

# PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION

A process of Reflection  
on Ministry Experience

The Uniting Church in Australia  
Ministerial Education Commission  
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Those who minister in the Uniting Church are in a pastoral relationship with those in their ministry placement, and with any others who come to them for spiritual care or support.

They have a particular place in the community, with responsibility to ensure that they embody integrity, trust and compassion in all their relationships.

Supervision in ministry is a gift that assists those in specified ministries to serve faithfully and effectively.



**BE CLEAR**

- What is it?
- Whose is it?
- What is it for?
- What to expect from it.
- How could it serve the ministry I offer?

**TAKE THE INITIATIVE**

- Discern an appropriate supervisor.
- Draw up a covenant.
- Give it priority

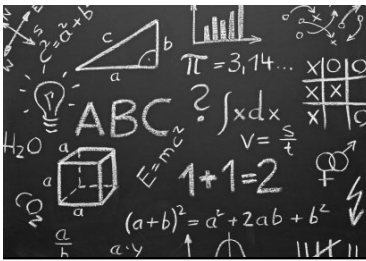
**COMMIT YOURSELF**

- To prepare
- To work
- To evaluate
- To review the process



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## THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF SUPERVISION

Supervision is part of formation for people hearing and taking up God's call to ministry within the whole people of God. In supervision the person in ministry enters a covenantal relationship with the supervisor for a period of time. Supervision works towards integrity in discipleship and ministry in the name of Christ, a consistency between belief and practice. It fosters a faithful response to God's call.

In Jesus, "the Word made flesh," we see God immersed in the everyday life of humanity. In supervision, we discern the presence and activity of God in the relationships and events, in the joys and tragedies of ministry encounters, both within the church and beyond. We ask what response the Spirit of God is seeking from us or how we can co-operate with God in God's purposes.

Jesus Christ led his followers on a journey of faith as they made their way to Jerusalem. He taught them, he challenged them, he loved them, and he modelled a life of trust in God, a path that led to his inevitable death. In supervision, we will learn, we will be challenged, we will be supported and we will discover the risks of entering into the mystery of God's call and where it leads us. Jesus often used parables and stories to frame the disciples' understandings of what they were experiencing, as a way to penetrate the deeper meaning of what they had witnessed. In supervision, we may come to terms with times of pain and difficulty. Jesus' journey led him to a horrible death and the joy of resurrection. In supervision, we may face some dark places including how destructive humanity can be, and in facing them, God may light the way for us. In supervision, we may also discover afresh the hope of God's gift of life in Christ!

### Supervision in the context of ministry

- Honours the call to a ministry of authenticity and integrity that is open to the formative power of God's presence and purpose in oneself, in the church and in the wider society.
- Advocates wholeness in affirming strengths and addressing and/or accepting weaknesses.
- Respects the boundaries of the particular call to ministry and of the particular ministry placement.
- Requires theological reflection on the practice of ministry, leading to increased intentionality, creativity and quality of ministry.
- Points to God's restoring grace which enables ministers to take responsibility for times of failure and in times of brokenness.
- Trusts the God of hope for the future, sustained by one's call to ministry and encouraged by the signs of God's activity in the ministry context.

□ NOW  
□ LATER

## THE MANDATE FOR SUPERVISION

The Uniting Church in Australia defines professional supervision as “the relationship Ministers\* have with another professional whereby the Minister\* is assisted to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of ministry” (Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, 2009, 3.9(c), p.6).

The Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice requires that Ministers\* demonstrate professionalism in all the tasks of ministry. Section 3 on Professional Conduct provides standards for one’s relationships with colleagues and councils of the church, for one’s teaching and competence, and for the exercise of one’s power, confidentiality and self-care. These are critical dimensions of one’s ministry for monitoring in supervision.

The Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice requires that, as part of their self-care, “Ministers\* have a responsibility to ensure that they receive regular professional supervision” (3.8(b) and 3.9(c)(d)). There are a number of dimensions of ministry specifically named in the Code as worthy of attention in supervision – “competencies, time management, priorities and any difficulties arising in ministry” (3.9(c)) and the appropriateness of a particular relationship (4.4(b)). In addition, “Ministers\* shall discuss with their supervisor any ongoing situations of conflict in which they are involved in the course of their work” (3.9(e)).

