

Section 7

Site Team Guidelines and Information

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The Journey of the Site Team

Site Teams should expect to receive downloaded copies of forms from their seminarians in a timely manner. These forms should be completed by the Site Team and submitted by the seminarian to the student's TFE Seminar Leader or the Supervised Ministries Office by their due dates. All forms are available online: <https://www.palmerseminary.edu/student-life/supervised-ministries/theological-field-education/theological-field-education-handbook>

A Guide for the Site Team

Welcome

Welcome to Palmer Seminary's Theological Field Education (TFE) program! We are delighted that you have agreed to partner with Palmer Theological Seminary in the educational experience of preparing men and women for Christian ministry. It is our desire that your experience and that of the other Site Team members will be one in which you feel the joy of contributing to God's plan of extending God's reign by helping raise up and provide ministerial growth for leaders of the church, its agencies and institutions. Further, it is our hope that your experience with the TFE program will confirm your own journey of faith and renew your enthusiasm for your leadership role in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Theological Field Education is the place in the seminary curriculum where academic theory is tested and tried. It is the place where seminarians can be challenged to not only teach and preach their theology, but live it. It is the place where seminarians can further develop their gifts, the understanding of their calling, and have the opportunity to be the Body of Christ in the world.

TFE is an opportunity for seminarians to learn how to collaborate with those they serve in developing the most effective ministries they can in any particular setting. We commend you the educational task of supporting and giving feedback to your seminarian as s/he grows in his/her call to ministry and in his/her ability to perform ministry tasks.

For your fuller understanding of the expectations of TFE, we ask you to read the departmental policies in **Section 1 of this handbook**. This section includes **selected Palmer Theological Seminary's academic policies, the TFE Code of Ethics, and policies about ministry site confirmation, Home Church Policy, Supervisory Personnel, and Full Disclosure**.

If you have any questions, please be in touch with the SMO. Again welcome to TFE at Palmer Seminary. May your experience be a blessing to you and for God's work among us.

Purpose

The Site Team offers the pastoral intern a significant opportunity for support and accountability. The relationships formed with this committee provide a most important component to the seminarian's education, and a collegial style of clergy-lay dialogue that will continue to be a foundation for effective ministry in the future.

The Site Team is actively involved in the formation of the Serving/Learning Covenant created between the pastoral intern and the ministry site. During the 6-8 meetings that occur during the year between the Site Team and pastoral intern, the covenant becomes the basis for discussion and assessment. The seminary provides formal assessment tools to help gauge the Seminarian's growth and understanding. The Site Team's insightful and forthright participation in these disciplines is necessary.

As representatives of the congregation or other ministry site, the Site Team provides a channel of communication and education, and network for support and accountability. Members of the Site

Team seek to talk “with” rather than “about” the seminarian. From their perspectives as laypersons, participants affirm effective performance in ministry and identify areas requiring improvement. The acceptance and encouragement of the committee offer the seminarian a valuable dimension of support in developing and confirming a sense of professional identity and competence. Engaging in the process of forming covenants and evaluations encourages the seminarian to serve with a relationship of accountability to the church/agency.

When the seminarian is also the pastor in the TFE Ministry Site, the Site Team is not designed to function as a staff relations, or similar, committee. Instead, the team is to function educationally in support of their growth through goals in the TFE experience.

Design of Committee

The committee is a small group of approximately five persons designed specifically to serve as a Site Team. The pastoral intern is a member of the committee, but may not serve as Chair. The committee will be selected by the supervising Pastor/Mentor (or by the Student Pastor if the Mentor is Off-Site.) The Pastor/Mentor may consult with a key lay leader. When a seminarian is returning to the same ministry site, the Pastor/Mentor may want to consult with the student as well. Selection of the committee should include diversity of age, gender, background and theology. Members are likely to be most effective who have an interest in nurturing the growth of the seminarian, and have gifts for providing a relationship of direct, non-threatening communication. No current Palmer Seminarian may serve on a TFE Site Team.

The Pastor/Mentor, or Student Pastor, generally convenes the initial meeting of the committee. The Site Team chairperson facilitates subsequent meetings. Neither the Pastor/Mentor, the Pastor/Mentor's spouse, members of the Pastor/Mentor or seminarian's family, nor current Palmer students may serve as members of the committee. This ensures the building of a professional relationship with the committee, unencumbered by a confusion of roles, relationships, and responsibilities.

The Teaching Church Model is essential to the success of effective supervisory training by the Site Team. Your active involvement and guidance in the supervisory process is as essential as the pastoral supervisory component. The seminarian needs to receive from you, as laypersons, helpful feedback in their practice of ministry (see Mid-year Reflection on Learning). You will not be able to effectively assess these components in readiness formation unless you are actively involved in their learning and practice of ministry.

