

## THE LEARNING COVENANT

Every student brings different skills and gifts to the field education site. For this reason alone, each experience should be individually designed, keeping in mind both the needs of the student and the realities of the placement context. This is accomplished through a Learning Covenant, which the student and supervisor negotiate together during the first weeks of the placement. In this Covenant, an example of which you will find in this Handbook, the supervisory relationship is formally established and accepted, the learning goals of the student are stated, and a basis is in place for later evaluation. The Covenant also includes some practical information and expectations. Once the Learning Covenant has been negotiated, it will be approved and signed by the student, the supervisor, the chair of the Lay Committee and the Director of Studies. A copy of the Learning Covenant will be distributed to each of these parties, and a copy kept in the administrative office of the Montreal School of Theology.

Central to preparing the Learning Covenant is the opportunity for the student to discern prayerfully and in consultation the areas of ministry where he or she most needs and wants to grow. These growth areas are then identified in the writing of **goals** and **objectives** and the **tasks** associated with them, along with identification of **benchmarks** to measure the progress in each of the goals.

**GOAL** is a long-term accomplishment on which you have set your sights. It may be general.

*(What do I want to learn about ministry?)*

Examples: 1) "I want to improve my preaching." 2) "I want to explore my identity as a pastor and to become comfortable with my role."

You should identify **no more than three** general goals relevant to your learning in the Field Placement. (*It is impossible to attend to more than three, given the time constraints of the IMY*)

**OBJECTIVE** is a Specific, Measurable, Attainable Relevant and Trackable (SMART) means of accomplishing a GOAL.

*(What will I have to do to learn it?)*

e.g. In order to accomplish Goal #1 above: 1) I am going to explore three types of sermon over the year: expository, story-telling, and topical. 2) I am going to preach from both the Old and New Testaments, seeking the Good News in each, and discovering how all can be related to Jesus Christ.

e.g. In order to accomplish Goal #2 above: 1) I will visit families in the congregation each week, practicing listening skills, and bringing the concerns I discover into prayer with them. 2) I will invite at least one family per week to write a short critique of my visit, commenting on my pastoral presence. 3) I will lead a Bible study, where I will explore my leadership style, develop group participation, and invite participants to reflect on my leadership and their experience of learning.

Note: An objective tells **WHO** will do **WHAT** and **HOW** we will know it is completed. Each goal will generate one or more objectives each, leading to a collection of **4-6 objectives** for the year.

**TASKS:** Ministry responsibilities should relate to your Goals and Objectives, and be feasible within the context of the field placement site, and be negotiated with the Supervisor.

*(How am I going to learn it?)*

Examples: 1) "I will preach two sermons per term with each one using a different style." 2) "I will lead a seven-week Bible study on Sunday mornings on the Sermon on the Mount." 3) "I will visit three congregational homes each week, and on two occasions each term, write Ministry Incident Reports on these visits."

**RESOURCES:** Think about and name the people available to you, the special books you will read, the courses you will take, including workshops, the feedback forms you want to use, or the journal you will keep.

*(What key resources are available to me to help me accomplish this goal?)*

Examples: 1) "I will make use of a sermon evaluation form each time that I preach." "I will discuss sermon styles in supervision and do some reading in this area."  
2) "I will reflect on how I have been pastored in my life by keeping a journal and I will discuss with my supervisor and Lay Committee theological aspects of pastoral care and pastoral identity."

**BENCHMARKS:** Goals and objectives are only as good as our ability to accomplish them. Ask yourself *how* you will be able to measure your progress in each. How will you and others know if/when you complete your task, or accomplish your objective, or succeed in your goal? What timelines may you need to put in place to help you achieve your desired outcomes?*(when?)*

*How can I measure my progress in this goal. When will I do the tasks necessary to accomplish the goal?*

Examples: 1) "I will seek feedback from my Supervisor once per month to discuss my growth in confidence....." 2) "I will complete the Integrative Paper # 4 in February to document my self-awareness as a pastor, and compare my growth in clarity over the course of the year." 3) "I will complete the education project by Feb 15 and use evaluation forms for participants' responses to the project as part of my own evaluation."

### **PREPARING YOUR COVENANT :**

First, pray. Then consult with those who know you, use the feedback you have received from those accompanying you on your journey towards accountable ministry. Reflect on your strengths and weaknesses in ministry and think about those areas in which you want and need to grow.

Consider these five categories when developing learning goals and objectives:

- 1) **Ministerial Identity** - who you are as a person/male/female in ministry
- 2) **Relationships** - how you relate to different people (ages, backgrounds, gender) - your pastoral and relational skills
- 3) **Theological Reflection** - what theological questions you bring to ministry (for example, the role of the church in mission, what do I believe about salvation and why)

4) **Spirituality** - where is God for me in the midst of ministry, or how do I discern Christ at work in the person I am visiting?

5) **Skills** - in what practical areas of ministry do I need to learn greater competence?

Or, put another way, in order to achieve a balance in your growth and in your ministry, make sure you include goals from each of these three categories:

1. Head: An objective that is **cognitive**; where you need to grow in knowledge
2. Hands: An objective that is **practical**; where you need to grow in skills for ministry
3. Heart: An objective that is **spiritual**; where you need to grow as a Christian person