Section 3.4(a) reads, “Ministers\* have a responsibility to maintain high standards of knowledge and skills in all the areas of ministry relevant to their placement. This responsibility requires that Ministers\* undertake continuing education appropriate to this ministry.”

The Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice further acknowledges that;

- Ministry is accountable to the wider councils of the church,
- Ministry should not be fulfilled in isolation,
- Mutual accountability requires continuing competence in ministry and appropriate resourcing of people in ministry with a variety of skills,
- Supervision will vary from minister to minister and placement to placement,
- Supervision may be supplemented by a mentor or spiritual director or coach, where the distinctiveness of each role needs to be clarified for those involved,
- Supervision is a regular commitment,
- Supervisors should be trained for the role of supervision, and
- The supervisory relationship requires good communication, the challenge to reflect constructively, and an understanding of the ethos of the Uniting Church and the role and responsibility of the person in ministry.

\* The term Minister/minister includes Pastors, Candidates, Deacons, Ministers of the Word, Youth Workers and Community Ministers.



## MODES OF SUPERVISION

1. **Organizational or Administrative Supervision** is defined in the Constitution of the Uniting Church (para. 15) expressing that those in ministry will be responsible to;

- “a Presbytery and Synod in matters of faith and discipline, and
- the Presbytery or appointing body for the exercise of their ministry.”

2. **Professional supervision** is defined in the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (3.9(c)) as a relationship with a supervisor to assist in enhancing the quality of ministry through maintaining the boundaries of the pastoral relationship, including competences, time management, priorities and any difficulties arising in ministry.

Supervision is a safe, confidential relationship which provides a regular opportunity to reflect on our ministry and pastoral relationships. It works only where an atmosphere of trust is built up. Both the person in ministry and supervisor are responsible for building that trust by approaching their working relationship with openness. Each supervision relationship is unique and needs its own covenant.

The desired outcome of professional supervision is a continuing enhancement of the ministry we offer. Along with this can go increased self-respect, released potential, the capacity to see, feel and hear what we have tended not to see, feel and hear about ourselves and the exercise for our ministry practice, and the bonus of increased health and well-being.

Good supervision supports, challenges, and encourages learning, self-knowledge, professional development, good use of resources and time, and respect for boundaries.

Supervision is also related to the ongoing learning which enhances ministry. Seeking a Heart of Wisdom: Guidelines for Continuing Education for Uniting Church Ministers states:

“In setting out suggested areas of study, flexibility and variety are critical, given the diverse kinds and settings of ministry. Nonetheless, certain core areas of study are foundational for most ministries. These include:

- academic theological study (including biblical studies, systematic theology, missiology, church history, culture and society etc)
- ministry practice and skills (which must always entail theological reflection)
- spiritual growth and formation.

These three broad areas indicate that a minister needs to give attention to her or his knowing, doing and being.”



## THE FOCUS OF PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION

The GOAL is continuing enhancement of ministry

The CONTEXT is an atmosphere of TRUST and OPENNESS

The VEHICLE is a RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The FOCUS is actual MINISTRY EXPERIENCES





## MARKS OF AN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISOR

Professional supervision is for all; Pastors, Candidates for Ministry and Ministers, People in ministry from other traditions and from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is an opportunity to learn and reflect on ministry practice in the particular context of the current placement. The following are qualities that potential supervisors and supervisors are invited to intentionally develop.

An effective supervisor provides:

- A supportive, safe environment
- Cultural awareness and sensitivity
- Full attention to the person coming for supervision
- An explanation of the limits of confidentiality and what happens when there is a breach of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
- Encouragement and space for those in ministry to reflect theologically on what they do and how it is done
- Specific feedback to those in ministry
- Relevant information, sources and referral as needed

An effective supervisor encourages those in ministry to:

- Be intentional and committed in supervision
- Accept responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings, attitudes and actions
- Observe and clarify thoughts, feelings, attitudes and actions
- Find other ways of looking at things
- Discover and explore a range of options
- Come to their own conclusion, choices and decisions,
- Acknowledge their own strengths and successes
- Respect and maintain confidentiality,
- Keep the focus on the process and response to the material the minister has presented for supervision,
- Pursue ecumenical openness in all expressions of ministry
- Consider cross cultural dimensions
- Monitor their boundaries in ministry
- Keep in mind the fundamental goal of improved quality of ministry

