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*Revised May 2015*
I. Overview of the Contextual Education Program of the Department of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry

A. PURPOSE

The Contextual Education Program seeks to fulfill the mission of the School of Theology and Ministry (STM) by offering students the opportunity to practice supervised ministry in specific settings using a curriculum designed to best meet the student’s personal learning goals which often include skill development, faith expression and the integration of theology, faith, and life. The Contextual Education program directed by the DREPM is designed to work with the MA in Theology and Ministry (academic year) and the MA in Pastoral Ministry (summer) degree programs.

To accomplish this mission, the Contextual Education Program offers:

- **Sites**, which provide safe, vital contexts for learning – be they in a parish, school, hospital, organization or agency.
- **Experienced supervisors** to mentor students in the reflective practice of ministry.
- **A classroom experience** that draws together field experience with relevant resourcing and discussion.
- **A Contextual Education team** committed to resourcing both students and supervisors through group and individual work.
- The resources of the STM to provide support for the:
  - Development of new and diverse sites;
  - Recruitment and training of lay persons and clergy to act as supervisors; and
  - Nourishment of our partner sites through continuing supervisory education.

Students in the following programs do not enroll in Contextual Education at the STM, but rather at our partner schools at Boston College:

- MA/MA in Pastoral Ministry/Counseling Psychology
- MA/MSW in Pastoral Ministry/Social Work
- MA/MS in Pastoral Ministry/Nursing

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1 A similar program of supervised ministry for the MDiv, ThM, and MTS degrees is overseen by the Ecclesiastical Faculty of the STM.
B. OUTCOMES AND APPROACH

The learning in Contextual Education happens through multiple processes. The program strives for balance between one’s present understandings and skills and one’s need for developing new understandings and disciplines in the practice of ministry. While a majority of students may have served the community of faith in one or more of a variety of ministries, new experiences and guided reflection on them can help the student further broaden and deepen the dimensions of his or her ministerial identity and competence and challenge the student into deeper reflective practice. For all students, it is important to identify growing edges in one’s practice and to create plans for Contextual Education that will develop those edges.

The Contextual Education Program works towards:
1. The integration of theology with the practice of ministry;
2. The acquisition and development of ministerial skills; and
3. The recognition and employment of theological reflection and discernment as factors in the integration of faith and life.

Working to engage in all three of these practices provides a comprehensive approach. The underlying assumption of the program is the dialogical relationship between theory and practice with students developing both language and skills appropriate to ministerial leadership. The ministry setting becomes a learning site where the student can identify how theology is expressed in ministry settings as well as gain confidence in her/his vocation and charism as a minister and educator. In a sense, the ministry setting and ministerial action becomes a “text” on which the student reflects – personally, with his or her supervisor, and communally, with his or her peers. The “text” of ministry is put in dialogue with the “texts” of other theological study.

Learning outcomes for students:
At the end of this course students should be able to:

- Reflect theologically on ministerial settings and initiatives;
- Assume responsible leadership for ministerial actions;
- Use practices to refine and deepen self-awareness in ministerial practice;
- Test and expand the validity of perspectives for the purpose of making decisions that affect the lives of others; and
- Demonstrate constructive colleagueship.

These outcomes are developed through the following processes:

- Ministerial/educational practice and leadership on site;
- Supervision and regular supervisory conversation;
- Composition of theological reflection papers;
- Presentation and participation in case studies in the small group;
- Participation in classroom didactics; and
- Discussion among classmates.
C. REQUIREMENTS

MA in Theology and Ministry (Academic Year) Contextual Education:
Five credits for the year (awarded 2 fall; 3 spring) are given for participation in the Contextual Education Program for the MATM. This includes:

- Meeting with the Faculty Director of Contextual Education to determine a placement.
- Participation in the Contextual Education Course, which meets eight times per semester for two semesters.
- A time commitment of approximately 8 hours per week (inclusive of supervisory sessions), for 13 weeks per semester for two semesters at a Supervised Ministry Placement.
- Regular submission of theological reflection papers to supervisor over the two semesters (see particulars – page 11).
- Timely submission of all site-related forms.

