involves three-way conversation among the candidate, supervisor, and Lay Supervision Team, the principal relationships are between the Lay Supervision Team and the candidate and between the educational supervisor and the candidate.

The following sections describe the roles and responsibilities of the Lay Supervision Team and the educational supervisor, and their relationship with the candidate.

Lay Supervision Team

The Lay Supervision Team is a representative group of laypeople associated with the learning site who are dedicated to the ministry and mission of the church. They are active in the congregation and represent the diversity within the community of faith.

The team's role is to support the candidate in growing personally, intellectually, professionally, spiritually, and in social awareness, with special attention to the learning goals.

Team members function as interpreters of the life of the congregation. They also interpret the process of education and supervision to the congregation.

Lay Supervision Team members are active participants in the Learning Covenant that is made with the candidate and supervisor. Therefore, individuals chosen to be members of the LST need to be open to their own learning about the wider processes of the church, the functions of ministry personnel, and their own Christian calling as disciples.

The LST fulfills its role by

- sharing their perceptions and knowledge of the site and the community. Team members reflect with the candidate on the practice of ministry experiences and the learning opportunities that take place.
- offering feedback to the candidate. The team contributes to integrating the learning and fulfilling the Learning Covenant.
- engaging in conversation and reflection on experiences. Team members grow in their own understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God.
- helping the candidate gain skills for ministry leadership, deepen awareness of pastoral identity, enhance their spirituality, and gain interpersonal awareness.

Additional information about the Lay Supervision Team can be found in the [Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education](http://www.united-church.ca/handbooks) resource (www.united-church.ca/handbooks).

Lay Supervision Team Meetings with the Candidate

Through planned times for conversation, prayer, and reflection, the Lay Supervision Team and the candidate learn together. During meetings, members are to offer support, give feedback, and share in theological reflection with the candidate.

The Lay Supervision Team meets with the candidate roughly once a month. The team may need to meet more often at the beginning of the SME to get to know the candidate and develop the Learning Covenant. Additional meetings may also be required to finalize evaluations.

Other details to consider:

- The convenor or chair of the LST should be someone who can encourage all members of the team to take part in the discussion and express their points of view.
- Hold meetings in a comfortable place with no distractions, such as a church room or in the homes of LST members.
- The agenda of meetings should be decided ahead of time by the LST convenor and the candidate or by the whole committee at its previous meeting.
- The length of meetings will depend on how long is needed to deal with the concerns and agenda of the candidate and the members of the LST. It is recommended that about two hours be set aside for each meeting. This will allow time for people to probe the issues of ministry in some depth, as well as allow time for worship and socializing.
- Since the meetings are intended to focus on the learning goals and experiences of the candidate, it is *not* appropriate for their partner or other family members to be present. The LST may invite the candidate's partner or family members to a social gathering to welcome and get to know them.

Timeline of Meetings

Timing	Purpose/Tasks/Guidelines
Before the Candidate Arrives	<p>The Office of Vocation Minister arranges to train the Lay Supervision Team. Ideally, this training occurs before the candidate's arrival</p> <p>During this time the LST will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get to know fellow LST members • clarify the role of the LST • learn the specific requirements of the candidate's education program • clarify the timelines and process for evaluation and reporting • discuss how they will work together to determine an agenda for each meeting • discuss the available learning experiences and the tasks needed by the congregation • begin to share learning goals and action plans <p>The LST takes an active role in welcoming the candidate.</p>

Timing	Purpose/Tasks/Guidelines
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write to the candidate to welcome them. You might include a copy of your community’s annual report, newsletter, bulletin, and so on. You might also encourage members of the congregation or site to send notes of welcome. • If necessary or appropriate, discuss how you might help the candidate with any housing concerns. • Plan for how you can introduce the candidate to the community. • Plan how to share the appropriate pieces of the Learning Covenant with the whole congregation, and begin to plan a ritual, possibly with the Ministry and Personnel Committee, to introduce the candidate and mark the beginning of the Learning Covenant. • Invite the candidate to a meeting.
First Meeting with the Candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be intentional about getting to know one another. • Clarify the role and purpose of the LST with the candidate. • Talk about how the meetings will be conducted (timing, location, prayer, facilitation). • Discuss the meaning of confidentiality, and commit to how you will (or will not) share information during and outside the meetings. • Discuss how you will handle conflict if it arises, • Ensure all members have a copy of this booklet and the appropriate evaluation form(s). • Begin the process of preparing the Learning Covenant, and set a date for completion. • You may want to invite the Educational Supervisor to this meeting, if possible, so all parties get to know one another. <p>Make plans to recognize the Learning Covenant and the participants in a service of worship.</p>
Ongoing Meetings	<p>Guidelines for a typical meeting of the Lay Supervision Team with the candidate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make sure that during the meeting <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. someone takes notes b. all participants have an opportunity to speak and share c. everyone practises active listening 2. Open with a devotion/worship time: prayer, reading, singing, or centring meditation. 3. Check in to see how people have been doing since the last meeting. 4. Invite the candidate to share some aspect of ministry they have been engaged in, and discuss the experience as a group. Engage in conversation and theological reflection about the candidate’s learning goals and experiences. Offer feedback, insight, and support. 5. End the meeting when you decided it would end.

