

# Ministry Practice Handbook for SFE Ministry Reflection Teams



Adelaide College of Divinity

To be read in conjunction with the  
**Ministry Practice Handbook for  
ACD Enrolled SFE Students**



**Uniting College**  
for Leadership & Theology

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## Introduction

Welcome to the explorative world of Supervised Field Education (Ministry Practice) and thank you for participating in the learning and growth of our students. This Handbook is best read in conjunction with the Ministry Practice Handbook for SFE Students that is freely available from the Lecturer in Ministry Practice (LMP) at Uniting College.

The Uniting Church's *Basis of Union* acknowledges the giftedness of every Christian and Christ's call to exercise these gifts in building up his Body for the sake the God's mission to the world (Para. 13). As an expression of the commitment to this vision, small groups of lay people have long been involved in the formation of ministry students, many on the path to ordination. The Ministry Practice Program of Uniting College has helped form and resource Ministry Reflection Teams – formerly known as Lay Supervisory Groups – since 1981.

Numerous participants in this process have expressed an enduring sense of satisfaction in relation to the formation for ministry that took place in the student within their care. And not only did they observe them grow in confidence and expertise, they themselves experienced a re-energising of their own faith and ministries by way active in involvement in the team.



## **The What? & Why? of a Ministry Reflection Team (MRT)**

A Ministry Reflection Team is a small group of 4 to 6 lay persons appointed in consultation with the student's supervisor, the faith community of which they are a part, and the ministry student. Ideally, they are both recipients and observers of the student's ministry practice, therefore well qualified to listen to their evolving learning experience and speak into that experience with considered feedback and reflection. A convenor will need to be elected or duly appointed. It is their responsibility to facilitate meetings and write a final report on behalf of the team at placement's end which is then forwarded to the Lecturer in Ministry Practice at Uniting College.

The team meets monthly for up to two hours at a time with the student. Where possible or feasible, it is suggested the team meets in a private home. This can help establish a conversational, safe and open environment.

Offering deep encouragement yet a searching honesty of perspective can be a challenging mix of purpose, yet it is the reason why a MRT exists. In itself, the MRT seeks to relationally practice on a small scale what Christian communities ideally seek to live and breathe on a large scale. Therefore, passive politeness or aggressive abruptness has no place here! Rather, the MRT is a living conduit for genuine learning and growth. ie, the repeated practice of that which constitutes edifying ministry and correspondingly, the laying aside of that which is non-essential or detrimental to good and healthy ministry practices.

The MRT is part of a wider group of persons instrumental in the formation of the student through the Adelaide College of Divinity's Bachelor of Ministry program: The Lecturer in Ministry Practice (LMP) at Uniting College, the student's supervisor and a college-based peer reflection group. All join the MRT in the privilege of journeying with the student on their path toward fruitful, competent ministry.

In sum, the MRT functions as a formal committee seeking to imaginatively contribute to the formation of the ministry student/candidate. Parallel to this task, and undergirding its very purpose, the MRT is a gathering of friends. In the safety of supportive and truthful relationships, ministry students can progressively allow themselves to become vulnerable and open to group insight for the sake of new learning and a broader skill-base. In this way, the MRT is a bodily expression of God's encouraging and equipping grace.

## **Reflective & Respectful Listening**

It is to be expected that the student would offer to the monthly gathering a succinct report based on recent ministry practice experience and written in light of their learning covenant. The learning covenant is a central piece in the SFE jigsaw puzzle and the MRT would do well to be acquainted with it early in its gathered life. The student's report does not need to be detailed (confidentiality is a key consideration) but does need to 'get at' some of the pressing issues of their ongoing learning and formation.

Reflective and respectful listening is obviously essential. E.g., what is really being said and how is it related to opportunities for further growth and development? How might I both encourage and open up windows of new possibility?

## **Offering Honest but Sensitive Feedback**

Related to, if not sequential to, respectful and open listening, is the gift of feedback. Such feedback need not simply be individual or the group's, but may represent what is being expressed within the faith community as a whole. Whatever may or may not be the case, team members will need to take ownership of whatever feedback is offered. Opening and self protecting phrases such as, "Some people have been saying...", are not helpful at all! If group members cannot own the perspective to be shared, it should not be given. All feedback to the student needs to be offered with due care and humility of perspective.