An effective supervisor has knowledge, experience, integrity and skill to:

- Maintain 'professionalism', that is to assist in setting a safe space to work on the issues those in ministry bring to supervision
- Help those in ministry identify things that are happening in their ministry practice that they might not see or understand
- Recognise when the supervisor does not have the level of skill to assist those in ministry appropriately and so offer a referral to a suitable person who does have the needed skills
- Have a working knowledge of the ethos of the Uniting Church in Australia, guided by the Basis of Union and observing the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
- Respect the processes and diversities of learning modes
- Recognise where cultural expectations may be affecting ministry practice
- Name under what circumstances a supervision relationship needs to be ended



## PREPARING FOR SUPERVISION

As people in ministry we are responsible for what we prayerfully prepare and present in supervision and for identifying what makes it important enough to spend time on and for what we choose not to share. Anything is appropriate that arises from actual experiences and can affect, or is affecting, the quality of our ministry. For instance our role in a particular situation, priorities, time management, insights, people, committees or institutions, changes, pressures, needs.

Any one of the following may be useful in deciding what to choose for the supervisory process:

- The most significant event in my ministry work since my last supervision is...
- This incident/concern keeps pushing itself back into my mind...
- I am aware of very strong feelings about something that has happened...
- When [this] happened it seemed to be a pattern repeating itself...
- I am so [tired, miserable, elated, inspired, challenged, worried]...
- I want to clarify where I stand on a particular issue...
- I want to know how this reflects my thinking about the nature of God . . .
- I want to stop something like [this] happening again...
- I want to get something like [this] to happen more often...
- I seem to keep avoiding/putting off...
- It is time to establish or review or evaluate my Supervision Covenant...

When we commence a supervision session, we need to be able to say:

- In ministry at the moment, I feel ...
- This specific pastoral incident occurred ...
- This is my question or challenge...
- This is what I want as an outcome...

Supervision works best if:

- We are open and honest
- Trust and confidentiality are guaranteed
- We report our behaviour, observations, reactions and feelings accurately
- We accept feedback
- We monitor our feelings and responses (including our need to justify, explain)
- We remember that what happens in supervision is our responsibility
- We discern God's presence and purpose
- We remember that the purpose of the whole undertaking is to enhance the ministry we offer
- We integrate our practice into our faith stance or our ministry with our theology.



## PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION - A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT FOR ADULT LEARNING

Professional supervision provides a context where the following principles of adult education find expression:

1. We learn best when we are highly motivated to learn. For example, attending a seminar on the gospel set down in the lectionary for the coming year will be a great resource for our preaching. Participation in such a seminar makes obvious sense as it will lay a foundation and save research time week by week. A supervisor may help us maximise what we have gained from the seminar. Or, if we go through a 'wilderness' time in our ministry, that may confront us with the need to go on retreat, or establish a relationship with a spiritual director, or face the 'wilderness' with our professional supervisor.
2. We learn best when we maximise energy for positive learning. It is good to get out of our ministry context to learn at a conference on homelessness. We can then bring back our learnings which would help us find a process for the complex challenges involved. This then removes confused expectations or blame directed at leadership or fear of failure, or significant tension. An effective supervisor will help us negotiate the struggles of our ministry context and apply conference learnings in our ministry practice.
3. We learn best when learning is accompanied by positive satisfaction and tangible rewards. It is possible that our professional supervisor has some expertise in leadership. S/he may work with us on a guided reading program on leadership, which ultimately results in lay leaders being much happier with the way we are leading.
4. We learn best if we are actively involved in goal setting, curriculum choices, choices as to modes of learning, and evaluation of learning outcomes. A good professional supervisor is invitational, asking us to nominate the journey we will go on together. It is good for us to take charge of addressing issues in our lives, and of developing the quality of the ministry we offer. For example, when we are not satisfied with an interview with unchurched people about the baptism of their first child, we may decide to talk to several respected colleagues about how they address that situation, and process it all with our supervisor.
5. We learn best if content is meaningfully and flexibly presented, and takes account of the learner's background experience, motivation to learn, preferred learning style, and contribution to the learning process. For example, many people in ministry have a previous career path that can be integrated into their ministry practice. It is important that professional supervisors work with us asking how the knowledge, attitudes and skills we developed in these previous contexts may be of service in ministry.