Timing	Purpose/Tasks/Guidelines
	6. Determine which aspect of the Learning Covenant you will discuss at your next meeting, and set the date. 7. Share brief closing remarks, and offer a closing prayer or blessing.
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a meeting without the candidate present to complete the necessary evaluation. Discuss and respond to the evaluation questions, and arrange for someone to type the evaluation responses. • Then call together the three parties to the Learning Covenant to share evaluation responses. • This may be a time to also review the Learning Covenant and make changes, if necessary.
Third-to-Last Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make plans for the final evaluation. • Discuss how the candidate will say goodbye to the many people who have become important to them. • Plan a ritual and party to end the relationship.
Second-to-Last Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet without the candidate present. • Discuss and respond to the evaluation questions and arrange for someone to type up the evaluation responses. • Finalize the arrangements for the farewell event(s).
Final Meeting with Candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call together the three parties to the Learning Covenant to share final evaluation responses. • Hold a rite of closure for the end of the Learning Covenant with the candidate to celebrate the experience.
After Final Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the experience of the Lay Supervision Team, and evaluate the work of your team. • Prepare a report for the governing body of the pastoral charge you are accountable to.

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 the current call and practice of ministry. This intentional practice of reflection helps to shape individuals toward integrated faith and develops ministers who are aware of themselves, others, the social context, and the big questions of theology and Spirit.

More information about the educational supervisor is found in the [Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education](http://www.united-church.ca/handbooks) handbook (www.united-church.ca/handbooks).

Forming the Relationship between the Educational Supervisor and the Candidate

The educational supervisor and the candidate should consider the following points as they meet to clarify roles and expectations and create the Learning Covenant:

- The educational supervisor and the candidate are expected to meet for the equivalent of an hour each week. This may be less depending on the nature of the SME; see the *Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education* handbook for more information on expectations related to the educational supervisor. The educational supervisor and the candidate discuss, analyze, theologically reflect, and engage in shared reflection on ministry experiences that emerge in the candidate's learning site.
- Make arrangements for the format and logistics of the meetings. Some meetings may be conducted by phone or electronically, but plan for as many face-to-face meetings as possible. Discuss location, timing, format, and agenda for your meetings.
- At the beginning of the experience, it is helpful to identify the learning needs and styles of the supervisor and the candidate. This may include both of you discussing your hopes, fears, and expectations. For instance, some like to plunge in, while others like to observe or do some reading before engaging in some tasks.
- For both parties to deepen their learning, the supervisor and the candidate must develop trust. You may want to reflect on ways to develop trust and how power dynamics work within the supervisory relationship. For instance, the supervisor has the power to evaluate the candidate, yet the candidate carries personal power through the self-evaluation process.
- Not all issues can be discussed in the initial stages of forming a relationship, but it may be helpful to identify how each person works through difficult issues, whom each may talk to, and how resolution may occur. If the setting is a multiple staff site and other staff are involved, they may also need to discuss how to resolve conflicts.
- Initially, the candidate will spend time writing learning goals. The educational supervisor supports this process by meeting with the candidate to help clarify what they hope to learn during the supervised ministry education experience and how that learning can be achieved and evaluated.
- As a member of the Learning Covenant, the educational supervisor is expected to develop their own learning goals as a commitment to the ongoing learning and growth that is required in ministry. These are shared with the candidate.

- Once the learning goals are in place, the candidate can use the supervision time to reflect on how incidents that arise relate to the stated goals. It may be helpful for the candidate to write a critical incident report or theological reflection to give to the supervisor before the supervision time. This will help each person prepare for that time, and it will contribute to deeper reflection. The educational supervisor and the candidate will want to review together some models for theological reflection found later in this handbook and agree to a format that will facilitate learning and growth.
- Where a staff team exists, it is important to discuss working styles, expectations, and responsibilities for the whole staff. Some areas of learning may involve working with a staff person (e.g., a chaplain at a local hospital or another ministry personnel). The nature of this relationship needs to be discussed—in particular, how a staff person who is not in a direct supervisory relationship may comment on the candidate’s work.
- If the educational supervisor is also a member of the ministry staff team or an active lay person in the congregation, the time set aside for intentional supervision must not be used to do regular weekly planning or church business in general. That kind of work needs its own time set apart from supervision, such as at the weekly staff meeting. If church business arises during a supervision meeting, arrange another meeting to deal with it.
- Off-site supervisors may not be able to observe tasks and offer direct feedback. In those cases, it is helpful to discuss how the candidate can seek feedback from people at the learning site. Identify ways the candidate can report to the supervisor about overall work and specific incidents that arise.

Theological Reflection

What Is Theological Reflection?

The purpose of theological reflection is to discern how God is present and active in our lives. We are theologically reflecting when we ask, “Where is God in this?” and “How is God active in this?”

When we reflect theologically on events and experiences in our lives, we are not seeking to fix the situation or to solve a problem. The goal is to understand the Divine more deeply.

Theological reflection asks us to consider what the sources of our faith (Bible, theology, traditions, etc.) say about our experiences. It invites us to consider what our experiences are teaching us about God, ourselves, our theology, our assumptions, and our ministry with others.

