

SOUTH CENTRAL REGIONAL TRAINING PARTNERSHIP

SUPERVISION SKILLS FOR TRAINING INCUMBENTS

Background

Through an ongoing national ecumenical process the Methodist, URC, Baptist and Anglican churches have come together to participate in Regional Training Partnerships (RTP) throughout England. Some regions are functioning very effectively while others are not functioning at all. Whilst ecumenical in outlook, the reality is that by weight of numbers an Anglican agenda tends to prevail.

The South Central RTP embraces six Anglican dioceses and more or less the Wessex Synod of the URC, the Southampton District of the Methodist Church and Regent's Park Baptist College in Oxford. The denominational leaders are deemed to be partners in the Partnership whilst individual training institutions and local training courses and schemes can become members. The RTP is governed by a Management Board made up of representatives and Chairs of the various project groups.

Initially a project group co-ordinating Initial Ministerial Education had oversight of supervision training. Over a period of years the group have raised the profile of supervision to the point where there is now a separate Supervision Project Group.

This is the story about changing a culture where talk of supervision was looked on with suspicion and felt to be too touchy-feely – something that belonged in the domain of therapists, chaplains and social workers – but not the Church.

Four years ago, those with an interest in promoting good practice in supervision began discussing what a programme of regional supervision for training incumbents might look like. In April 2013 in Bath and Basingstoke, more than 50 training incumbents attended a two day programme in each venue.

The culture is beginning to change.

The journey

Against a background of resistance and scepticism a small group persisted to keep the dream alive. From the outset there was an objection raised that prevented us from linking the words 'pastoral' and 'supervision' and so 'Supervision in ministry' became the term under which we laboured. For eighteen months we wrestled with what supervision meant in the context of training a colleague in parish ministry. We persisted as a group of colleagues with a common vision across the region. Slowly, bit by bit, we built enough confidence amongst the leadership and some of early detractors are now our strongest advocates.

A major part of the success we have been able to achieve has been down to be able to draw on the wisdom and experience of Tony Nolan (APSE's Accreditation Secretary) who happens to be embedded in one of the RTP member organisations. At the APSE annual conference two years ago I mentioned our plans to a prominent member of the Leadership Team who smiled as they told me that we would never pull it off!

The feedback we received from trainees has been very positive and has helpfully provided many pointers to how we can revise and improve the training on offer. Dates have been set for 2014 and we plan to offer the training at three venues in the region which stretches from Warwickshire to the Channel islands and from inside the M25 to Exmoor.

The journey continues.....

What follows are extracts from the various papers that provide snapshots of where we were at a given point on the journey and how we progressed to move things forward. The RTP has developed the practice of investing in intensive 24 hour residential conferences to work issues through and move things forward. Two of these have taken place in the roll out of this training.

Minutes from the RTP Board meeting in January 2011 read:

- **IME Supervision sub-group (paper 4):** *The recent meeting had sharpened understanding of the need for a policy for supervision across 1-7; this would enable sharing of good practice across a range of groups and was commended – though various models of supervision could be used within the same policy.*
- *It was agreed that the RTP would fund £1000 for a 24-hour IME Supervision conference, details tbc.*

We noted that supervision has history among the caring professions and in educational contexts. We want to value and use much of the learning from these traditions but our particular emphasis is on Christian ministry, Biblical foundations, theological reflection and oversight.

So we suggest a core purpose of placement/ supervision:

To enable a learner to develop into the kind of minister God is calling them towards, and in particular learn to be:

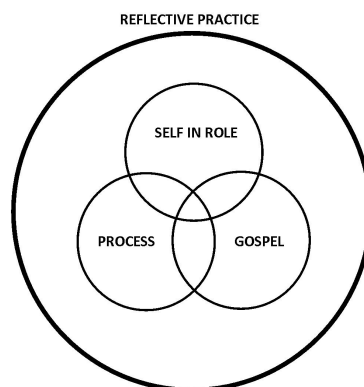
- Faithful to God's calling
- Contextually aware
- Skillful in the practice of ministry
- Aware of self and vocation (formation)
- Reflective theologically/missiologically about experience
- Creative in the midst of uncertainty and new ministerial demands

Supervision will cover both reflective practice and reporting

In our church settings, an excellent supervisor would

- Have a good grounding in supervision theory – confidentiality, difference between formal and informal, managerial and non-managerial. In other words have a good idea of what they are doing as training ministers and the complexity and ambiguity of roles in ministry. (Friend, colleague, disciple, prayer partner, priest, boss)
- Have a good grounding in supervision practice – educational styles and theological reflective practice, addressing issues of power, difference etc
- Ensure that learners deal with the learning outcomes/ placement aims as well as flourish in their gifting
- Be able to recognize learners' levels of ability
- Have enough self-confidence and humility to take responsibility for themselves, and their continuing learning.
- Be organized enough to manage the demands of supervising a student or colleague.
- Know when to ask for help.
- Know how to take difficult decisions in consultation with appropriate diocesan/college/course authorities.

We would want to use the framework of the IME 4-7 curriculum as received by the Board in their November 2011 meeting (Self in role, process, Gospel and reflective practice).



Given that this is not a transitional programme and that we wish to include IME1-3 providers and ecumenical partners, we think that this should be an RTP rather than an SRI responsibility.

While we recognize that nearly all incumbents and ministers have supervisory responsibilities there is a specialist skill of supervisor, which we might expect of ministers having students on placement and ministers in training.

We think that the RTP could appoint a team of trainers who could deliver an agreed programme in supervision. It should also develop a team of supervision supervisors.

We realize that each member will want to use this provision in their own way but our suggestion is that each institution establishes a list of 'approved supervisors' and expects them to pass the assessment. From an Anglican point of view we might suggest that training ministers/incumbents with curates are required to have passed, and that over time it becomes a requirement for those who are invited/allowed to have curates. For Methodists in the area it might offer an alternative to the Empowering Ministry course.

Such a programme should have an assessment mechanism so that potential supervisors could know that they had 'passed' and might be appointed by the diocese/district as 'approved supervisors'. We could develop an assessment process with traffic lights (Green – passed, Amber – some extra development needed, Red – not likely to be a good supervisor at the moment). We think it would include self, peer and trainer assessment.

The programme consists of a two-day introduction to supervision and the requirement to belong to a supervision set that meets once a month for six months. A requirement for those seeking assessment would be regular attendance at supervision set.

On the following pages is the programme that was followed over the two days of training. The same programme was delivered in the two venues with a different team of facilitators leading at each venue.