Positively speaking, feedback around particular issues related to the student's ministry practice introduces a needed reality check that can help ease the student's head out of the clouds, so to speak. In short, creative feedback may well aim to redirect thought and current practices, yet always within the hope of healthy skills and character development. Identification of both *strengths and growth areas* – a good choice of words – is essential to a growing self-awareness, and self awareness is essential to a conscious and effective expression of Christ's ministry to the Church and world.

### **Practical tips in relation to Feedback**

As indicated, when offered in the spirit of encouragement and openness, feedback can be a powerful tool of learning. There are a number of ways to give feedback. The following examples have proven to be particularly effective and helpful:

- Creative feedback is contingent upon relational trust. Building mutual trust will need to be a key focus from the outset of the MRT's life and will be a key focus for the convenor to consider.
- Before giving feedback, assess the state of well being of the student. It is not advisable to offer critical feedback when they are in an unduly emotional state or already feel discouraged due to a ministry experience that has felt like a failure. Often, the greatest critic resides within the one we might be seeking to help or redirect.
- Balance any critical feedback with positive comments on things the student did well.
- When giving critical feedback, be specific and descriptive, yet without value judgement! eg, "When you read the Bible text last Sunday, I couldn't hear you properly as you were speaking too softly and quickly. Were you nervous?" Don't say, "You obviously have a nerve and reading problem that quickly needs fixing if you are going call yourself a minister."
- When you offer congratulation and encouragement, be equally specific and detailed. E.g., "When you used the illustration of the grafted rose in your sermon from John 15 on Sunday, I could tell you had put a great amount of imaginative thought into how best to communicate a complex but life giving principle of faith. Well done, and thank you!"
- Give some broad and calm reasons for your responses and gracious room for response. Eg, "From where I stood, I found your interactions with the homeless at 'Fred's Kitchen' on Wednesday evening somewhat detached, even disinterested. Is that fair? How were you feeling inside at the time? How would you describe the experience from your perspective?"



## The Place and Art of Theological Reflection

As is quoted in the Student Handbook,

Theological reflection nurtures growth in mature faith by bringing life experience into conversation with the wisdom of the Christian heritage. To practise theological reflection we must be able to pay attention to and enquire about the meaning of our individual experiences, our world, and our religious heritage. The standpoints of certitude and self-assurance block our ability to do so. The standpoint of exploration supports it. Transformational theological reflection takes place in the standpoint of exploration.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of a MRT, theological reflection is a vital exercise, in that through a searching and prayerful spirit, assumptions can readily be questioned and practices critiqued in light of discerning where the Spirit might be at work or how the Spirit maybe inviting the student to explore further options. Exploration is a key word here. It is closely linked to learning, for to be truly educated is not simply to be informed or *conformed* but to be 'led out' and formed (over and over again) within the vocational path that has been chosen.<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, folk often think that if they have not done any theological training, they have little to offer when it comes to theological reflection and insight. By thinking like this, they tend to forget that every person of faith is a theologian, simply by holding faith and life together in creative tension. Theology means 'words about God' and anyone who intentionally brings their experience into dialogue with the Christian tradition, and all that it entails, is a theologian! It is not an academic exercise without practical ends. It is an exercise of deep noticing and following in the life-enriching ways of Christ.

Much greater detail is given over to theological reflection in the Student Handbook and it is important that convenor and team are familiar with its various components.

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1 Killen and de Beer (see Reading List).

2 Parker Palmer is an important author to be familiar with in this context.

## Conducting a MRT Meeting

### The Role of the Convener

The convener takes responsibility for:

- selecting members of the MRT in collaboration with the student and, if appropriate to the ministry context, their supervisor. Due discernment is needed here in terms of giftedness, interest and a growing understanding of the learning/reflective process.
- calling and leading the meetings, and creating a safe place for honest conversation.
- preparing and distributing a brief agenda in collaboration with the student.
- receiving a reflection paper from the student in advance of the meeting and forwarding it on to the team.
- opening and closing the meetings within an agreed-to time frame with prayer and devotions as is appropriate.
- introducing the student to the team and vice versa;
- establishing and maintaining a connection with the student's supervisor around any pressing issues.
- writing the final report (the template is at the back of this Handbook) and sending it to the Lecturer in Ministry Practice at Uniting College who will in turn forward that to the appropriate faculty person linked to the student via their formation panel if they are a candidate for ministry.

The convener will also, within reason, be available to the student beyond meeting times, if and when needed. The convener may share the leadership of a meeting with the student if the context warrants it. However, it is the convener's role to establish clear lines of leadership responsibility between themselves and the student for the processes of the meeting.