Theological reflection affirms the statement from the United Church’s New Creed: “We believe in God: who has created and is creating.” Reflecting theologically on the events of our lives today invites us to consider how God continues to be a creative force in the world in our everyday experiences. Theological reflection is a conversation that “opens the gates between our experience and our Christian heritage” (Patricia O’Connell Killen and John DeBeer, *The Art of Reflection*). It is “an opportunity to...discover what we believe and how our faith and life intersect” (Abigail Johnson, *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups*).

Resources for Theological Reflection

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

Killen, Patricia O’Connell, and John de Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad Classic, 1994.

Models for Theological Reflection

A Model for Theological Reflection on Experience

by the Rev. Dr. Abigail Johnson

Name the Experience

Briefly describe the ministry in which you are engaged. 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 Faith Connections

- What theological images/symbols/concepts does it evoke?
- Who is God in this situation, for you and for others?
- What biblical, historical, literary, or other stories does it call to mind?
- What learning from United Church tradition is applicable?
- How does it relate to other faiths/cultures/traditions?

Reflect on Your Learning

- How has my faith been enriched or challenged by it?
- What have I learned or discovered about the practice of ministry?
- What have I learned or discovered about my own pastoral identity?
- 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, and greeting new opportunities for pastoral depth and sensitivity.

