

Some Guidelines for Supervision

Introduction

At the heart of supervision is a regular meeting of the training incumbent and curate. It is a structured time of support for the curate with the aim of encouraging personal and professional development. Supervision sessions are different to staff meetings and they provide an opportunity to:

- Reflect on ministry
- Clarify aims, priorities and expectations
- Set learning objectives
- Receive feedback, encouragement and constructive criticism
- Discuss issues, plans and problems in confidence
- Reduce Stress

Supervision is an outcome as well as a process. We have many different ways of finding insight, perspective, meaning – supervision.

It will be at its most creative, challenging and enriching if it is conducted in a climate of mutual respect and trust.

Supervision sessions should be uninterrupted and should take place in a mutually agreed venue at a mutually agreed time. A good session should last between 60 and 90 minutes.

Practical questions need addressing:

- Is it best to have the supervision session in a different location from where the staff meeting is held?
- Do you answer the phone?
- How regularly do you meet?
- How long does a session last?
- Have matters of confidentiality been discussed?

To enable reflection and learning, the space of supervision needs to have secure boundaries in order to let the challenge of learning, which can be discomforting at times, to be worked with and absorbed at deep rather than superficial levels.

Preparation:

The following headings¹ provide a format for making notes in preparation for a supervision session:

- Date
- I need help or a decision from you about the following:
- I'm having a problem with the following:
- I'm planning to:
- I've made progress in the following areas:
- Happiness: (grade 1 to 10 – with 1 being 'suicidal' and 10 being 'the happiest I've ever been')
- Please pray for me about the following:

Supervision is ... the opportunity for both supervisor and reflective practitioner to learn. How the supervisor models the quality of listening, challenging and dialogue contributes to the implicit learning of the reflective practitioner, so that good, rather than bad, habits are gained.

(Frances Ward: Lifelong Learning)

¹ From Lamdin, K. and Tilley, D (2007) Supporting New Ministers in the Local Church, London, SPCK

Setting learning objectives:

The supervising minister should help the curate to identify those areas where s/he needs to learn and develop, and to agree how this can best be achieved.

The process will be aided by clarifying:

- The specific learning objective, i.e. to become more able to...
- The task(s) the curate will undertake to achieve this
- The resources available to help perform the task, e.g. what people, books, learning aids are relevant
- The criteria for recognising when the objective has been adequately achieved

The Learning Outcomes and the worklist of training will form the basis for learning objectives and they need to be linked to both the working agreement and the learning plan.

These lists may also be helpful and objectives should be drawn from all four categories.

A – Personal and spiritual development

The curacy should be a period of personal and spiritual growth which will entail a growing awareness of strengths and weaknesses. Specific learning objectives could be set in such areas as:

- Ability to change
- Commitment to people and tasks
- Making time for prayer and reading
- Holiness of lifestyle; Ability to articulate beliefs and accept the beliefs of others
- Capacity to express love appropriately
- Capacity for vulnerability
- Setting boundaries
- Responding to pressure.

B – Personal and professional relationships

The pastoral relationship demands that we respond appropriately to parishioners and maintain proper emotional and physical boundaries. Specific learning objectives could include:

- Ability to initiate and sustain appropriate levels of relationship
- Ability to exercise leadership without abusing power or position
- Ability to handle conflict
- Ability to cope with large and small groups
- Ability to encourage, to listen and to communicate easily with strangers
- Ability to relate well with colleagues, children, teenagers, elderly, disabled etc.

C – Ministerial skills

This will largely depend on the curate's previous experience, but it could be appropriate to make a learning objective from skills such as:

- Organisation
- Visiting

- Worship
- Preaching
- Teaching
- Pastoral care
- Children's work

D – Growth in knowledge and understanding

Benefit of theological reading and Bible study is enhanced by reflection with the training incumbent. Similarly, discussing parish life and the world views of those we serve helps us to more fully understand the local context. Specific learning objectives may arise out of:

- A troublesome doctrine
- A home group Bible study
- A critical incident
- A conversation at the school gate etc.

The process:

In a typical supervision session the curate may:

- Bring a particular task s/he has performed
- Describe a significant event that has been disturbing, challenging or stimulating
- Raise a particular issue that relates to a learning objective

The supervising minister's role is to be a facilitator (not a problem solver) who will:

- Listen carefully
- Help identify relevant facts and underlying feelings
- Help identify the implicit and explicit theological issues
- Help reflection
- Help the curate to decide their own response utilising different methods of theological reflection, particularly the pastoral cycle.

In offering supervision the supervising minister may find the following checklist helpful:

- listen more than you speak
- recognise your personal feelings and their possible influence on your judgements and actions
- be sensitive to the experience and needs of your colleague
- stay with the issues, and avoid being too anecdotal
- ask open questions and be genuinely interested
- build on your colleague's strengths by offering constructive feedback
- encourage your colleague to learn from failures as well as successes
- set realistic goals
- be patient
- don't let disagreements fester

Giving and receiving feedback:

Feedback helps us to become more aware of what we do and how we do it. Feedback is a vital part of ministry as we seek to develop and enable the ministry of others. The giving and receiving of feedback is not only helpful in curacy, but is also good practice for the curate's future ministry.

Giving feedback:

- Can take the form of both positive and negative observations
- Can be given (whether a positive or a negative observation) in a way that is helpful or unhelpful

Helpful feedback needs:

- To be given in a concerned and supportive way, always checking that positive observations are heard as well as negative ones.
- To include positive and negative observations. If possible, sandwiching negative observations between positive ones
- To be owned or personalised so that the giver is sharing a personal observation or idea – ‘I feel...’, ‘I noticed...’.
- To focus on behaviour the receiver can do something about
- To focus on observations rather than inferences, i.e. begin with the facts and let the interpretations emerge through discussion.
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Example	Expressed helpfully	Expressed unhelpfully
Positive feedback	“I liked the way you asked an open question at that point and then waited for a response.”	“That was good.”
Negative feedback	“I think it might have been more effective if you had asked an open question at that point and then waited for a response. What do you think?”	“It’s a pity you asked a closed question at that point and then jumped in again before anyone had a chance to answer.”

Receiving feedback:

Feedback gives us an opportunity to change and modify the way we do or say things. We can choose whether we accept or reject feedback. It will depend on how open we are and how we feel about the person who is giving it and the way it is being given. In general:

- Listen, rather than reject or argue
- Clarify what is being said
- Look for other evidence to check out what is being said
- Ask for the feedback you want but don’t get
- Decide what you will do as a result of the feedback.