

Ethical Ministry

Resource Book for
Facilitators and Participants



Half-day Refresher Program

A continuing education program for:
Ministers, Deacons, Candidates,
Pastors, Chaplains, Pastoral
Practitioners and Lay People
engaged in ministry.

**2026B Case studies relating to
Self Care and Supervision (Secs 3.8 & 3.9)**

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Acknowledgement

This program has been prepared by the UCA Synod of NSW & the ACT, revised for use in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. Material is used with permission.

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‘Ctrl+Click’ on the links provided below for the:

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice

Themes for 2026

- 2026A: Working in and with the whole church (Secs 3.2 & 7)

- 2026B: Self Care and Supervision (Secs 3.8 & 3.9)

Guidelines for Discussion

INTEGRITY – RESPECT – CONFIDENTIALITY

1. Arrive on time, remain for the entire session, and do not wander in and out of the session.
2. Unless you're expecting an emergency call, **please turn mobile phones off**. If you must take a call, please leave the room before doing so to minimise the interruption.
3. **Practice active listening**. Hear what the other person is saying. Let them finish talking. Think before you respond. Try to ask a question for clarification rather than making an assumption.
4. Talk about yourself and your own experience. You may ask questions of others, but do not challenge the validity of another's personal experience or point of view. Code of Ethics case studies are intended as tools for reflecting on how the Code applies to our own ministry practice. Sometimes discussions may need to hold a wide range of views, and the Facilitators may need to ensure the spirit and intention of the COEMP is being upheld in the discourse.
5. Keep your comments brief and to the point, so everyone has a chance to speak.
6. Do not generalise the experience and feelings of others based on your experience. Let people speak for themselves.
7. Do not attack, or try to hurt, or pass judgment on anyone, whether they are present or not.
8. Treat this group session as confidential conversation; do not repeat elsewhere what is said.
9. Stay on topic.
10. Please be discerning about what is appropriate for you to share in the wider group, what may be better suited to the 'paired sharing' and what should be shared only with your Supervisor.

Safe Paired Sharing

This is an opportunity to engage with the topic on a more personal level, and to integrate your experience as it relates to the Code of Ethics. Please keep discussions confidential, whilst remembering that paired sharing is in no way to take the place of a conversation with your Supervisor. We are all vulnerable people. Collegial respect and care for one another is essential for ministry.

Sharing an example from your ministry could include:

- An actual (de-identified) situation that you feel comfortable to discuss in this setting.
- A ‘hypothetical’ situation that could possibly happen to you or someone else – what steps would you take to resolve it, or how might you prevent a breach of the Code of Ethics? What choices might you make in this situation?
- A situation when you were concerned about another person’s ethical engagement with you (de-identified). Reflect on what might the other person in the situation have done differently so they would not have acted unethically towards you? Or how in your ministry practice you seek to avoid such violations and develop healthy practice.

The suggested format for the paired sharing time is as follows:

Paired Sharing: (30 minutes)

- Share for 10 minutes each: Think of an example from your ministry that relates to the topic. How did you frame it? What did you learn? How are you practicing ministry differently as a result?
- Together discuss: What insights have we gained about prevention of ethical breaches in ministry practice?
- End with (10 minutes): – What would you like to take away from this experience?

Excerpts from the Code

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.7 People enter ministry as a response to a call from God and the Church. It is this call that requires that all Ministers carry out their ministry in a professional and accountable manner.

3. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

3.8 SELF CARE

Ministers shall take responsibility to:

- (a) address their physical, spiritual, mental and emotional health needs and, where appropriate, seek assistance from a qualified professional;
- (b) participate in supervision;
- (c) give adequate priority to their relationship with their family;
- (d) nurture personal relationships which assist them in their wholeness;
- (e) take appropriate and regular leave, and time off from work for recreational activity.

3.9 SUPERVISION

- (a) Ministers have a responsibility to recognise that they are also vulnerable, requiring them to maintain their professionalism in difficult circumstances.
- (b) Ministers shall keep appropriate pastoral records (e.g., details of appointments and referrals and a journal of critical incidents).
- (c) Professional supervision means the relationship Ministers have with another professional whereby the Minister is assisted to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of ministry (as per the definition at the commencement of the Regulations) including competencies, time management, priorities and any difficulties arising in ministry.
- (d) Ministers have a responsibility to ensure that they receive regular professional supervision. Such supervision is intended to assist Ministers to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationships and quality of ministry.
- (e) Ministers shall discuss with their supervisor any ongoing situations of conflict in which they are involved in the course of their work.
- (f) Where applicable, Ministers shall maintain membership requirements of any relevant professional association (e.g., psychologists or counsellors.)

Reading

Making the Most of Supervision: Some Reflections on Practicalities

Purpose of Supervision

Supervision is an adult learning space providing time to reflect on your work and the impact your work has on your life and well-being. This is an ongoing task as your needs will change throughout your ministry.