MATM students officially register for TMPS800701 "Contextual Education: Supervised Ministry and Professional Development" in the first semester and are automatically registered in the second semester.

MA in Pastoral Ministry (Summer) Contextual Education:
Two credits are given for participation in the Contextual Education program for the MAPM. This includes:

- A time commitment of 5-6 hours per week for 26 weeks at a Supervised Ministry Placement in a "remote" placement from September to late April. For many summer students this takes place within the setting of their professional ministry; in those instances a special focus is developed.
- Participation in the Summer Contextual Education Course. This includes face-to-face meetings for two consecutive summers and online discussion throughout the academic year. "Summer I" meetings take place in on three afternoons of the Summer Institute. The following summer, students will attend the "Summer II" meetings which take place in two afternoons of a different week by arrangement of the course members.
- Regular submission of theological reflection papers to supervisors over the two semesters (see particulars – page 11).
- Timely submission of all site-related forms.

Summer students planning an academic year "remote" placement are required to register for TMPS800702 or TMPS800703 in the summer before their placement experience. Students only need to register in the summer before their placement and are automatically included in the second summer.
D. GRADING

As an important element of the student’s formation for ministry and completion of the degree, Contextual Education is a graded requirement of the MA programs. The student’s success as a minister is not being graded; what is being graded is the quality of the student’s engagement in the process.

*MA in Theology and Ministry (Academic Year) Contextual Education* is given a letter grade as indicated below. The primary determinant in the grading process is the student’s quality of engagement in the processes of Contextual Education as outlined below.

**Grades** – In accord with the academic policies of graduate studies at Boston College, grades are understood in the following manner:

“B” work is clearly satisfactory at the graduate level. The student demonstrates consistent engagement with the placement, the supervision and the course.

“A” work demonstrates superior or exceptional work at the graduate level. The student demonstrates a consistently high level of engagement with the placement, the supervision and the course.

“C” work is minimally acceptable at the graduate level. This is basic engagement with most but not all of the requirements of the placement, the supervision and the course.

“F” work is unsatisfactory and fails to meet the requirements of the course.

Additional variations of “B-,” “B+,” and “A-” are possible.

*MA in Pastoral Ministry (Summer) Contextual Education* is graded Pass/Fail.

**Criteria** – Contextual Education has two main components. They are the placement experience and the course. Inclusive in the placement is the time spent in preparation and actual ministry, as well as supervisory meetings. The course includes both the large group seminars and the small group sessions. An element of both is the completion of theological reflection papers. The following elements will be considered in the grading process:

Relative to the Course:
- Attendance and thoughtful participation in all course meetings, both small and large group.
- Timely submission of all forms, particularly mid-year and final evaluations.
- Submission of theological reflection papers that demonstrate capacities for self-awareness and theological resourcing
- Submission of one case study and participation in those of classmates.

Relative to the Placement:
- Completion of commitments made to the placement.
- Participation in supervisory sessions.
- Submission of theological reflection papers.
E. EXEMPTIONS

Exemptions are not encouraged, but are occasionally granted to students who can show past ministerial experience that demonstrates they have participated in a supervised educational program that was: related to their current purpose for study; and provided comparable reflection and theological analysis. If you feel you may qualify for an exemption, you must:

1. Meet with and request an exemption form from the DREPM Faculty Director for Contextual Education;
2. Request a letter of recommendation that carefully details the experience as well as the evaluative process.

NOTE: If an exemption from the Contextual Education program is granted, students must take additional courses to replace the Contextual Education credits (5 credits for M.A.T.M. students and 2 credits for M.A.P.M. students).
II. Options for Supervised Ministry Placements

A. PLACEMENT SITES

The fundamental purpose of the Contextual Education Program is to provide the MA student with theological and ministerial opportunities beyond the classroom. The program enables the student to bring together theological understanding and pastoral insight in a particular ministerial or educational context. Each supervised ministry placement is a viable learning situation that:

- Offers practical involvement and opportunities for ministerial growth;
- Responds to the real needs of persons both inside and outside the Church;
- Encourages both personal and professional growth through the art and disciplines of theological reflection; and
- Provides competent supervision and an evaluation process.

