

# Good Supervision for Curates encourages learning and working together well!



As part of our continuing learning as deacons and priests we all benefit from good reflective conversations exploring our learning and practice, our understanding and development. To that end all curates have supervision with their TI. We also invite all newly ordained Priests to undertake Pastoral Supervision, which is a supportive opportunity going beyond curacy – more on that later.

Supervision is...

*“... what happens when a practitioner takes space and time out in an environment that facilitates on-going processes of reflection on practice.”*



Frances Ward,  
Lifelong Learning:  
Theological Education and Supervision

Supervision in the curacy context can be understood as a structured and purposeful conversation between training incumbent and curate. The intention is that the curate is able to articulate what they are doing and how, in order that the two together may then reflect upon the curate's work and discern

possibilities for development and enhancement of that ministry. Supervision is an integral and vital part of the curate's training and is NOT to be confused with any other time shared with the training incumbent, such as staff meetings, for instance.

(All training incumbents should have attended a Diocesan Skills for Supervision Course, where detailed exploration of the issues and training in the practice of supervision are provided. If for any reason a training incumbent has missed this, or after a long interval would value a refresher course, then the DDO will be happy to arrange accordingly.)

## Organising Supervision

Training incumbents are therefore expected to plan in the diary regular supervision sessions with you, their curate, taking into account holidays and other significant dates. Training incumbents with full-time stipendiary curates should therefore initially arrange fortnightly sessions, moving to monthly as and when appropriate, but still ensuring **at least twelve sessions during each year**. Incumbents with part-time or self-supporting curates should agree an appropriate number and pattern of supervisions based on personal situations e.g. employment etc., although six to eight sessions per year could be the norm.

Once these dates have been decided, please guard them as absolutely essential and do not allow other parochial duties to displace them (real emergencies notwithstanding!).

For a supervision session to be of real value the curate and TI will need to ensure appropriate and good preparation time beforehand, especially when that particular session is to consider any written reflections to be submitted.

These sessions will enable the on-going assessment together of ministerial **and** personal development in the light of the events,

circumstances and situations that have arisen over previous weeks. Particular, but not exclusive, attention should be paid to any occasions where you may have experienced some challenge or difficulty, or where outcomes have not been as anticipated. It is important however to avoid an over-excessive focus on problems: opportunities for commending and celebrating ‘success’ should be taken and celebrated.

### Helpful things to consider for Supervision sessions

These guidelines for curates and training incumbents can be adapted and developed but should serve as the minimum of what is expected during someone’s curacy.

#### Timing

Sessions should be of a reasonable duration (an hour and a half to two hours probably), whether carefully managed time or flexible, according to need. To have their proper priority sessions are best arranged for times of day when there is minimal possibility of interruption. Use of answering-machines and switching off mobiles is essential! It may be helpful to have a regular day for these sessions, and it is important that

participants arrive in time and begin promptly. Remember too, to allow yourselves some personal reflective space after the session (at least half an hour) – you are going to do some hard work together, before moving on to your next commitment.



## Place

Adequate heat, comfortable chairs and tea or coffee, and of course cake, all help! It is always helpful, if at all possible, to use a different venue from the one used for your staff meetings, in order to establish this occasion as having a different purpose and therefore, outcomes, for each of you. It is also to be noted that public coffee shops etc. might not be the best kind of place for these conversations – even if they do have the best cake!

## Focus

Each session will need a specific focus to prevent aimless wandering! Some of the sessions will have a focus provided by the required reflections and review timetable (see the Learning, Training and Assessment Booklet), but other sessions should be thought about carefully in advance so that participants know what they need to bring to the discussion. These sessions, reflecting on ministerial experience and practice, could be led by either you, the curate, or your TI.

Sometimes it might be appropriate for you to reflect on and learn from the ministerial practice of your TI: e.g. what model of ministry was implicit/explicit in the way a PCC meeting was chaired or a pastoral situation dealt with by them. It is important to note that this should always be understood as being for the benefit of your learning and not in any sense about you critiquing your training incumbent's work, past or present.