## **Suggested Tone and Content of Initial Team Meetings**

Hospitality and team building is obviously essential from the very outset! A shared, informal meal might be appropriate with an informational meeting to follow in time. This Handbook and the Student SFE Handbook can be referred to and discussed for clarity of purpose and process sake. The student would greatly benefit from this discussion also.

Personal introductions and reasons for accepting the invitation to be part of the team would be beneficial too, as will a sketched history of the ministry placement itself, ie, culture of membership and local community (or clientele), significant events or shaping moments, either joyous or difficult.

Beyond the informational sharing (and this may well take place at another time soon after), it will be important for the ministry student to walk the team through their particular **learning covenant**. In all probability it will be a draft document at this stage, so careful and *learning based* responses, will be invaluable to its forming.

It cannot be stressed enough, that the contract is about the student's learning and growth as a ministry practitioner, not about what the ministry setting (or community) might want achieved or even expect from a person exercising ministry skills. These are very different mind sets and if they are not named as such from the outset, the MRT may not step out on a sound footing, that is, so far as creative reflection and support is concerned. Questions or comments in relation to the covenant will be important throughout the team's life, yet with the student's explorations and discoveries squarely in mind. It will be more than helpful to keep referring the student back to the stated goal and objectives of the learning covenant, so as to check in with how they are tracking in relation to them.

## **Suggested Template for subsequent Team Meetings**

- A biblical reflection pertinent to ministry practice such as from the NT Epistles, concluding with prayer.
- Student's explorations around their written reflection, whether it be a case-study, a verbatim or even a journal entry concerned with the exercising of a ministry task and its implications for further thought and practice.
- Team responses – theological reflection and relevant evaluative feedback.
- Student response(s).
- Informal conversation over tea and coffee. e.g., repeated and interested enquiry into the student's self-care, leisure activities and time away from the placement.
- Shared prayer for the student and the ministry setting.

## **Evaluative Processes**

Two evaluative templates are included in this Handbook. They are designed with preaching and worship leading in mind. Other acts of Christian ministry – and there are many beyond these well known forms – can also be evaluated by members of the MRT using the same observational principles and probing questions. It is simply a matter of envisaging the ministry practice to be offered, then framing questions related to the student's self awareness, skill and gift level, comfort level etc, before observing them in action and taking some notes to work on later.

## **Encouraging vision for future ministry practice**

Toward the end of the placement, it will be appropriate to converse with the student around issues of future ministry approach and practice, based on their present experiences. For instance:

- What kind of vocational vision and self-understanding – gifts, loves, what gives energy, what does not – is emerging out of this learning experience?
- How has the student grown in a more integrative way so far as links between theory and practice is concerned?
- What have they learned about ministry practice in relation to the mission of the church? How has that shaped their practices?
- What has the student learned about God's prompting and presence in their planning and delivery?
- What has the student learned about ministry leadership in their placement and how are they coping with their leadership responsibilities?
- What are some of the developing strengths the student can see in their learning and growth? And what might be somewhat disappointing to their hoped-for learning and growth?
- What might the student have learned about their placement and the community they have exercised ministry to? What helpful insights can they share with the team?

These and other more detailed questions included in the MRT Report template should give the student and team a highly creative basis for concluding conversations.

## **Appendices**

### **Assessment of a SFE Unit**

#### **Content**

"SFE includes the development of a learning covenant with goals and objectives related to practical ministry experiences. The goals and objectives of the learning contract will be related to the ministry development needs of the students and the pastoral needs of the placement. The supervisor (who is a person formally accredited by UCLT) will enable the student to reflect pastorally, personally and theologically on developing experience in ministry in relation to the learning contract, with the development of self-supervisory skills and attitudes as an overarching goal."

(ACD Handbook)

#### **Unit Learning Outcomes**

Students with the assistance of an accredited supervisor will:

- a)** Achieve personal growth in ministry through integration of theory and practice;
- b)** Develop various skills for ministry and mission;
- c)** Reflect on their particular ministry experiences.

(ACD Handbook)



# Final Ministry Reflection Team Report<sup>3</sup>

- 1.** In light of the student's Learning Covenant, and more particularly their stated learning goal and objectives, how have you seen them develop as a student minister? Have they grown in competence and confidence? Is the student realistically self-aware? Has their ministry been enriching to the community?

- 2.** Is the student, in your opinion, well suited to the ministry roles and tasks they have practiced? What are their strengths of call and giftedness, and where might their limitations lie? What specific encouragement and direction has the MRT given?

