

LAY COMMITTEE GUIDE

This group is to be seen as playing an important part in the In-Ministry Year as an integral whole. However its main area of involvement will be with the student in the field placement.

Membership and Meetings

The Committee should include the student and 5 involved lay members of the community in the field placement. The Committee will be appointed by the Supervisor in consultation with the student. It should represent a cross-section of the people in the congregation. The Committee will choose a chair (not the student!) to oversee and coordinate its meetings.

- The supervisor does not attend meetings. He or she should attend the first meeting with the Director of Studies, but thereafter will be available only as a resource person to the Committee if the Committee so requests.
- The Director of Pastoral Studies will meet with the Lay Committee at the beginning of the IMY to answer any questions about the task of the Committee. After that, the Director will only attend if called in to resolve a serious difficulty.
- The Committee should meet about once a month at a time and place when all can be present. An occasional informal meeting (a shared meal, for example) or common worship may be worthwhile to the student and the fellowship.

Motives and Goals

Mutual support is the decisive motive and the Committee can provide this in the following ways:

1. It can deepen the student's sense of **belonging** in the field placement. This obviously makes for an attitude of concern and caring from all the members. Members should be willing to support the student through prayer and encouragement.
2. It can provide an invaluable opportunity for the student to hear and be involved with **the lay person's understanding of the life of the community and of ministry**. Members can give the student the "perspective from the pew" on his or her work, on the life of the community, or on ministry in general. They can also be a resource for the student, answering his or her questions about the community.
3. It can provide a **safe place for critical feedback** in such a way that the student can feel helped in his or her growth as a ministering person. This will involve specific feedback, such as sermon feedback, as well as end-of-term evaluations.
4. The task of the Committee is ***not*** to evaluate the student's general suitability for ministry. This is not a Discernment Committee; IMY students have all passed through that process and been recommended for ordination. Should serious concerns arise in this respect, they should be shared with the student and Director of Pastoral Studies as soon as possible. This will be an exceptional case; and until such concerns arise, you should work on the assumption that this student has been called by the church to ordained ministry.
5. The overall goal of the Committee is to help the student in his or her growth, and especially in **relating theological studies to the life of the field placement**.

The Agenda

You will set your own agenda, including the following elements:

- I. Gathering for prayer and greeting.
- II. The student should share his or her learning goals with the Committee at the beginning of the year, and check in about them at every meeting. The Committee is a resource and source of feedback in meeting these goals.
- III. The Committee will provide the student with feedback on his or her sermons. Forms will be made available.
- IV. The Committee will be available to answer the student's questions. It can be a resource for explaining congregational history or dynamics, or a sounding-board to assist the student in planning projects.
- V. Committee members should also have space to raise their own observations or questions regarding the student's work.
- VI. The Evaluations at the end of each term should be written by the Committee members jointly. It is best to prepare it in the absence of the student, but the report must be discussed with the student, and his or her concerns considered, before submitting it to the Director of Pastoral Studies. Thus a minimum of two meetings are required.

Other Concerns

1. **Evaluations:** The Committee will be asked to provide an evaluation of the student's progress at the end of each semester, using the attached forms. The intention of such evaluations is to be a support to the growth of the students.

In general we ask you to express three perspectives in each of the areas of work:

- strengths: particular gifts you see the student bringing to ministry - areas of growth: where you have seen the student to grow over the semester - challenges: continuing areas that need further work and attention

The Committee should submit a single evaluation. Evaluations should always be shared with the student and Supervisor before they are sent to the Director of Pastoral Studies.

2. **Confidentiality:** As in all nurturing relationships, **trust and confidentiality** are vital. What is discussed at the Committee should not be shared with others in the congregation. Nor is it normally shared with the Supervisor (except in the form of written evaluations), unless a problem arises that necessitates involving the Supervisor.

This places a responsibility on the student not to abuse this by using the Committee to complain about the Supervisor. If there are problems in that relationship, they should be discussed with the Supervisor directly and/or the Director of Studies, not within the community.

The Lay Committee is not an appropriate forum to share confidential pastoral encounters, which may be shared with the Supervisor or (anonymously) in a classroom setting. The student should exercise discretion in speaking of fellow congregants with the Committee.

Not everything that is shared at the meetings has to be reported on to others involved in the IMY. However, students must expect that whatever is discussed, even if it is not to be revealed directly, will at least indirectly form the basis of evaluation.

3. **Conflict:** If there is a serious difficulty in the work of the Committee the Supervisor or the Director of Pastoral Studies may be called upon to help. Such an intervention would normally require the permission of all involved.

We thank you for being involved with us in this way and sincerely hope that you will find new growth and understanding in yourselves as we share in this important phase in preparation for a life in ministry.