## SUPERVISION AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY

The Uniting Church recognises four phases of ministerial education. The Period of Discernment is for all who would like to explore the call of God on their lives. Working with a mentor is an essential part of this process.

Some of those who complete the Period of Discernment go on to become candidates for ordination and enter the second or Core Phase. This is a period of formation within one of the church's theological colleges. Mentoring and/or supervision are endorsed as part of this process and intentional, ministry supervision happens within a student's field education.

The Third Phase is "intended to be a period of sustained and intentional mentoring and support for newly ordained ministers during the first three years of ministry practice."

The next phase is Continuing Education for Ministry which continues for the remainder of a person's ministry. Supervision is again essential to one's ministry. In fact, the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice affirms that "regular professional supervision" is required of candidates and of those in lay ministry roles just as much as it is for those who are ordained.

The Assembly document, *Seeking a Heart of Wisdom: Guidelines for Continuing Education*, asks that professional supervisors guide all those in ministry in the preparation of Continuing Education Learning Agreements. It is appropriate, then, that all people in ministry within the Uniting Church explore with their supervisors what might be the most important areas of focus for their ongoing learning. It would be constructive for supervisor and person in ministry to look at this document together as possibilities for CEM are considered and the Learning Agreement is shaped.

Does the person in ministry need to do some intentional learning and development in his or her

- Knowing - biblical and theological studies?
- Doing - some specific skills training?
- Being - with a focus on spiritual growth?

Supervisors with an awareness of the opportunities and challenges of ministry will be able to bring a richer perspective to the planning of the CEM Learning Agreement by the person in ministry. Such supervision ideally will assist the person in ministry to shape their continuing education to address some of the changes and transitions in their own lives (including their faith), in the church and in the world.

~~dream~~  
plan

## SUPERVISION COVENANTS - WHY HAVE THEM?

### **A covenant describes a unique relationship.**

Each supervision relationship is unique; it is the only supervision in which these particular people work together. Their experience and understanding of supervision may differ, so they need to clarify what they are doing. If they don't, there can be confusion and disappointment. A written covenant [preferred to 'contract'] is the best safeguard.

### **A covenant helps establish the relationship.**

Negotiating a written covenant can be an important step in the setting up of supervision. It can be a learning experience and a model. It emphasises each person's commitment. It requires the effective use of time.

### **A written covenant provides a framework.**

Some people find making a detailed, specific covenant a good base for on-going work. It sets ground rules for the shared task. It provides a framework for evaluation (are we doing what we agreed to do?). It can be re-negotiated and adapted to meet changing needs.

Significant aspects to consider in formulating a supervision covenant:

1. The purpose of the supervision,
2. What each person expects the process of supervision to be like,
3. What each person expects a supervision session to be like,
4. What the roles and tasks of the person in ministry will be in this relationship,
5. What the roles and tasks of the supervisor will be in this relationship,
6. How and when the supervision will be evaluated,
7. The UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice will be adhered to,
8. The working details:
  - a. What preparation will be done?
  - b. The working format of the session - e.g. how it will begin and end,
  - c. How material will be presented [e.g. orally, written, verbatim, tape],
  - d. What records will be kept and how material will be disposed of,
  - e. The frequency, day, time and length of sessions,
  - f. Starting and review dates, and the proposed duration of the covenant,
  - g. Agreement about cancellations, regularity, punctuality, interruptions,
  - h. Frequency and format of evaluation of the supervisory relationship,
  - i. Confidentiality and limits to confidentiality,
  - j. What to do if there is conflict, or if one participant has a complaint.
9. The issue of payment or non-payment: The current rate for professional supervision is at least \$80-100 an hour. Note the need for flexibility where supervision is part of the ministry of a person with a part-time placement. Supervision of ministry may be offered by another active Minister, a retired Minister, a professional as indicated above, or a lay person such as a teacher, social worker or psychologist who has undertaken the basic training expected of supervisors, and who is committed to ongoing training in this form of ministry-supervision.