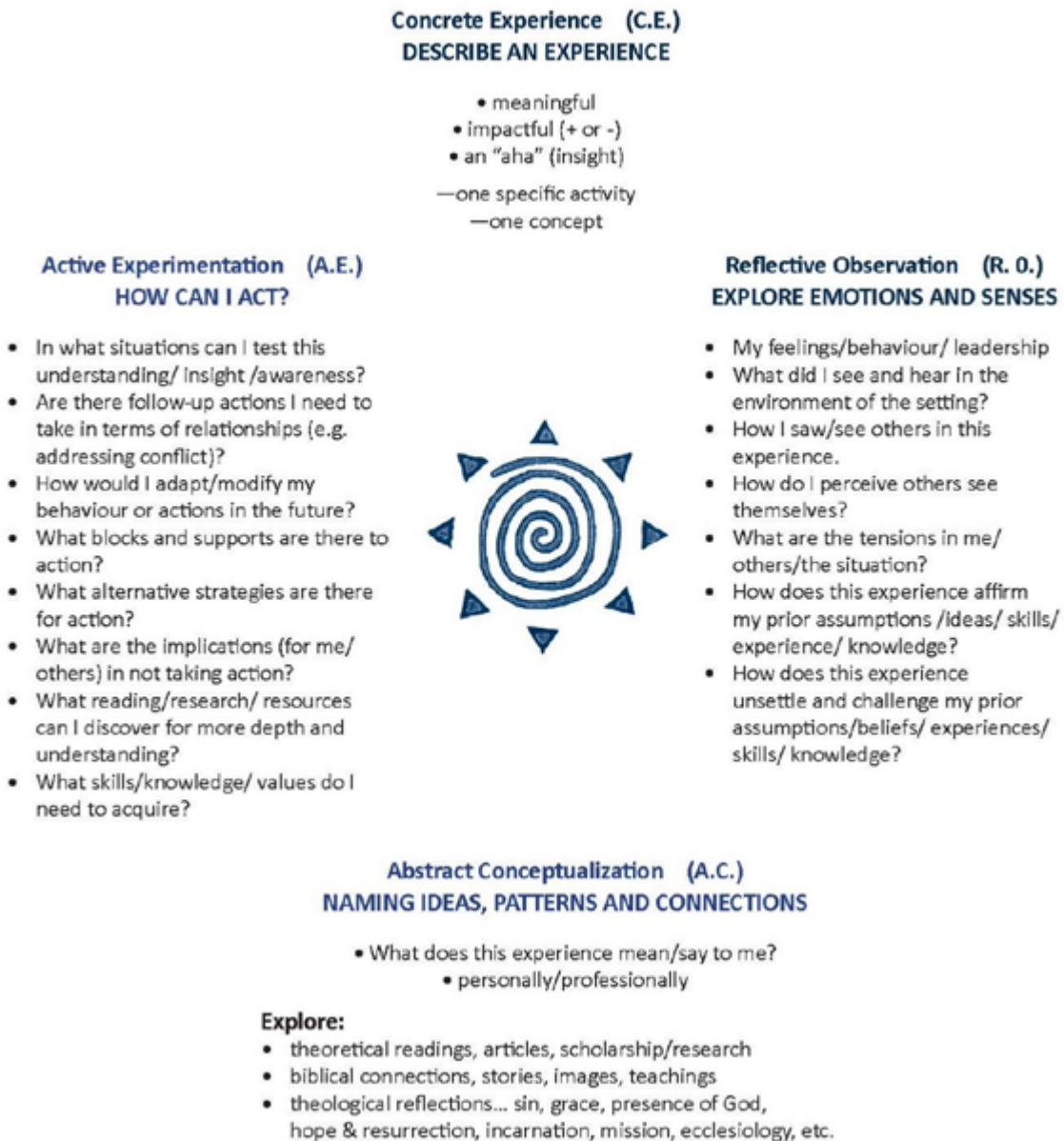
Conclusion and Discussion

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

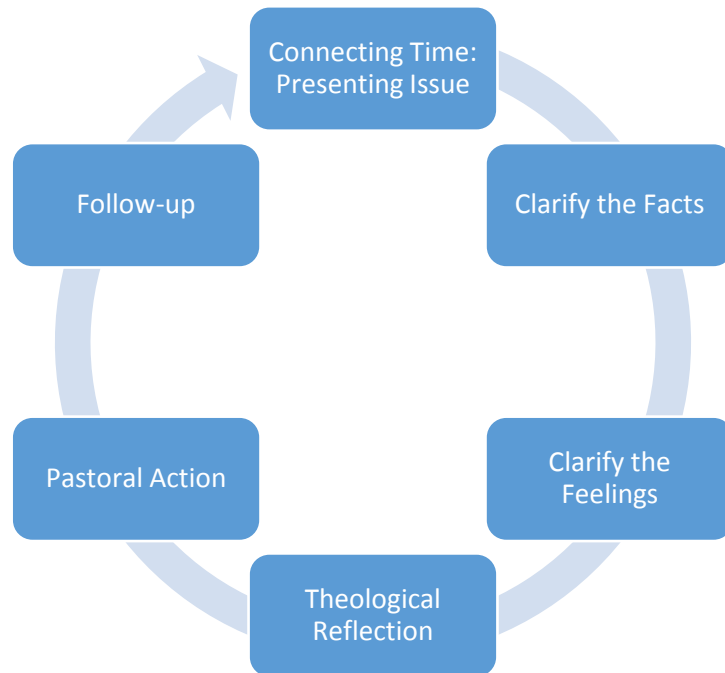
Spiral Model of Theological Reflection: Action/Reflection Learning Model in Theological Education

(Used with permission from the Centre for Christian Studies)

In the Spiral Model you start by thinking about a **concrete experience** you have had. You then explore the **emotions and senses** associated with that experience. Following this you think about the **patterns, ideas, and connections** arising from this experience. Finally you determine a course of **action** (leading to new experiences to be reflected upon).



Educational Supervision Model: Theological Reflection “Loop”



Connecting Time: Presenting Issue

- Why is it an issue?

Clarify the Facts

- Who, what, when, where, how?
- What are you still questioning about the situation?
- Be clear what “the issue” is.

Clarify the Feelings

- What emotions are you aware of?
- How do they make you feel (positive/negative)?
- What do you fear?

Theological Reflection

- So what? analysis
- Meaning in the event: Where do you see the Holy? hope? What are positive/negative points?
- Does this remind you of a story from the Bible/from your culture?
- Where is God in this situation?

Pastoral Action

- What next?
- What’s in the way?
- What are the alternatives?

Follow-up

- Plan for next session.
- Review Learning Covenant.
- How does the issue fit into the Learning Covenant?

Wesley Quadrilateral

(Source: "Confessing Our Faith," a project of The United Church of Canada, circa 1983)

Theological reflection begins by identifying the issue to be considered. It could be setting the budget, planning an anniversary, preparing a sermon, even confronting a dispute.

Now choose one of the areas of the quadrilateral: scripture, experience, tradition, and reason. You may begin with any one of the four quadrants. Write down ideas and questions as you look at the issue from each of the four perspectives. What does experience teach you? What does scripture have to say to this issue? Are there traditions surrounding this topic? Are we reasoning clearly?

<p style="text-align: center;">SCRIPTURE</p> <p>In matters of faith and practice scripture is essential for theological reflection. Its authority becomes apparent when we appreciate the richness of the many kinds of writing in the Bible and learn their original source and purpose.</p> <p>Scripture is relevant to our life experience. It also tests the past—such as the tradition of the church and the changing ideas of right and wrong.</p> <p>It reminds us that we are the people of the living word. Writings that grew out of experiences of faith are now treasured by the community of faith.</p> <p>Turning to scripture to discern God's will is a stimulating spiritual exploration well known to many and new to others.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EXPERIENCE</p> <p>Experience is the soil out of which life grows and takes on meaning. The story of faith is the story of reflection and experience.</p> <p>Think of experience as putting things together, making sense of them, seeing patterns and purposes emerge. For people of faith this includes experience of the presence of God. It involves our sense of ourselves as made in the image of God and as inhabitants in a world God loves.</p> <p>Christian experience is varied and while all may be valid, none can claim to be absolutely right, overriding the experience of other faithful people. The experience of love is both our safeguard and our liberation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">TRADITION</p> <p>We are shaped by the past in ways that are subtle but powerful. We have received the faith from others. It has been expressed in acts of worship, in music, in convictions about personal conduct, and in responsibilities toward our neighbours.</p> <p>Some of our tradition is set out in confessions of faith, in credos, which are efforts to say publicly what we believe. Often these come in times of crisis, or from wilderness experiences.</p> <p>We have oral traditions also, as did those very young churches in the first Christian centuries.</p> <p>A living church has a lively memory, linked to a world of faith, which is discovered in and through tradition.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">REASON</p> <p>Reason is God's gift to the church as well as to the individual. Reason (or intellect) brings order to our theological thinking and therefore to our decisions and ultimately to our actions. We become more consistent, constant, dependable, and steadfast.</p> <p>Reason is necessary when dealing with new situations. It is the "common" sense that makes the obscure clear.</p> <p>Reason helps to guard against misguided interpretation of scripture, or faulty interpretation of experience. It respects innermost thought and individual insights, while recognizing the interdependence of the whole of creation.</p>

You will likely discover as you work (individually or together) that once you have put down the obvious points in each quadrant, new insights emerge. Sometimes completely new views of the issue come forward when you read over the four quadrants. You will find that scripture pushes against scripture, and that people's experiences differ radically.