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3 Please feel free to add comments or pertinent feedback to the report that the questions have not directly asked for.

- 3.** How effectively and willingly has the student engaged with the reflection team for their ministerial development? Do they relate well in a team or group environment?

- 4.** In order for the student's gifts to develop more, what areas do they need to grow – personally, pastorally, theologically and spiritually?

- 5.** How well does the student seem to manage their work/life balance(s)?

- 6.** Please identify any major growth or ‘gap’ areas the student could address in future ministry practice. Identify, also, particular areas of gifting that you would like to see the student develop further. Finally, are there any areas of difference (dissonance) between the student’s actual ministry practice and their theological foundations that is worthy of note here?

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Signed:

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#### **MBT Convenor**

MRI Convenor

## A Preaching Assessment Guide<sup>4</sup>

**Please fill in this guide within 48 hours of the student's sermon. It will be an invaluable part of their learning, reflection and self-evaluating process. Thank you for participating!**

Was the sermon engaging in content and delivery? Did it move you, in heart, body or mind? Did it strike you as being authentic to the one preaching and expressive of an exploring/expansive faith? In other words, did the student reveal their own need of learning in both ministry practice and faith development?

Was the sermon well thought through – well prepared? What evidence did you see and feel about that? Did it reveal any helpful scholarship and/or thoughtful life experience? If used, how ‘on track’ were the sermon illustrations or stories? Did they helpfully engage your imagination?

4 To be photocopied and handed out.

Did the sermon ‘dovetail’ with other parts of the worship service? Was there an integrative feel and tone about it or did it tend to stand alone? For example, was there a close, or otherwise, working relationship to the various readings, the song/hymnody and the prayers?

What did you find attractive about the preacher's method of speech or delivery? What did you find detractive that can be practically addressed for future opportunities? Did the student have due presence and bearing?

After the service, did you converse with others about the sermon or the preacher? If so, was your conversation directed towards content, style or your own faith responses?

What other constructive and encouraging feedback might you like to give here? What might your prayer and blessing be for the student you are assessing?

## A Worship Leading Assessment Guide<sup>5</sup>

**Please fill in this guide within 48 hours of the student's leading of worship. It will be an invaluable part of their learning, reflection and self-evaluating process. Thank you for participating!**

Did the student express and maintain a presence or appropriate bearing in the leading of worship? Did they convey a discernible sense of reverence and grace, and did he/she make you feel expectant about the worship itself? If so, how did they communicate that? If not, what might have been some contributing factors?

Did the student appear to be well versed and prepared to lead the worship? Did they work smoothly and well with others who might have been involved?

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5 To be photocopied and handed out.

How integrative or flowing did the service feel? Did it follow a theme or an identifiable direction? Did the leading of the service create room for your own prayer, praise, thinking and imagination? If so, how did that happen and if not, how might it happen more readily in the future?

What was the mood or spirit of the community following the service? Did it seem encouraged, inspired and buoyant or did it feel somewhat flat; a 'steady as she goes' feeling?

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Was the student clearly audible? Did they modulate their voice at all according to the moment?  
Did he/she make good (pastoral) eye contact with the congregation?

Were opportunities made for the pastoral needs of the congregation to be addressed or shared? How was that handled – sensitively, clumsily?

What other constructive and encouraging feedback might you like to give here? What might your prayer and blessing be for the student you are assessing?

## Select Reading List

Cahalan, Kathleen A., *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*. Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2010.

De Beer, John & Killen, Patricia O'Connell. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York, Crossroad, 1994.

\*\* Floding, Matthew (Ed.), *Welcome to Theological Field Education!* Herndon, Virginia, Alban, 2011.

Jones, Gregory L. & Armstrong, Kevin R., *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Palmer, Parker J., *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Stone, Howard W., Duke, James O., *How to Think Theologically* (2nd Ed.), Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2006.

\*\* *A highly valuable resource for the group to purchase and read concurrently with the placement.*



For enquiries contact  
Lecturer in Ministry Practice  
Rev Sean Gilbert

- p:** (08) 8416 8432, 0419 271 137  
**e:** [sean.gilbert@flinders.edu.au](mailto:sean.gilbert@flinders.edu.au)  
**w:** [www.unitingcollege.org.au](http://www.unitingcollege.org.au)  
**a:** 34 Lipsett Terrace  
Brooklyn Park SA 5032