The deep purpose of the sessions is to have a structured conversation for the benefit of learning in any particular situation(s). It is important to note however that the sessions related to submitted reflections should not be taken up with the writing of the report itself, although notes may be taken for the report to be written up afterwards.

Do note too, that other business should **NOT** intrude into these supervision sessions either: routine work matters, diary checks and discussing current parish work needs to happen elsewhere!

### Facilitating the process

Your training incumbent needs to remember that your supervision time is for your benefit. It is important that this does not become



some kind of ‘Spanish Inquisition’ by your TI! Careful thought as to how to avoid such circumstances by any means, including negative criticism, should therefore be considered beforehand. Equally your TI should avoid discussing or reminiscing about their own ministerial work or making comparisons with your work via these reminiscences.

It is also wise for your TI to avoid offering condemnation or advice to you, such as saying “If I were you, I would do this”. It is rarely helpful and actually can prevent you from thinking for yourself. “What do you think you might do next?” is a much better approach.

Similarly, any others involved in reviews meetings should ask you ‘open’ rather than ‘closed’ questions and encourage you to speak and reflect more than simply listen to the comments made by the reviewer.

### Confidentiality

This is a very important parameter and should be agreed at the outset. Think together about the following:

- Safeguarding as always!

- Will confidentiality depend on what is being discussed?
- What about others who are involved in ministerial training (e.g. IME2 Officer)?
- Who has access to notes and records, if kept?
- What, if anything, will be shared with the training incumbent's / curate's spouses / partners?
- How is the privacy and confidentiality of church members to be maintained?
- Should everything be shared between training incumbent and curate?
- Is there anyone else in the church who needs to be included?

### Supervision during an illness or a vacancy

If your TI becomes ill or incapacitated to such an extent that they cannot provide supervision or if they move away during your training period, it is the responsibility of the TI or the churchwardens to inform the IME2 Officer of this situation so that alternative provision for supervision can be made without delay.

So how do you actually make all of this work well for everyone?

Maybe this will help you:

### A Beginner's Guide to a Supervision Session

Before the session, and as previously decided for that session, either the TI or the curate considers what they want to bring to the supervision. And then perhaps this happens:

## Gathering

A few minutes (only) at the beginning in which to catch up with one another. How are you? etc.

## Initial agreements and general focus

The curate, or training incumbent, explains what they would like to discuss and what would be a useful outcome. The time frame for this is then negotiated.

## And the supervision will be about...

Assuming that the curate is presenting a particular issue... the curate explains the problem / describes a pastoral situation / asks for feedback, etc. The TI endeavours to get an overall picture of the situation by listening, asking questions for information, and clarifying or summarising when necessary.

## Now the work: time to talk, reflect, resolve

Depending on the issue brought, this part of the supervision allows the curate to 'say the unsayable' and 'think the unthinkable' and let out their feelings if necessary or possible. The TI's task then is to support the process by saying very little but encouraging the curate to reflect and talk. The objective of these moments is to allow feelings to be expressed and thoughts to be verbalised, so that by reflecting on the situation the curate has the possibility of resolving the issues or solving the problem themselves. Reflective listening, minimal comment and open questions to open up the issue, and a supportive attitude all help here, and even a pad of Sticky Notes has its uses!



In their responses the TI might want to ask, ‘How can I help you with this?’ or ‘What help do you need?’ Leaping in with a suggestion or solution is unhelpful – although if factual information is needed, then the TI should give it!

### Moving it back into ministry

The curate may need some particular information, or further opportunity for theological reflection, discharge of feelings, support, encouragement, reassurance, challenge or explanation. Once the presenting issue has been considered/resolved however it is important to enable the curate to apply their learning to their work. It is this ‘moving back into ministry’ which prevents the supervision from becoming either spiritual direction or personal counselling – which it is NOT!

Alternative perspectives on the issue or possible courses of action may be considered following the discussion. (And if a particular action is required by the curate, it is important that the TI remembers to ask about it at a later date.)

### Review

At the end of the supervision session, it is important to take a few minutes to review what has been achieved, and what has been learnt, or has changed, as a result of the supervision. Discussing together how far the outcomes and expectations have been realised is really important and finally pondering how all that was considered in the session will immediately inform best practice for the future.

And then of course pray for each other!