As the work continues, the insights from one quadrant flow into the others and the lines begin to disappear. Something else happens. We discover that we are led into larger fields of truth (John 16:13). When we talk about scripture, we contribute what we do know, and we search for further knowledge, understanding, and insights. When we apply reason, it takes everything we've got plus the contribution of our neighbours. The quadrilateral makes us aware of both what we know and what we need to know. It opens up areas of spiritual growth for us.

The use of the Wesley Quadrilateral moves us toward the awesome conviction that our life is set in the presence of God, a greatness beyond our understanding (Psalm 145). Theological reflection does not reduce the profound mysteries of God to formulas or slogans. Out of it may come clarity about pressing current issues. Out of it may come creeds, confessions, statements, hymns, liturgies—all of them attempts to express what we believe.

When undertaken as a spiritual exercise, theological reflection quickens our faith, sets our daily concerns in a larger context, and reminds us what we are called to be. It is a way of engaging in life.

Developing Learning Goals for the Learning Covenant

Based on the concept that we are all lifelong learners, it is assumed that every participant (members of the Lay Supervision Team, educational supervisor, and candidate) will develop learning goals.

The time and energy that the LST members, educational supervisor, and candidate put into crafting their learning goals will not only help the United Church to equip future leaders but also be an experience of enrichment and personal challenge. Members of the LST and the educational supervisor may focus their learning goals on growing in their faith, deepening their understanding of ministry and the United Church, or interpersonal goals such as dealing with conflict, giving feedback, and so on.

The LST, supervisor, and candidate may have some goals in common. All of these participants may also have individual learning goals. These goals should relate to the realities of the learning site, including tasks and responsibilities in the ministry position description, as well as those identified during the supervision time together. The candidate will also need to follow the direction of the Candidacy Board regarding the focus of their learning goals.

Remember: We do not learn from experience; we learn by reflecting on experience. The Learning Covenant enables all participants to reflect both during and after an experience.

The following guidelines will assist in creating learning goals:

Learning Goal: What do I need to learn?

Learning goals identify what you need to learn and why.

The [Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership](http://www.united-church.ca/handbooks) (www.united-church.ca/handbooks) are the foundation on which learning goals are identified. Throughout the Candidacy Pathway process, the Candidacy Board evaluates the candidate's progress in meeting these outcomes. When the candidate is approved as ready for Supervised Ministry Education, the Candidacy Board discusses with the candidate which learning outcomes need particular attention during the experience. The candidate needs to follow the direction of the Candidacy Board to successfully complete the SME requirement of their pathway to ministry.

The *Learning Outcomes* document lists four goal areas:

1. Spiritual, Vocational, and Personal Formation
2. Teach and Facilitate Learning in and of the Christian Faith
3. Cultural and Contextual Sensitivities and Analyses
4. Leadership within the Faith Community and Wider Community

The candidate should have one goal from each of these groupings. A single learning goal may cover one or more learning outcomes.

The candidate must review the learning outcomes and assess their current strengths and weaknesses. Goals are created based on learning outcomes that need further development, that present opportunity for challenges to be overcome, and or that will lead to personal and spiritual growth.

For example, the candidate may need to deepen spiritual practices in order to be effective in ministry. Therefore, they might focus on creating a learning goal based on Learning Outcome 1a: *Discern one's own process of spiritual health and growth...*

Here are some additional questions to help identify possible areas for learning goals:

- What theological questions do you have—e.g., how do you understand and apply your understanding of the Bible, theology, justice?
- How does your understanding of theology influence your practice of ministry?
- Are your actions consistent with your beliefs?
- What skills for ministry do you need to obtain—e.g., theological reflection (exploring where God is for you in the midst of ministry), leading groups, communicating as an effective listener and speaker?

When the candidate has a list of possible areas for learning, they identify four to six to concentrate on. Members of the LST and the educational supervisor choose from one goal area in the *Learning Outcomes* document.

A simple acronym, SMART, provides helpful guidelines for creating learning goals:

- S** = Specific
- M** = Measurable
- A** = Attainable
- R** = Relevant
- T** = Time Bound

Specific: Specific goals have a much greater chance of being accomplished than general ones. Provide enough detail so the goal and the action plan to accomplish the goal are clear.

Be specific about what you need to learn about skills for ministry. It is not enough to say that you simply need to gain experience.

Measurable: Create goals with measurable progress. A measurable goal has an outcome that can be evaluated and assessed. Learning goals are usually stated with an awareness of where you are beginning and how far along you hope to be by the end of the process. You might use phrases such as “begin to,” “increase my skill in,” or “develop more understanding of.”

Attainable: An attainable goal has an outcome that is realistic given the situation and context. Things like budget, resources, and time need to be considered when creating learning goals. Assess whether your goals can be met at the learning site. For example, having a goal of

working with children in a church with no Sunday school and an elderly membership would not be of much value.

Relevant: In the context of preparing for ministry the learning goals must relate to the *Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership*, to the direction provided by the Candidacy Board, and to the realities of the ministry of the community of faith.