Initial Responsibilities

Teams with On-Site Pastor/Mentors assist the seminarian and the congregation to establish a relationship through:

- **Introduction of the seminarian to the congregation**, perhaps in installation special service incorporating expressions of mutual commitment
- **Provision of a place** in which to study, pray, counsel, and prepare for other aspects of ministry--with desk, access to telephone, clerical services if necessary, and so on
- **Inclusion of the seminarian's name** in staff listings on bulletin, newsletter, and elsewhere

- **Preparation in a preliminary way for closure and recognition** of the seminarian when the term of ministry is complete

Teams with Off-Site Pastor/Mentors will not have the partnership with the off-site Pastor/Mentor in establishing relationship with the congregation. Instead, the Site Team will help to establish the TFE program, as an educational experience, in the TFE ministry site.

Developing an Effective Educational Relationship as a Site Team

As lay members of a congregation or other ministry, Site Team members are appreciated for their individual, unique perspectives on ministry that illuminate new ways for the seminarian to understand the church/agency and to experience oneself in ministry with the laity. Since each setting for ministry, Site Team and Seminarian are gifted in individual ways, each relationship with a seminarian has different qualities. Some of the attitudes and functions that Site Teams and seminarians have commonly found to facilitate a positive relationship for educational growth have included:

- openness and acceptance in the group; including all the members' ideas and feelings
- being in prayer for the seminarian, the committee and the church/agency
- understanding the Seminarian and the laity to be in ministry together
- trust and confidentiality
- mutual respect
- sharing the heritage and mission of the church or agency
- discerning and affirming the seminarian's gifts
- offering direct feedback on the seminarian's functioning through viewing Seminarian's ministry and experiencing seminarian's ~~pastor~~
- sharing criticism in an atmosphere of acceptance and hope
- believing that the church/agency is strong enough to live with imperfections
- acknowledgment and working toward resolution of conflict
- respect for seminarian's boundaries and need for balance of student-hood and personal life
- resource for facing challenges, but encouraging seminarian's growth rather than solving problems for the seminarian
- following appropriate ethical norms

What are some additional goals and attributes that your Site Team brings to the pastoral internship? By taking the risk of being in relationship with the seminarian and sharing what you perceive and believe, your committee contributes significantly to seminarians establishing an effective relationship with the church/agency or other ministry, and discovering and growing in their gifts for ministry. We hope that your investment in participating in the Site Team will also offer you fulfillment and growth.

Scheduled Meetings

Because trust and communication develop best in the absence of serious problems, the Site Team is to meet with the seminarian regularly rather than only during times of difficulty and stress. It is

expected that Site Teams will meet with their seminarian **at least three times each semester**. The suggested schedule is **monthly** from **September to December** and from **January to April (at least six sessions)**, with additional meetings scheduled if needed in a context of **sensitivity to persons** and **confidentiality concerning issues**.

A suggested agenda for meetings with the seminarian is:

- Greetings and opening prayer
- Review of the committee's purpose and the seminarian's covenant. Site Teams of student pastors need to be careful to reflect and hold the pastor accountable only in the areas of covenant
- Review of the seminarian's ministry experience since the previous meeting.
- Summary and closing prayer. The key concern is that time be allowed for sharing by all committee members and the seminarian

Suggestions of questions to be raised during the meeting:

- Are the expectations, commitments, and terms of the covenant being honored?
- What tasks of ministry are performed effectively by the seminarian?
- What tasks of ministry require growth and improvement?
- Do additional areas of service or opportunities for learning by the seminarian need to be considered?
- How can communication, education, support, and accountability be strengthened?
- Does the seminarian's spouse (if married) need special attention, consideration, support, or response?

Note: In the case of student pastors, only the 10-12 hours covenanted for the TFE internship learning goals and tasks should be considered in the Site Team meetings and for TFE evaluations.

Annual Assessments

The Site Team formally assesses the seminarian twice during the year, once through the Mid-year Reflection on Learning and through an End of the Year Assessment. Assessment may be done with or without the seminarian present, but the completed forms are to be **reviewed and discussed with the seminarian**. It is the student's responsibility to submit the forms to the SMO, but you greatly help the process by completing your work in advance of the due date. Site Team Assessment Forms are included in Section 3. They can be downloaded in useable form from our website. See web address at the beginning of the section. The Assessments are read by Supervised Ministries' faculty and staff and responded to when appropriate. It is treated with maximum confidentiality by the staff and released to others outside of PTS only when written permission is granted, and is destroyed five years after the student's last contact with our department.

Retention of Student Records

The SMO maintains TFE records for four years following completion of the courses. Judicatories and denominations sometimes ask for information based on a seminarian's TFE experience. You as the Site Team may want to consider writing a generic reference for your pastoral intern. The generic

reference might include observations on the growth of the seminarian serving at your ministry site over the year in TFE, his/her strengths, character traits, and what you observe of his/her professional gifts at this point in her/his journey. The generic reference may be given to the pastoral intern to keep in his/her TFE file in Supervised Ministries.

Site Team Training

Each fall, training is available for members of the Site Team. Generally, an evening session, at least two opportunities are provided for both the chairperson as well as members of the committee. In addition, the committee, through the chairperson, can direct specific questions or concerns to the Supervised Ministries office throughout the year.

The Journey of the Site Team³

The journey of each Site Team will be unique. Therefore, this scenario is only suggestive of some of the landscape of the journey of a Site Team. It is not meant to be a set of directions but a set of clues by which we may pace our journey.

