



A GUIDE FOR STUDENT MINISTERS

Revised January 2014

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1. EXPECTATIONS

Throughout life we constantly encounter new situations, such as beginning a new job or getting married. We enter these situations with certain expectations, which may be close to or far removed from the actual reality of the situation.

When there is a wide gap between our expectations and the reality, problems can occur. We can feel frustrated, cheated, despondent and a variety of other negative reactions.

As you begin work as a student minister, you will have expectations. Some will be appropriate, others may be somewhat unrealistic.

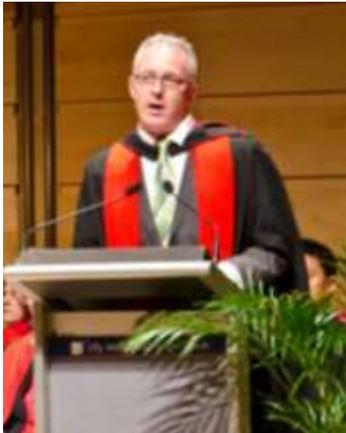
This guide was initially prepared by a group of students in consultation with Keith Condie, Dean of Students. The aim is to help bring your expectations closer in line with the reality. It is an attempt to explain what training you should receive, but also to set out some of the limitations and problems you may encounter. Hopefully this will enable your ministry work to be a more fulfilling and rewarding experience.



Students should consult with Archie Poulos about commitments in work as a student minister. archie.poulos@moore.edu.au If problems arise in the course of your employment in a particular parish, it may be helpful to share those with the Dean of Students, the Dean of Women Students or your chaplain.

2. YOU AND YOUR MINISTER

Most students view student minister's work as a great opportunity to be involved in practical ministry. It should be a way of continuing to exercise the ministries you may have had in your own congregation before coming to College. The difference will be in learning to adapt those skills to another context and in being, perhaps for the first time, in a leadership position in a Church. Involvement in a parish can provide the opportunity for the testing and development of preaching, communication and other skills, as well as the opportunity to observe first hand what parish leadership is all about.



Students are normally discouraged from taking up a student minister's position in their home parishes. As indicated above, there is great value in learning to adapt ministry skills to another context. Furthermore, a complete break with the obligations of the home parish enables you to start afresh with a new pattern of ministry and to learn new skills. Finally, it is desirable to have two appointments for two years each under different ministers.

Ideally, the minister of your parish plays a critical training role. By training we mean providing you with the opportunity to exercise certain ministries and providing you with some feedback so that you can reflect on how you are going. He can observe your strengths and weaknesses first hand and on a regular basis. Thus he can give input about ways to improve as well as sharing his own expertise regarding pastoral ministry.

- **Issues you may encounter**

The experience of some students is that training is not always a high priority for the ministers with whom they work. Some may feel that they employ a student minister to work and not to be trained. Others may not have the time or may feel they lack the ability to be very involved in your training. Some also feel challenged by students with their new ideas and the theological insights.

Some student ministers expect to gain more from their parish work than is reasonably possible. Recognise the limitations - you have only 1 or 1.5 days in the parish per week. In this time you cannot expect to learn all you will need to know to run a parish or be able to maximise all the ministry opportunities that will come your way.

- **Strategies to help you gain as much as possible**

Plan to meet regularly in your first interview regarding a prospective student minister appointment discuss with the minister his attitude to training. If possible,

try and work out a regular mutually agreeable time for discussion and reflection about your ministry in the parish and about the way the minister plans and conducts his own ministry (e.g. 30 minutes to an hour each week on a Sunday afternoon).

- **Take some responsibility for your own training:**

Be willing to ask questions. Most ministers will respond well to this if done in the right spirit. Work hard at keeping open the lines of communication between yourself and the minister.

- **Ask for feedback:**

Regarding your sermons and other activities that you are involved in, ask for feedback from both your minister and other mature Christians in the congregation.

- **Pastoral situations:**

Your minister may be willing to glance over his diary for the past week and share with you some of the pastoral situations he has encountered. Pastoral situations may be the most challenging aspect of your work in ministry.

- **Above all, be observant:**

Even when your minister is unable to spend time with you, much can be learnt (positively and negatively) by watching what goes on around you.