Time Bound: Set timelines for accomplishing benchmarks so the overall goal is achieved.

Action Plans: How will I go about learning?

- How will you work on your goals? How will you know you have accomplished them?
- Action plans are specific to each learning goal; they refer to how learning goals will be achieved. Be as concrete as you can.
- Action plans include an agreement on how much work/time is appropriate to spend on tasks, how tasks are assigned/accepted, to whom the candidate is accountable for the various tasks, and what resources are available (e.g., people, materials, and space).

Example: I want to deepen my spiritual practice for ministry (Learning Outcome 1a: Discern one's own process of spiritual health and growth...). How will I do this? What specific practices will I try? How much time will I devote to this? Whom will I seek advice and wisdom from? What books or articles will I read?

Methods of Evaluation: How will I reflect on the experiences of learning?

- Evaluation of the learning goals should be ongoing in any accountable learning process.
- Evaluation usually works best when it takes place at agreed times and in previously agreed ways. It involves growing in understanding and competence in a spirit of trust, openness, honesty, and mutual respect.
- The emphasis is on what the participants have learned together, taking into account all the discussions that have happened over the duration of the supervised learning. The process includes self-assessment, feedback, critical reflection, and future planning.
- Action plans may be evaluated by using
 - case studies
 - written verbatim (reports of conversations or visits)
 - a journal of reflections
 - a theological reflection
 - evaluation questionnaires
 - reflections on specific tasks, such as visiting patients in hospital or leading Bible study

Example: I want to deepen my spiritual practice for ministry (Learning Outcome 1a: Discern one's own process of spiritual health and growth...). I will journal after using each spiritual practice and share this with my supervisor. I will keep track of the time I spend in spiritual practice to find a balance that works for me. I will reflect theologically on my experiences and

share them with my supervisor and LST. I will provide one specific example where a spiritual practice helped support me in my ministry on the learning site.

Sample Learning Goals

Example 1: This goal could be for the candidate

Learning Goal: I want to begin to learn how to offer pastoral care that enables individuals to feel supported and better able to reflect on their faith and understanding of God. (Learning Outcome 4.j: Design and facilitate processes for on-going pastoral care)	
Action Plans	Evaluation
<p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> visit several people in their homes or in hospital/care practise active listening skills and be intentional about creating space for faith conversations reflect on how I relate to people who are different from me in age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, economic class, and educational background (Learning Outcome 4g: Demonstrate cultural and intercultural sensitivity) share four written verbatims with my supervisor 	<p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> observe whether some people are reflecting theologically as a result of our pastoral conversations keep a journal to record my reflections and learnings request feedback from the supervisor and the Lay Supervision Team request feedback from those experiencing my pastoral care

Example 2: This goal could be for the candidate or Lay Supervision Team members with some different action plans

Learning Goal: I want to develop my leadership skills in facilitating learning and discussion in a group setting. (Learning Outcome 4m: Model effective leadership)	
Action Plans	Evaluation
<p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify skills I already have and specific skills I want to work on rotate leadership in Lay Supervision Team meetings for planning and leading discussion lead an adult Bible study group for six weeks during Lent 	<p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify the changes in my skills keep a journal to reflect on my learnings identify the educational methods that were most effective

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • test different educational methods (experiential, storytelling, audiovisuals) to discover my own comfort and convictions about learning and the responses of adults to different methods • work to integrate my academic learning in biblical and theological understanding with the experience/understanding of laypeople 	
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Example 3: This goal could be for Lay Supervision Team members, the candidate, and/or the supervisor

<p>Learning Goal: I want to learn more about how to give useful feedback, both affirming and critical, in a way that enables growth and openness to trying new methods. (Learning Outcome 4f: Communicate effectively)</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with the information provided in this resource and identifying ways of implementing the guidelines for offering feedback • ask the feedback recipients what could have made the feedback more helpful 	<p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess which methods were effective and comfortable

Example 4: This goal could be for the supervisor, candidate, and/or Lay Supervision Team as a group

<p>Learning Goal: I/We want to learn to identify moments of God’s grace. (Learning Outcome 1d: Articulate clearly the role of God, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit in one’s spiritual life and the lives of others)</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Action Plans</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reflect with others on the meaning of God’s grace and on specific experiences in the internship that can be interpreted as grace-filled 	<p style="text-align: center;">Evaluation</p> <p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • articulate the meaning of God’s grace

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify how I understand myself as a spiritual being in the experiences of life 	
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Example 5: This goal could be for the Lay Supervision Team and the candidate, with additional focus for the candidate on enabling others to learn.

<p>Learning Goal: We want to understand and learn to do theological reflection and learn how to enable others to reflect theologically. (Learning Outcome 2b: Interpret the Christian heritage and make it accessible to the community.)</p>	
<p>Action Plans</p>	<p>Evaluation</p>
<p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss what theological reflection means and include a time of theological reflection in each Lay Supervision Team meeting and supervisory session • find tools for doing theological reflection • read books (<i>name them here</i>) about theological reflection 	<p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe what theological reflection means • assess the various tools/methods used and their effectiveness

Example 6: This could be a goal for the candidate.