September

- Welcoming and including: it's important to be intentional about saying hello.
- Becoming acquainted: Site Team and student may share a meal together.
- **Serving/Learning Covenant negotiated, signed and due in the SM Office October 2.**
- Covenanting together as a Site Team, deciding how we want to work together, when our meetings will be held, and describing a format for our meetings. We will each want to begin to define our role and responsibilities so that each Site Team member, the pastor/mentor, the pastor (if not the pastor/mentor), and the intern can see “where we fit.”

Note: When the intern is on professional staff of the ministry site, it is important to understand that the role of the Site Team is not the same as that of a Pastoral Relations Committee. The Site Team deals exclusively with the needs and growth of the staff person who is the intern in terms of his/her learning goals for the year in TFE.

October

- See that we have put our Site Team covenant in writing so that it is explicit and can serve as a guide for continuing reflection and evaluation.
- Be open to one another as we share first experiences together.
- Encourage the intern to share freely and openly by offering our readylistening and willingness to risk sharing ourselves.
- Recognize that we are each unique and different; there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit.

November

- Together with the intern, reflect on this process of becoming involved, or more deeply involved, in ministry as a professional in terms of **her/his own learning objectives.**
- What does this experience feel like? What does it mean? What is happening with her/him vocationally, spiritually, emotionally and theologically? Further, what is happening to us? This is a time for naming some of the dynamics of the journey and discerning the meaning of these dynamics from the perspective of our Christian faith.

December

- Already it is time to turn attention to the preparations for the Mid-Year Reflection on Learning. The Mid-Year Reflection on Learning brings us to the horizon of new possibility. Consider the Serving/Learning Covenant. Perhaps some contents of the Learning Agreement need revising.

³ Also available on the TFE website “TFE Handbook and Selected Documents.”

- Perhaps we see ways in which we can communicate more effectively with our intern. Do we need to be more disciplined in our meetings, to make adjustments in our format in order to be more focused on our intern's concerns?
- Are we getting to issues of ministry which are vital to the intern's learning process and our shared ministry?
- Do we need someone to resource us? Might it be the time to call upon the Supervised Ministries team of the seminary for some assistance?

January

- We have all been busy through Advent/Christmastime. We may need a longer meeting to complete work on the **Mid-Year Reflection on Learning due January 3**, to re-group ourselves and to take a look ahead from now until May when our covenant with the intern will come to an end.
- Time seems to be going so fast. We've hardly begun and yet there is so much to accomplish. We may need to be selective about the content of our time together. We may need to be more direct with each other. We have done some trust-building. Perhaps it is time to rely on that trust and to invite more risk-taking. Are we challenging the intern and allowing the intern to challenge us? Have we evidenced appropriate support for the intern and yet held her/him to accountability in both his/her learning and in her/his ministry tasks?

February

- Are we seeing real progress in our intern? Are we celebrating her/his growth? And are we celebrating and claiming our growth as well?
- What is the quality of our sharing? What about that covenant we made as a group in the beginning? Are we living out that covenant or do we need to write a new one in accordance with who we are now?
- Theological reflection? What is it? Is it happening here among us when we meet together? What does it look like for us? Can we be more intentional about looking at our group life through the meaning of Christ in our lives?

March

- Our student has raised a lot of questions. How have these affected each of us personally? How have we been growing and changing?
- The inquiry about participating in TFE at Palmer Seminary next year will be arriving at the ministry site soon. Do we want to indicate our interest in continuing with this educational program to the Pastor/Mentor or our pastor?
- The relationship with the intern is affecting us and the ministry site as well. It might be time to consider its impact on the congregation and what that means for our mission and ministry to the community.

April

- Already we are moving toward the **Year End Evaluation which is due April 13**. We have experienced a lot of mutual sharing, reflecting and evaluating. Are we the best setting for our intern's continued growth as a minister? Are we needing to make some changes in ourselves in order to challenge this intern another year? If our intern is leaving, let's identify what yet

needs to happen before we say goodbye to one another. If our intern is part of our pastoral staff, do we have recommendations for goals for another year of TFE?

- It is important for us to be intentional about saying goodbye for the summer or permanently. Ending the year of TFE with appropriate ritual, celebration and grace allows all TFE partners to move forward well from this experience. How can we help the congregation or ministry site say goodbye to the intern? How can we recognize this particular experience had by the intern and ministry site during this year?

May

- The journey with our student has been a dynamic one. It has had some fulfilling moments. Let's identify these. It has had some struggling moments. Let's reflect also on these. All of these moments have been opportunities for new insights. Let's name these insights. These have been the forerunners of gifts we have shared with one another. Let's acknowledge these gifts whether born out of joy or pain; let us receive the gifts God has offered each of us through this relationship and pilgrimage. Let the closing prayers together be the fulfillment of prayers said with one another along the way.

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Supervised Ministries, Palmer Seminary

Thank You

Palmer Theological Seminary is very grateful to the persons serving on Site Teams. The Supervised Ministries Office seeks to serve committees by providing training opportunities and by conferring with Site Team members upon request (email mwoodard@eastern.edu) about any matters of concern. Thank you for your essential role in the education of a student in training for min