Choosing a Supervisor

The Ministers' Hub in the Synod website ([Minister Hub - Uniting Church in Australia. Synod of Victoria and Tasmania](#)) contains resources and information about supervision, including link to a source of supervisors who are qualified, experienced, and willing to supervise people in pastoral ministry in the UCA. Another way to gain positive referral information is to consult a colleague to find out who they might have gone to for supervision or who they might have tried and how they found that experience.

Finding a supervisor is an important task, so there are some resources available to assist you in choosing someone who will work respectfully with you and provide a safe, confidential and reflective space away from the workplace or ministry setting. Some questions for you as a supervisee are, what do you need from supervision? What are you looking for in selecting a supervisor?

Do you want somebody inside the Uniting Church or someone from outside the denomination so that they bring objectivity and maybe a greater sense of privacy and safety than the connections we hold within our own denomination? Are you looking for someone who is an ordained minister or pastor or someone with other skills in the helping professions, like a psychologist or expertise in counselling or from another background? As you read the supervisor's information, does it give any insight into possible theological perspectives that they might hold or that might make you wonder about?

First Sessions – Questions to Ask

When you select someone try an introductory session with the supervisor. Ask about the person's role, their qualifications, the policies that they work within, and so on and how they generally work with people. This is usually a free session to gauge the match and then afterwards decide if you want to try working with them for 2-3 sessions and see if the supervision relationship is working well for you both.

The Uniting Church Assembly Professional Supervision document is a very helpful document that gives some insights into supervision and how you might prepare well for supervision. Find someone who can adapt and adjust to your learning style, eg. some people use a variety of creative methods to explore ministry issues, and they don't just work in the space of talking, critical incidents, verbatims or storytelling. Explore the different ways that they might work with you. (UCA Professional Supervision, 2011, p9)

Michael Carroll and Maria Gilbert's book has an excellent section on choosing a supervisor and some great questions you might ask a supervisor as you talk to them in an initial session. What questions do you want to ask your prospective supervisor? "How did you feel working with them? Could you be honest and open with them? Were you satisfied with the answers that they gave you or their approach?" (Carroll & Gilbert, *On Being a Supervisee*, 2005, p16)

Finally, be prayerful about this, as it's an important decision. Try one person and see if they seem like a good fit for you. If you feel or think this is not going to work well for you or not quite what you're wanting from them, then discontinue if it's not effective or try 2-3 sessions and make your assessment.

Preparing for Supervision Sessions

Supervisees should set the agenda for your supervision sessions. So, preparing yourself and preparing the focus of that session is essential. Some people like to write down some points or list key issues, draw a diagram and think ahead of time what is important to process together. Some helpful questions that might enable your pre-session preparation are:

- "What have you been pleased with that's given you satisfaction over this last time?"
 - Are there any anxieties you're carrying about a particular person or group or situation?
 - And what are you looking forward to?
 - Are there any uncertainties that need to be unpacked in the supervision session? "
- (Carroll & Gilbert, p29)

Other useful suggestions for this are:

- "At the moment I feel...."
- In ministry, this specific pastoral incident occurred and I'm just troubled by it...
- This is my question on my challenge right now...
- I'm aware of strong feelings about something that's happened and I think I need to spend some time talking through that with other people...". (UCA Professional Supervision, p10)

The better prepared you are for your supervision, the greater the potential to gain more positive benefits from it for you and for your ministry and those who receive it. If you're not sure what to bring, the supervisor may help unlock some awareness of issues and help you clarify or they may take you on a track that may not be useful or helpful for you or your ministry, so be proactive about your own learning in this space.

Supervision should be supportive and encouraging. So let your supervisor know what you need or what you want from them. It can also be challenging if we're honest and open about the load we carry and the impact that ministry has on our mental, physical and spiritual well-being. Supervision can help us access resources within ourselves and outside ourselves eg drawing on spiritual foundations and the grace that we find in our Christian faith and relationship with God.

Times to review the Supervision Relationship

Most, if not all, supervisors go into this profession committed to creating safe and trusting places for their supervisees, so that the work and the person can flourish. No one is perfect and as your needs change, you may also seek or need to seek a different supervisor that might offer a different approach or have a different skill set or different rapport for you at a time of change or transition.

In most supervision, people contract or agree to work together for a set period of time, generally a year. There's usually a review about how that supervision alliance has been going at the end of the year. If it's working well, you may want to continue for another year, or reconsider with whom you might work depending on your situation. It can take a while to build a solid and trusting supervision relationship, so it can be helpful to have some continuity for a few years, perhaps one to three years. If it's working well that's good.

So be prayerful about finding a supervisor that you can work well with, that will provide you with support, encouragement, challenge and a safe place for you to be able to reflect on your ministry.

In Closing

I'd like to share a poem with you from Liz Crumlish, a Supervisor trainer from Scotland, Associate of the Institute of Pastoral Supervision and Reflective Practice, a Minister in the Church of Scotland and creative poet.

Cultivating Courage

Porous boundaries will not serve the task of reflection.