<p>Learning Goal: By the end of the Learning Covenant, I want to discover my gifts in preaching and grow in my ability to preach using various styles. (Learning Outcome 2b: Interpret the Bible and make it accessible to the community.)</p>	
<p>Action Plans</p>	<p>Evaluation</p>
<p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss my understanding of preaching with my supervisor and the Lay Supervision Team • try various preaching styles (storytelling, teaching, evangelistic, drama, using no notes, etc.) • create a response sheet/feedback form for the Lay Supervision Team to use • keep a journal of my discoveries and learnings 	<p>I will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss my reflections with my supervisor, including sharing written copies of my sermons and video or audio tapes • meet with my Lay Supervision Team soon after the worship service to share their written reflections on the reaction sheet/feedback form • on a regular basis, share my journals of self-discovery and learning

Providing Feedback

The success of the Supervised Ministry Education depends on the ability of all parties to observe behaviour and offer constructive feedback and encouragement. During the SME, feedback is an ongoing process of comment offered to all participants in the Learning Covenant in response to their learning goals. Particular attention is given to providing feedback to the candidate. This happens formally in regular meetings with the LST and the supervisor.

Feedback is a way of helping someone to consider making changes by offering information about how they affect others. It involves naming positive areas and those that need more growth. Feedback should be ongoing. The regularly scheduled assessment or evaluation time provides an opportunity to summarize the total feedback offered during the SME experience.

Laypeople can often give helpful feedback on sermons, pastoral visiting, small group leadership, “presence” at church events, and so on. Sometimes the best sharing comes out of our own experiences. For example, how helpful (or unhelpful) was the church/minister in a time of illness or grief? What are your expectations in such situations?

Follow these guidelines to provide useful feedback:

Descriptive

Be descriptive rather than judgmental. By describing your own reaction, you leave the other person free to use the feedback as they see fit. By avoiding judging language, you reduce the likelihood of a defensive reaction. It is important to use “I” language in offering feedback, thus owning your observations, perceptions, and feelings.

Example: “When you use the word ‘girl’ when referring to me, I feel put down and not recognized as an adult woman.”

Specific

Be specific rather than general.

Example: To tell someone they are “dominating” is not as useful as saying, “Just now when we were deciding the issue, I felt you were not listening to what others said. I felt forced to accept your arguments.”

Appropriate

Take into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs. What we offer needs to be supportive and responsible.

Example: “I know that speaking in large groups is difficult for you, and I appreciated the effort it took for you to make your contribution at the board meeting. Your comments were helpful to me.”

Requested

If you want feedback, ask for it; if you have feedback to offer, wait to be asked. Feedback is most useful when the receiver has formulated the kind of question the observer can answer.

Example: Candidate can create a worship feedback sheet listing the areas they want feedback about.

Usable

Direct your feedback toward behaviour the receiver can do something about. It is frustrating to be reminded of some shortcoming or characteristic over which one has no control.

Example: “I enjoyed your Children’s Time last Sunday, but I would have found it more helpful if you had used the microphone so the adults in the congregation could have heard it too.”

Timely

Time your feedback carefully. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after a given behaviour depending, of course, on the person’s readiness to hear it and the availability of support from others. Unless you are prepared to spend time with the person, it is not helpful to make a quick critical comment immediately following the observed behaviour.

Example: “The process you used in Bible study tonight was not as helpful to me as it might have been. Do you have time to sit down and talk about it a bit, or can we set up a time soon?”

Clear

Ensure you are communicating clearly. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.

Example: “Let me see if I understand what you are saying to me. Was it the specific word I used in the sermon that concerned you or the expression of my theology that you heard?”

Accurate

Check for accuracy. When feedback is given in a group, both the giver and the receiver have an opportunity to check with others about the accuracy of the feedback. Is this person’s impression shared by others? Do not repeat comments from anonymous sources or repeat things that cannot be verified.

Example: “In this evaluation time, one of you said that more printed resources would have been helpful. What do the rest of you have to say about that?”

Related to the Learning Covenant

Relate feedback to the Learning Covenant—its goals and action plans.

Example: “In relation to your goal to learn more about offering pastoral care, I noticed that when you responded to Jane in our Bible study group, she seemed to withdraw. What do you think was going on there?”

A Model for Nonviolent Communication

Marshall Rosenberg (Director of the Center for Nonviolent Communication in Sherman, TX) has developed a form of communication that can empower people to exchange resources and resolve differences nonviolently. His model is based on speaking honestly and responsibly about one's perceptions, feelings, values, and desires, as well as listening to the perceptions, feelings, values, and desires of others. This model is one way to give feedback as outlined above.

There are four basic pieces of information to exchange:

When you said/did _____.

I felt _____,

and because I value _____,

I would like _____.

Procedure for Resolving Conflicts

The Learning Covenant should spell out a process for resolving grievances and differences that cannot be resolved by those involved.

As in all human relationships, tensions or disagreements may arise. It is hoped that these are dealt with face to face and resolved as soon as possible. However, sometimes difficulties arise that two people cannot work out themselves. In these cases, sometimes a third party is asked to assist in the process.

A grievance or conflict procedure is like a spare tire on a car—you hope you will never have to use it, but you are glad to have it when you need it. The candidate, supervisor, and Lay Supervision Team should discuss the procedures to follow should a conflict arise and at what point the third party, as named in the covenant, will be called upon.

The Office of Vocation Minister is available to discuss any concerns or problems.