Because participation in professional supervision is a significant investment of oneself, it is important that there be a careful conversation with a potential supervisor about the possibilities for such a relationship. This initial, no obligation (to either party) conversation can establish mutual expectations. It may address

- How we understand the nature, purpose, value, and style of supervision
- How to decide the focus of each session
- How sensitive and personal issues will be handled
- How active both parties will be in the process
- Concerns about confidentiality
- The cost, how often to meet, and how long each session will be

Supervision takes time, so both parties need to plan well for a session to be effective. Supervision is an investment in one's ministry where we are helped to think more carefully about what we are doing and why. Such reflective practice mostly leads to better quality ministry. At times, it can save us from ignorance or unhealthy or destructive practices which may be costly. In our increasingly complex society, whether the church requires it or not, without regular professional supervision, we run the risk that the quality of our ministry deteriorates. Supervision is healthy, preventive practice for ministry.

Many of us (if not all of us) carry wounds and scars from earlier life experiences. We are not completely free of the damage they have caused. Some of us can see how we also have damaged others through the way we have treated them. This is all a reflection of our failure to love one another as Christ has loved us. There is a degree of baggage we carry with us, that may interfere with our establishing healthy relationships. That baggage from the past may contaminate current interactions and may hinder the communion called for in Christian community. It is good to be able to identify some of that baggage we carry and how that affects the way we relate to others now. This is not to deny the healing power of Christ, but rather to be honest about ourselves. To face up to our past and how others now experience us in relationships is part of the challenge of the gospel and a step towards the wholeness God desires of us as individuals and as communities anticipating the reign of God. For example:

- a person who has experienced an abusive father may get angry whenever they hear God referred to as Father
- as a child, a person in ministry was surrounded by parents and teachers who were regularly telling her what to do, and so she finds it hard to cope with any suggestion from her supervisor that she should take particular steps

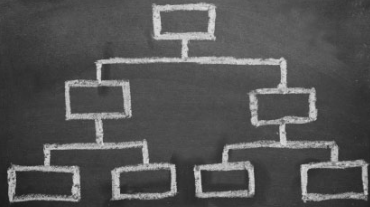
This does not mean that supervision is therapy or counselling. However, wherever our personal issues affect our ministry, an effective supervisor will help us to reflect on the impact on our ministry, and consider with us what steps we need to take for the sake of better ministry.

Some ministers are concerned about the cost of supervision. Some Presbyteries and ministry placements happily cover the cost as an investment in the ministry of their minister(s). At least one Presbytery has trialled small group supervision where a trained supervisor works with a small number of people in ministry. These options are worth exploring. Some ministers beginning in supervision realise, relatively early on, that the expense is worth it, as they see the benefits.

Some ministers wonder how supervision can happen in an isolated placement. The increasing use of technology such as teleconferences and Skype (with a camera) means that distance is now much less of a problem. The use of such media may be supplemented by email and possibly occasional face-to-face contact.



- For Church Council Members and Elders, Boards and Councils: Regulation 3.4.4 (a), as well as the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice require people in ministry to “receive regular professional supervision”  
Are there ways in which you can support and encourage your minister or pastor in this commitment?  
What might assist you in understanding professional supervision for your pastor or minister?
- For People in ministry: Is there anything in these guidelines which is inconsistent with your view of ministry? Identify this concern, and if necessary seek further clarification from Presbytery or Synod.  
Is there anything in these guidelines which encourages you to rethink what you are doing about supervision at present?
- What suggestions do you have for ways in which your Presbytery or Synod could make it easier for people in ministry to obtain good supervision?
- Note other questions which arise for you as you think about/discuss next steps in implementing supervision arrangements for yourself.



# APPENDIX - SUPERVISION COVENANT

Uniting Church in Australia

..... Presbytery

## Supervision Covenant

*Note: A copy of this document shall be to be sent to the Convenor, Pastoral Relations Committee, immediately after signing; Supervisor and Minister should each retain a copy of the document.*

### This covenant is between:

**Minister** .....

Telephone (H) .....

Address .....

Mobile .....

Email .....

**Supervisor** .....

Telephone (H) .....

Address .....

Mobile .....

Email .....

### Supervision arrangements:

This Covenant is for the period of.....year(s) beginning on .....

and concluding on..... We have agreed to meet at ..... weekly

intervals (eg every six weeks) starting on.....(date)

at a fee of.....(amount in \$, NA, or waived)

Signed:

(Minister) ..... Date: .....

(Supervisor) ..... Date: .....