- **Gain a range of experience:**

If you have worked mainly with youth in the past, try to concentrate on adult work; aim for a parish in a socio-economic area different from the one you are accustomed to.

- The experiences you miss in one parish, try and gain in the next.

- Remember that student minister's work is not the sole training you receive for practical ministry - there are the pastoral units at College. Ministry Training and Development also run post-ordination training in the context of two curacies for most Sydney diocesan candidates.

Job Description

Ask your minister to give you a letter setting out your obligations and terms of employment. Certain areas of doubt should be clarified from the beginning: e.g.

- a) What attendance at parish house parties, conference or other extra activities will be required? Will there be any time off from regular commitments if these activities are excessive?
- b) What liberty will you have to speak at other churches or to be involved in other ministries outside the parish?
- c) Will there be a minimum 4 weeks annual leave and how will this be arranged?
- d) The College asks that students be freed from parishes for the week of College mission, normally including the two Sundays, and that this should not be considered part of your annual leave arrangements.



3. YOU AND THE CONGREGATION

Even in parishes which have employed student ministers for some years you will find some members of the congregation have little idea of what your role is. A frequently heard question is "Just what is a student minister?" Some endow the student with almost superhuman capabilities, and you may need to explain you have only just begun theological study and therefore have much to learn, as well as the fact that the College workload is demanding.

Generally you are in a privileged position in the parish. People will share difficulties with you that they would not with others. You often have the opportunity to spend time in people's homes over lunch. All this provides the potential for you to minister to others and to be able to form strong friendships. It can also be a problem if members of a congregation take the opportunity to criticise the minister when they have the student in their home. Beware of taking sides or of offering comment that will cause further difficulties for the minister.

Probably the greatest frustration you will face is time pressure. Some find that one day a week in the parish means they never really become part of the congregation and are treated as outsiders. Others feel their ability to minister is hampered by this small amount of time that can be spent with congregational members. This can lead to anger and frustration with the College course since it consumes so much of your available hours. Always remember the priority and importance of your theological training at this stage - now is the time to spend 3/4 years being equipped to minister more effectively in the future. Therefore, your parish commitment is intentionally limited!



4. YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

There are many positive aspects to student ministry. Usually you and your family will be warmly received. Many parishioners will offer encouragement and support and valued friendships will develop. Practical help is frequently given - you may sometimes leave a home after lunch with a bunch of freshly grown vegetables. Often you and your spouse will be able to see first hand some of the problems of rectory life and hopefully be able to observe strategies for coping with these. The Rector's wife may also be willing to discuss how to manage in this role.

However, not all will be positive. Your spouse may have been actively involved in your home church but now finds they are in an ill-defined role with little active involvement. Or they may feel pushed into areas of ministry but lack the time or energy to pursue them. There is the frustration of only being in the parish one day a week, and if you live well away it is difficult to pursue and build upon potential friendships. Your family may never gain the feeling that they really belong.



One of the hardest things is that Sunday is a long and tiring day. Most of it will be spent talking to people. If your spouse has to go to work the next day or if you have young children, you may start the week feeling as if you need a weekend.

What steps can you take to minimise the stress?

1. Before you begin in a parish discuss with your Rector your family's involvement on Sundays. It should be clear to both sides that you are being employed, not your spouse. If your spouse wants to be more involved, that is their choice, however, it is wise not to make any long term commitments until the demands of Sunday have been assessed.

2. Most parishes have a lunch roster. Try to negotiate for some flexibility before this is arranged. While lunching with families is a good way to get to know people, it provides some relief to have a free Sunday once a month or every alternate week when you can go home and relax.

3. Many spouses find it necessary to go home mid afternoon, especially if they work or if you have children. Encourage your spouse to go home if it is in the family's best interest to do so and not feel guilty.

4. Take the responsibility for caring for your family.



Regularly discuss with them the shape your Sunday is taking. Do all you can to ensure that the pressures upon them are minimised while fulfilling your other responsibilities.

5. Try and arrange to have a place to retreat to on a Sunday if you have some spare time. Find a park where you can spend half an hour together before you go to lunch. Often as you get to know people you may find someone who is willing to let you drop in at any time on a Sunday just to lie down and have a rest (without having to talk to them!). Some students arrange to visit family or friends if they are nearby.

