Parish Training Site

We have always sought good supervisors for seminarians doing field work. But we also seek local congregations who see the education of seminarians as part of their mission and ministry.

We want seminarians placed in a total context of learning where both lay and clergy influences are important. In such a context the seminarian is given opportunity to try a full range of pastoral activity: preaching at the major Sunday services; attending vestry meetings; teaching adults, children, and youth; giving pre-baptismal, first communion, and confirmation instruction; visiting; assisting at weddings and funerals. To give a seminarian the responsibility for some of these activities is risky. Therefore, we have discovered that only if a whole congregation sees itself as an educational site will the supervisor and lay committee feel free to schedule significant ministry for the seminarian.

Supervisors are usually, but not always, full-time clergy members of the parish staff. They and lay committee members need the official and personal support of the congregation. Time and energy are required, and this may mean something else does not get done. We want, therefore, parish leadership to affirm theological field education as a legitimate ministry for the congregation and pastor.

1. Application by a Church for a Seminarian.

Parishes desiring seminarians must apply each year (even though the seminarian may be the same person entering the senior year). Using the application forms provided by the Field Education Department, parishes should:

- By December 31, obtain Vestry or Board approval, and submit the application.
- Interview, from January 7 to February 15, seminarians who seek placement the following September. The clergy supervisor may include several lay people in the interview process.
- Notify the seminarian(s) and the Director of Field Education of the selection made, no earlier than February 15.
- Work with the seminarian through the supervisor and lay committee on the Work/Learning Agreement for the coming year. The seminarian is responsible for a copy to be given to the Field Education Office for approval.
- Pay to “The Virginia Theological Seminary - Attention Field Education,” the stated contribution to the Field Education Scholarship Fund. Payments should be made between July 1 and June 30, the fiscal year of the Seminary. The Field Education Office will send a statement of the account to the church treasurer in December and April.
- The process is completed when an acceptance of the application is forwarded to the parish, signed by the Director of Field Education.
2. Application by a Non-parochial training Site for a Seminarian.

Counseling centers, church-related schools, community alcoholic rehabilitation centers, colleges and universities, etc. sometimes provide specialized training in field education. Potentially, there are numerous non-parochial programs that can be developed. It is the faculty’s policy that at least two of the three semesters in field education should be in a parish. Usually this is the middle year, but not necessarily.

Such non-parochial institutions should make application whenever they so decide. In order to be considered by students appropriately, applications should be in by January 31 for placement the following September. Potential selectees are interviewed between January 7 and February 15, and selection made no earlier than February 15. The institution must provide one qualified person to supervise the student for the following academic year on a regular weekly basis. Use the form for application provided by the Field Education Department. Consultation with the Director of Field Education will clarify the appropriate supervisory training to be indicated on the application.

Junior Year-Fall Semester

Parish Visits

In the first semester students are encouraged to attend a variety of churches in the Washington area. The emphasis is on exploration of what is unfamiliar in our own denomination or in Catholic and Protestant churches. This semester is an opportunity to broaden one’s experience of Christian worship.

Students with children will feel the pull to settle down in a “home” parish for the family. This is understandable, but several things need to be considered. Does the family want to be with the student spouse during field work in the middle and senior years? Some students settle down assuming they will be selected by that parish as a field work student only to be disappointed. The decision about a parish home for the family needs careful consideration and consultation with others. Undue haste can be risky.

A list of active field work training sites is distributed early in the fall. Students are not to seek to “Sign up” for a field placement until second semester of the junior year. Obviously, as one visits churches, the question of the appropriateness of the place as a field training site should be considered.

A “Student Placement Questionnaire” is filled out in the fall to guide the Field Education Office in suggesting potential training sites to be visited in the Spring semester.