Please note that The United Church of Canada has guidelines to follow in cases of sexual misconduct. These guidelines ([Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures](#)) are available at www.united-church.ca/handbooks and from your Office of Vocation Minister. Each regional council has trained consultants who deal with cases of sexual harassment. Their names are listed in a PDF on www.united-church.ca/leadership/supporting-ministry/sexual-misconduct-prevention-training.

Stages in Dealing with Conflict

Stage 1: The candidate, supervisor, and Lay Supervision Team meet to try to resolve the issues. Depending on the nature of the conflict, the issues discussed in the meeting

and a plan of action to resolve them are put in writing and given to all three parties.

Stage 2: If the issues are not resolved as a result of the first meeting and followup, a second meeting is called and the Office of Vocation Minister or the third-party consultant named in the Learning Covenant is invited to attend.

Note: This meeting may be called by any one of the three parties to the Learning Covenant. The Office of Vocation Minister must be informed that this meeting is taking place.

Stage 3: If the issues are not resolved as a result of the second meeting, a third meeting is called with the Office of Vocation Minister.

There are times when the difficulties encountered in the supervised ministry education experience lead to a decision to dissolve the Learning Covenant and end the education experience. Please refer to the [Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education](#) resource for guidelines related to terminating a SME (www.united-church.ca/handbooks).

Formal Evaluation

The Learning Covenant includes a description of how the evaluation process will take place with all participants in the covenant.

The evaluation is the formal summary of the feedback that has already been offered. It is not a time to raise new concerns or surprises.

The evaluation form is provided to the candidate. The candidate must ensure that the other parties in the Learning Covenant have the appropriate evaluation form. All participants in the Learning Covenant must have their own copy of the form so they can prepare for evaluation at the specified deadlines.

Discuss the process you will follow as you complete the forms. Many Lay Supervision Teams choose to write individual responses before completing a group response. After each party to the Learning Covenant has completed their own evaluation form, meet with the supervisor and the student minister to share and discuss your evaluation comments and then sign the completed forms.

The Office of Vocation Minister will identify the deadlines for the evaluations to be submitted. Please follow the instructions on the forms to submit the evaluations.

These evaluations are important for the candidate's Candidacy Board to determine successful completion of requirements and to assess growth and formation. The Office of Vocation uses the evaluation to assess the suitability of the learning site and supervisor.

Celebrating the Covenant

Rituals are important in the learning process. Through appropriate liturgies, participants identify and celebrate the various stages of the covenant. A liturgy at the beginning of the Learning Covenant can help to clarify terms of the covenant and confirm the commitment of all participants. It is also a way of involving members of the pastoral charge.

It is useful to share the learning goals with the community of faith so the whole community feels involved. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as a bulletin insert or part of a newsletter.

An ending liturgy offers a way to celebrate the learning experience and acknowledge closure.

Your rituals can be created especially for the occasion or borrowed from the traditions of the church. Usually, they can be included in a regular service of worship at the learning site. In some non-congregational settings, it may be necessary to create a special occasion or use some regular occasion, such as a board meeting.

What matters is that you acknowledge and celebrate the various rites of passage in the Learning Covenant in ways that are appropriate to the site and meaningful to you.

Sample Covenanting Service

Adapted from Trinity United Church, Nanaimo, BC

- LST member Let us make a covenant together with God and with one another as we begin this journey of learning together.
- LST member: Into this circle we welcome _____, who will be sharing our congregational life until _____.
- Minister: A covenant is a promise we make with God and with one another, a promise to live God's way. Let us now make a covenant with God and with one another.
- Congregation: In the presence of God and one another, we give thanks for the example and lasting love of Jesus Christ, who shows us how to live God's way.
- LST member: The church recognizes the different paths that lead to ministry and celebrates the particular ministry of each person. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them.
- LST member: There are different ways of serving, but the same God is served. Christ is like a single body that has many parts. All of us are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.

Minister: God has called _____ to learn and serve at _____, and they have accepted this call. _____, are you willing to share your God-given gifts for ministry as you work and worship with this faith community, and are you willing to serve as the Spirit enables you?

Student minister: I will, God being my helper.

LST member: God has called you to be _____'s supervisor. Will you share with them your knowledge and passion for ministry and your love of God, supporting them throughout the experience in our faith community?

Supervisor: I will, God being my helper.

Minister: Members of the Lay Supervision Team (*name them*), you have accepted God's call to fulfill the role as lay supervisors. Are you willing to share your faith, offer wise counsel, and support _____ in their learning path and thus, by sowing seeds of the Spirit, participate in _____'s growth into ministry?

LST team: We will, God being our helper.

LST member or
Chair of Board: Members of the congregation, you have heard the promises of (*candidate*), (*supervisor*), and the Lay Supervision Team, who have answered God's call to service. Let us pledge to them our support.

Congregation: We promise to support you with love as we all try to live God's way.

LST member: Let us say our United Church Creed together...

LST member: Let us pray...

All: Loving God, we have made a covenant with you and with one another. We are grateful for this opportunity to learn and grow in faith and understanding of your ministry in the world. Help us to encourage the gifts of all those involved in this covenant relationship. We pray in the name of the One who shows us the way. Amen

The United Church of Canada
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www.united-church.ca/handbooks