Each placement recommendation is made such that it allows the student to be involved with work that corresponds with his/her degree and learning goal. The student makes the final determination on site and supervisor.

The STM offers approved supervised ministry placements in a variety of settings, including parishes, schools, hospitals, college campuses, retreat centers and social service agencies. These sites provide opportunities for ministerial and educational leadership appropriate to the student’s degree. New supervised sites are developed each year. To begin the process of site location students must meet with Dr. Theresa O’Keefe, Faculty Director of Contextual Education at the beginning of the spring semester.

B. CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is a process of theological education and professional development for ministry developed and accredited by the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. In a CPE unit, theological students, ordained clergy, members of religious orders and the laity minister to people in a variety of settings while being supervised. CPE is a structured, intense learning experience. CPE is most frequently done in hospital settings, and there are several programs in the greater Boston area.

One unit of CPE may be used to fulfill the Contextual Education requirement, both the practicum and the classroom component, with the permission of the faculty director of Contextual Education. One unit of CPE may be transferred in to the STM to fulfill the five-credit requirement for Contextual Education, but only if CPE is appropriate to their ministry. It must have been completed during the degree program or within the prior three years. Students are responsible for application and acceptance into a CPE program.

Following the program, a letter of completion on hospital/program letterhead from the Director of the CPE program must be submitted by the student to the Associate Dean, Academic Affairs at the STM in order to receive the five credits toward the degree.
III. Organization of the Contextual Education Program

A. SUPERVISION

The opportunity of the student on site is not to learn to be the supervisor’s assistant, but to learn what it means to take on the ministerial role of the supervisor. However, considering the limited time the student spends on site he/she is not able to see and take on all aspects of the supervisor’s role. The main responsibility of the supervisor is to aid the student in growing the primary learning goal named in the Learning Agreement, and to insure that the student’s overall learning process moves clearly and smoothly toward the successful completion of his/her learning goal and objectives.

Supervision is a method used in Contextual Education designed to stimulate professional growth, especially that of taking on the mind of the ministerial leader. The interaction of student and supervisor allows a student to reach deeper professional levels by integrating faith, theology, self-knowledge, theory and skills. The supervisory process involves regular meetings between student and supervisor. Supervision is neither pastoral counseling, nor spiritual direction, nor a staff meeting – although each may play a peripheral role in a supervisory session. The supervisory conversation is more concerned with issues and themes flowing from the student’s experience in ministry, such as: recognizing the student’s operative theology; developing an identity for ministerial leadership; and reflecting on their ministerial practice.

1. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPERVISOR

a. Supervision as a whole contains ministerial/educational practice, supervisory and evaluative components:

   o Ministerial/Educational Practice: It is expected that the student will begin their time on site learning from the site and its practices, as well as deepening ministerial skills through reflection and conversation with the supervisor. Early in the placement experience, the supervisor and student will be responsible for developing together a Learning Agreement for the placement, based on the student’s interests and the possibilities in the placement. This is to be submitted to Theresa O’Keefe, Faculty Director for Contextual Education by the due date on the agreement.

   o Supervision: This component is made up of one-on-one sessions between the student and the designated supervisor. For on-site supervisors, the commitment is to weekly meetings of approximately one hour. For off-site supervisors, the commitment is to bi-monthly meetings of at least 90 minutes. More is written on this below.
Evaluation: The supervisor and student are responsible for submitting a Mid-Year Progress Report and a Final Evaluation on or before their due dates. This evaluative work, although written separately, should be discussed together and submitted to Theresa O’Keefe, Faculty Director for Contextual Education. Remember that good evaluations should contain no surprises, but rather should emerge from the ongoing supervisory process.

b. The relationship which develops between the student and supervisor during the Contextual Education experience is crucial to the educational outcome. It is a relationship built upon honesty and trust. A student must be in a position of safety within the supervisory relationship so that new ideas and skills can be risked without fear. To this end, the supervisory session must be strictly confidential. Furthermore, it is inappropriate that supervisor and supervisee have any fiduciary relationship (e.g., employer or colleague on the same paid staff).

c. Supervisor training and formation is offered throughout the academic year by the STM. While the sessions are not mandatory they are designed to assist supervisors in their role by offering professional input and peer support.

d. Supervisors will be welcome, upon request, to sit in on an STM-sponsored workshop, program, or course (non-credit and non-audit status).