6. Foster some special relationships with parishioners of "kindred spirit". Such people can be a great support, especially through the tough times.

7. Check whether you might co-ordinate with a student travelling in the same direction. Your spouse might be able to drive home after lunch and leave you to get a lift with someone else after the evening service.

5. YOU AND THE COLLEGE

The student ministry system exists for several different reasons, all of which must be taken into account when considering its effectiveness. The majority of parishes employ student ministers because they need part-time assistance in the conduct of services, the supervision of youth work or other specific ministries. Such parishes would also consider that it is a ministry of encouragement they can have to students, providing them with a limited amount of practical experience for which they receive some remuneration. Ideally, parish work should benefit both the parish and the student.

The College encourages work as a student minister because it wants you to have the opportunity:

1. to continue to exercise in some form the sorts of ministries you had before coming into College,
2. to observe different styles and patterns of parish ministry and to learn in particular from the minister with whom you work;
3. to develop skills in preaching, the conduct of services, pastoral care and leadership.



These aims are limited because the College places a priority on fulltime study of the Bible and Christian Theology, believing that this is the fundamental preparation for a biblical ministry. Students are strongly advised to work a maximum of one and a half days only in parish each week. This would usually be all day Sunday and one other evening, either Friday or Saturday).

It is recognised that at least half a day per week may have to be devoted to preparation and more time when preaching. It is advised that no more than fourteen hours per week should be spent in parish work, including preparation.



1. No more than one sermon per month should be the basic preaching requirement.
2. Students are advised that if they are required to preach more than the stipulated 'once per month', the preparation of their sermons should consist of material drawn directly from lectures and studies in the College.
3. A student minister must not accept a position where he will be required to prepare more than the specified, amount, although he may preach the same sermon twice on the same day.

When you know in advance that you will be preaching, plan to prepare in segments of time throughout the period and not all at once, in the week before hand. It is important to prepare and preach well but this responsibility should not be at the expense of your College work or family responsibilities. The normal pattern is for students to work in one parish for two years and then another for two years. There is value in having an extended ministry in one place but there is also value in having a variety of experiences in ministry before ordination. Appointments are made in consultation so that some direction can be given about the sort of experience that would be most appropriate for each student. Please check with Archie Poulos before making any arrangements.

The practical ministry units in College are designed to help students reflect on the ministry they are having as student ministers and to develop those skills that are essential for pastoral leadership. Apart from such formal opportunities for reflection and learning, students are encouraged to discuss their parish work with their College Chaplain and to invite him/her to critique their preaching, either by visiting the parish or by listening to a recording.



It would be helpful for students to share with their ministers the sort of guidelines for student ministry work set out here and to discuss ways of making the training in the parish more effective.

6. ARCHBISHOP'S MINISTRY CHAPLAINS

The Sydney Diocese is large and has a sizeable hierarchy. It is difficult for those in senior positions of authority to get to know personally those who are training to be clergy. So, for the duration of the college course, each candidate is assigned to an ordination chaplain (not your College chaplain), who will endeavour to build a personal relationship with the students assigned to him or her. It is important for each candidate to view his/her Ordination Chaplain as sympathetic and approachable.

2. The Ordination Chaplains are chaplains to the Archbishop, with the responsibility to recommend to him candidates suitable for ordination in the Diocese.



3. An assessment is not made solely on the basis of a 20 minute interview. The assessment panel, which includes the College representative and a candidate's chaplain among its members, have before them reports from College and parish. If you have had a conflict with your minister and believe he has assessed you unfairly, take the initiative of discussing this with them.

Do not make the mistake of adopting a "siege" mentality where you are unwilling to express fears or feelings of inadequacy to your minister or chaplain at College for fear these will end up on some report. It is vital to be yourself. Is it not better for your weaknesses to be discovered now? Then they can be worked on, or if they are such that it is thought inappropriate for you to continue as a candidate, both you and the people of God may be spared an unfruitful ministry.

Another error to avoid is to approach the assessment interview with the Ordination Chaplains in an aggressive frame of mind. Of course you should be honest, but a little tact and diplomacy may mean you avoid or diminish the amount of conflict in the interview.

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