

# Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education Feedback and Communication Resource

2024



Office of / Bureau de la  
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The United Church of Canada  
L'Église Unie du Canada

Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education, Feedback and Communication Resource (2024)



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## About This Resource

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This resource augments the [\*Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education—Educational Supervisor's Orientation\*](#) handbook.

During Supervised Ministry Education, a Learning Covenant creates the framework for the learning that will take place and how it will be evaluated. This resource is intended to guide candidates and their supervisors in creating and maintaining a Learning Covenant involving good communication and appropriate feedback.

Additional resources for Educational Supervisors, Community of Faith Connection members, and candidates are available from the Vocational Minister or on the [Candidacy Pathway](#) page of [united-church.ca](http://united-church.ca).

## Providing Feedback

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The success of the Supervised Ministry Education (SME) depends on the ability of all parties to observe behaviour and offer constructive feedback and encouragement. During the SME, feedback is an ongoing process of comment offered to all participants in the Learning Covenant in response to their learning goals. Particular attention is given to providing feedback to the candidate. This happens formally in regular meetings with the Community of Faith Connection and the supervisor.

Feedback is a way of helping someone to consider making changes by offering information about how they affect others. It involves naming positive areas and those that need more growth. Feedback should be ongoing. The regularly scheduled assessment or evaluation time provides an opportunity to summarize the total feedback offered during the SME experience.

Laypeople can often give helpful feedback on sermons, pastoral visiting, small group leadership, “presence” at church events, and so on. Sometimes the best sharing comes out of our own experiences. For example, how helpful (or unhelpful) was the church/minister in a time of illness or grief? What are your expectations in such situations?

Follow these guidelines to provide useful feedback:

### Descriptive

Be descriptive rather than judgmental. By describing your own reaction, you leave the other person free to use the feedback as they see fit. By avoiding judging language, you reduce the likelihood of a defensive reaction. It is important to use “I” language in offering feedback, thus owning your observations, perceptions, and feelings.

*Example:* “When you use the word ‘girl’ when referring to me, I feel put down and not recognized as an adult woman.”

### Specific

Be specific rather than general.

*Example:* To tell someone they are “dominating” is not as useful as saying, “Just now when we were deciding the issue, I felt you were not listening to what others said. I felt forced to accept your arguments.”

### Appropriate

Take into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs. What we offer needs to be supportive and responsible.

*Example:* "I know that speaking in large groups is difficult for you, and I appreciated the effort it took for you to make your contribution at the board meeting. Your comments were helpful to me."

## Requested

If you want feedback, ask for it; if you have feedback to offer, wait to be asked. Feedback is most useful when the receiver has formulated the kind of question the observer can answer.

*Example:* Candidate can create a worship feedback sheet listing the areas they want feedback about.

## Usable

Direct your feedback toward behaviour the receiver can do something about. It is frustrating to be reminded of some shortcoming or characteristic over which one has no control.

*Example:* "I enjoyed your Children's Time last Sunday, but I would have found it more helpful if you had used the microphone so the adults in the congregation could have heard it too."

## Timely

Time your feedback carefully. In general, feedback is most useful at the earliest opportunity after a given behaviour depending, of course, on the person's readiness to hear it and the availability of support from others. Unless you are prepared to spend time with the person, it is not helpful to make a quick critical comment immediately following the observed behaviour.

*Example:* "The process you used in Bible study tonight was not as helpful to me as it might have been. Do you have time to sit down and talk about it a bit, or can we set up a time soon?"

## Clear

Ensure you are communicating clearly. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback to see if it corresponds to what the sender had in mind.

*Example:* "Let me see if I understand what you are saying to me. Was it the specific word I used in the sermon that concerned you or the expression of my theology that you heard?"

## Accurate

Check for accuracy. When feedback is given in a group, both the giver and the receiver have an opportunity to check with others about the accuracy of the feedback. Is this person's impression shared by others? Do not repeat comments from anonymous sources or repeat things that cannot be verified.

*Example:* "In this evaluation time, one of you said that more printed resources would have been helpful. What do the rest of you have to say about that?"

## Related to the Learning Covenant

Relate feedback to the Learning Covenant—its goals and action plans.

*Example: "In relation to your goal to learn more about offering pastoral care, I noticed that when you responded to Jane in our Bible study group, she seemed to withdraw. What do you think was going on there?"*

## A Model for Nonviolent Communication

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Marshall Rosenberg (Director of the Center for Nonviolent Communication in Sherman, TX) has developed a form of communication that can empower people to exchange resources and resolve differences nonviolently. His model is based on speaking honestly and responsibly about one's perceptions, feelings, values, and desires, as well as listening to the perceptions, feelings, values, and desires of others. This model is one way to give feedback as outlined above.

There are four basic pieces of information to exchange:

When you said/did \_\_\_\_\_.

I felt \_\_\_\_\_.

and because I value \_\_\_\_\_.

I would like \_\_\_\_\_.

### Procedure for Resolving Conflicts

The Learning Covenant should spell out a process for resolving grievances and differences that cannot be resolved by those involved.

As in all human relationships, tensions or disagreements may arise. It is hoped that these are dealt with face to face and resolved as soon as possible. However, sometimes difficulties arise that two people cannot work out themselves. In these cases, sometimes a third party is asked to assist.

A grievance or conflict procedure is like a spare tire on a car—you hope you will never have to use it, but you are glad to have it when you need it. The candidate, supervisor, and Community of Faith Connection should discuss the procedures to follow should a conflict arise and at what point the third party, as named in the covenant, will be called upon.

The Vocational Minister is available to discuss any concerns or problems.

Please note that The United Church of Canada has guidelines to follow in cases of sexual misconduct. These guidelines ([Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy and Procedures](#)) are available at [united-church.ca/handbooks](http://united-church.ca/handbooks) and from your Vocational Minister. Each regional council has trained consultants who deal with cases of sexual harassment. Their names are listed in a PDF on the [Sexual Misconduct Prevention Training page](#) of [united-church.ca](http://united-church.ca).



### Stages in Dealing with Conflict

**Stage 1:** The candidate, supervisor, and Community of Faith Connection meet to try to resolve the issues. Depending on the nature of the conflict, the issues discussed in the meeting and a plan of action to resolve them are put in writing and given to all three parties.

**Stage 2:** If the issues are not resolved as a result of the first meeting and follow-up, a second meeting is called and the Vocational Minister or the third-party consultant named in the Learning Covenant is invited to attend.

*Note:* This meeting may be called by any one of the three parties to the Learning Covenant. The Vocational Minister must be informed that this meeting is taking place.

**Stage 3:** If the issues are not resolved as a result of the second meeting, a third meeting is called with the Vocational Minister.

There are times when the difficulties encountered in the Supervised Ministry Education experience lead to a decision to dissolve the Learning Covenant and end the education experience. Please refer to the [Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education, Educational Supervisor's Orientation](#) resource for guidelines related to terminating a SME (on the Candidacy Pathway page of united-church.ca).