2. THE SUPERVISORY PROCESS

The Supervisory Session

Time and place: It is important to dedicate a regular setting and period of time for your supervisory conversation – preferably the same time and place each week. The setting should be a place of quiet which provides a good atmosphere for conversation and reflection. As much as possible, interruptions should be avoided so that both supervisor and supervisee can concentrate on mutual reflection.

Material: The intent of the session is to reflect together on issues of ministry and theology which arise in the ministry setting. In preparation for these meetings, the student should write a brief theological reflection (one to two pages, double-spaced). The reflections emerge from moments of joy or sadness, triumph and disappointment – all the paths on which the student travels in ministry. These papers will serve as the focus of the supervision session, with the hope that in the collegiality and safety of the conference, learning and growth occur.

If the supervisor would prefer to use a verbatim process for supervision, that is an acceptable replacement for the theological reflection papers.
3. SUPERVISORY EVALUATION

Although formal evaluation includes the Mid-Year Check List, Mid-Year Progress Report and Final Evaluation, both student and supervisor are involved in various forms of evaluation throughout the whole Contextual Education process in open and honest dialogue. Remember that the basis for all evaluation is the Learning Agreement, since it spells out in a clear way what students expect of themselves and their sites, and the areas in which they feel they need to grow.

a. The Learning Agreement sets out the student’s primary learning goal for the year. That goal is then supported by various objectives, tasks and activities that are possible at the site. While the student may be the one to name the learning goal, the supervisor should be most helpful in identifying activities and tasks at the site that will help meet that goal.

b. The Mid-Year Check List is a short form due at the end of the fall semester, completed by the student. It offers the Contextual Education team a quick snap-shot of how the process is going for each student.

c. The Mid-Year Progress Report is named such because its purpose is to check the progress of the student toward the realization of his/her learning goal and objectives. It is a time for “mid-course corrections” if necessary and even a renegotiation of the Learning Agreement itself. This is completed by both the student and the supervisor.

d. The Final Evaluation is an honest reflection on the student’s work in ministry for the whole year. Special attention should be paid to the student’s progress toward realization of the stated learning goals and objectives as well as the tasks they have performed in completing them. The evaluation should present no surprises but rather should be a more formal record of conversations which have been ongoing throughout the year. Of equal importance are the reflections of both the supervisor and supervisee concerning the nature and value of their supervisory relationship. This feedback is especially helpful as both student and supervisor grow in the Contextual Education experience. This is completed by both the student and the supervisor.

4. THE SITE VISIT

During the year, the student may arrange a site visit by the Faculty Director of Contextual Education and/or one of the members of the Contextual Education team. The purpose of the visit is to provide an opportunity for representatives of the STM to get to know the sites where students practice ministry, meet the persons who give of themselves to supervise students and furnish any information and answer any questions which might make the experience more effective for everyone.
B. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION PAPERS

The discipline and practice of Theological Reflection has become an essential tool for ongoing growth in ministry. Through continuing, critical, theological thought on one’s ministry, important insights can emerge leading to more faithful and effective service. Our hope is that all STM students will enter their ministerial vocation prepared to be lifelong learners and reflective practitioners.

Contextual Education is an opportunity to discover and cultivate the discipline of reflecting on one’s ministerial praxis and is a proven means of growth in ministry, both in terms of one’s ministerial identity and pastoral effectiveness. In addition, reflecting theologically upon one’s ministerial experiences will help students arrive at a more comprehensive understanding and articulation of their own theology. In theological reflection, students will bring their ministerial activity into dialogue with theology, scripture, tradition and contemporary culture. It is this process which enables students and supervisors alike to better understand and to assess their ministry experience in the context of personal faith and theology.

Within the framework of the Contextual Education experience, students prepare written reflections for their supervisor on average once every other week: five reflections for the fall semester, seven for the spring. The number and frequency of the papers is to help develop the practice of theological reflection within the students. What is a challenge early in the year should become a natural process by year’s end. The reflection can follow various formats, but should be at least one page in length. Copies of those written reflections will also be submitted by the student to their small group leader for comment: two for the fall semester, three for the spring. The same reflection papers that are submitted to the supervisor can be submitted to the small group leader, as the student chooses.
C. THE CONTEXTUAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

MA in Theology and Ministry (Academic Year) Contextual Education:
The classroom component is that part of the AY Contextual Education experience which takes place at the STM, on Mondays from 5:00 – 7:00 PM, throughout the academic year. **There are eight meetings each semester;** the specific schedule is handed out separately. Of those meetings, some are sessions of all students gathered together for input on issues of value to all. Other meetings take place in small groups. A member of the Contextual Education team guides each small group. They assist students to engage in theological reflection upon their contexts, and present and discuss case studies. They also encourage mutual feedback and supportive critique among course students.

MA in Pastoral Ministry (Summer) Contextual Education:
The classroom component for Summer Contextual Education experience which takes place in two formats: face-to-face meetings at the STM during Summer I and II; case study discussions online via Canvas or AdobeConnect Boston College’s online learning platforms. These discussions take place from September to May. The Summer I sessions (three) are designed to help students get to know one another and learn the processes that will take place on line over the year. The online discussions work around presentation of a case study by students. Each student is responsible for the presentation of one case. The Summer II sessions (two) are devoted to wrap up of any remaining group work and closure.

D. CONTACT INFORMATION

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Boston College STM Policy on Supervised Ministry Criteria for Enrollment

Supervised Ministry: Criteria for Enrollment
Upon beginning their ministerial studies at the STM, students are responsible for knowing and following the guidelines for their respective degree programs regarding supervised ministry requirements. Cultivating a positive working relationship with the appropriate faculty director of supervised ministry is essential to the dynamic and inter-related processes of conscientious self-assessment, enrollment in the supervised ministry course, the appropriate selection of sites and supervisors, the development and implementation of learning goals and objectives, and rigorous, constructive and formative evaluations.

Mindful of the fact that students admitted to ministerial degree programs at the STM are expected to manifest the faith and religious commitment, the personal responsibility, the emotional maturity, the capacity for collaboration and perspective-taking, and the resiliency, resourcefulness and integrity that a program of preparation for professional ministry presupposes, the faculty members and administrators of the STM take extremely seriously their collective institutional responsibility for guaranteeing that these expectations, among others, are met and verified before any student’s enrollment in a supervised ministry course is approved. Associated with such responsibility is ongoing accountability to those supervised ministry sites and supervisors with whom the STM works in partnership.

In the light of such responsibility, when a faculty co-director of supervised ministry and/or the associate dean for academic affairs is provided with substantive evidence indicative of a student’s lack of readiness or suitability for undertaking supervised ministry in general or a specialized supervised ministry in particular, it is the responsibility of the co-directors for supervised ministry and the associate dean for academic affairs to delay or deny enrollment in the supervised ministry course. In obtaining and evaluating such evidence, the faculty co-directors and the associate dean may consult with other Boston College personnel, who may reveal relevant information as permitted by law. In addition, the appropriate faculty co-director and/or the associate dean are responsible for providing the student with adequate feedback regarding the reasons for the decision as well as support and guidance regarding subsequent steps. Such advice may include referring the student to appropriate avenues of personal and professional development, inviting the student to apply for supervised ministry at a future time, encouraging the student to consider a change of degree program, or recommending (or in some cases mandating) a leave of absence or withdrawal from the STM.