If I am to take risks, I need to know that I will be met.

I need to know that my courage

will be greeted with empathy.

I need parameters within which

I can discern an appropriate level of sharing.

Your invitation to take a leap

must be fenced around

to contain my response.

And the brave space that we create together

must be a temporary installation

readily dismantled when our work is done

and easily resurrected

for our next round of reflexive engagement.

Boundaries enable risk.

(Paterson M. & Crumlish L, Group Supervision, 2022, IPSRP, p133)

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This paper was modified from the original to make reference to the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. Altered and included with permission.

Discussion Questions

1. When considering a new Supervisor, what aspects are most important to you personally?
2. What are the ways you personally prepare for a Supervision session?
3. For those who have been in Supervision for a while, what are the signs you look for that it may be time to change Supervisors?

Case Studies

Case Study A: Ministry Burnout

Leah, the sole ministry agent at a lively suburban church, has been stretched thin for months. Between hospital visits, funerals, meetings, and community events, not to mention part-time study, she's running on empty.

Lately, she's been short with parishioners, forgetting details from pastoral conversations, and avoiding phone calls. A close colleague gently suggests she raise it in Professional Supervision. Leah shrugs it off: "Supervision's for serious problems, not just being tired." She's determined to push through.

But deep down, Leah knows she's nearing burnout. She's ashamed to admit that ministry is wearing her down, afraid it'll look like failure. Her exhaustion is straining relationships and causing friction with the Church Council. The Code of Ethics urges ministers to care for themselves and seek support, but Leah feels stuck, unsure how to begin or whether she even has the energy.

Questions

1. What signs of burnout are evident in Leah's experience, and how might they affect her ministry relationships?
2. Supervision is for all things ministry related. Why might ministers hesitate to bring up personal struggles in supervision, and what could help normalize those conversations?
3. How does self-care contribute to safe, healthy, and sustainable pastoral relationships?
4. If you were Leah's friend or colleague, how would you gently support her and encourage her to seek help?

Case Study B: Medical Diagnosis

Rev Larene is in a Congregational Placement in a regional centre. She has been feeling off for quite a while, not her usual self. After talking with her GP and months later a Specialist. Larene has been diagnosed with a medical condition that can be managed but will impact her capacity to work as she once did.

The Specialist and GP have both recommended that Larene reduces her work hours to part-time and provide her with a list of accommodations workplaces can make for the condition.

Larene loves the congregation she is in placement with, but is aware gossip is easily spread. Early in the placement Larene had to ask certain congregation members in the prayer network not to share private information in the guise of 'prayer'.

Larene is reluctant to share her medical condition with the Congregation. She isn't confident they will hold confidentiality and is worried that if news of her diagnosis was spread around the town, it would place the focus on her health, rather than her ministry and the ministry of the congregation.

Larene considers telling her presbytery minister but similarly is not comfortable with the Presbytery PRC and wider church knowing her personal health issues, particularly as it may impact future ministry opportunities.

Larene commits to making some minor adjustments to her practice of ministry but does not disclose her condition to the Church Council, Congregation or Presbytery.

Questions

1. What is a Minister's responsibility to share important information with Placement and Presbytery? (Consider your understanding the boundaries between reasonable privacy, professional accountability, and self-care)
2. What are the likely ongoing consequences that Larene needs to be attuned to following her decision for the relationship between?
 - a. Minister and Congregation
 - b. Minister and Church Council Leadership
 - c. Minister and Presbytery Minister/PRC
 - d. Congregation and Presbytery
3. Consider if instead Larene informs the congregation. What boundaries would Larene need to establish so that pastoral relationship remains focused on the Congregation needs, not the minister's needs.

Case Study C: Difficult Weeks Ahead

Ryan is Chaplain at a Uniting Church School. It's mid-term, a time when Ryan finds balancing the demands of the school with family life a challenge, the holidays too far in each direction.

It is an otherwise normal mid-term week. Then one morning, tragic news, four year 11 students have been involved in a car accident, three are injured but okay, one of the passengers is however in intensive care in a critical condition, all that has been shared with the school is the student's prognosis is uncertain.

This news and associated uncertainty sends waves through the staff and students. The driver, one of the injured students, decides to specifically contact the Chaplain for support, replaying the events again and again and again.

The uncertainty could last weeks. The support demands, including the pastoral demands, from students and staff are high with EAP services and additional Counselors deployed to the school. Even those who do not particularly know the students are impacted. All this is on top of regular Chaplaincy responsibilities. Ryan doesn't want to let anybody down. Responding to this crisis is going to be a massive workload, Ryan knows that this will come at a further cost of his family life.

Questions

1. In what ways is Ryan vulnerable in these circumstances, how might this impact his ministry? (refer to 3.9a of the Code of Ethics)
2. In what ways might Ryan utilise Supervision, particularly when the strain of a ministry crisis overshadows concerns about family life?
3. Following these events, as the holidays commence what boundaries and plans can be put in place to strengthen Ryan's ongoing self-care.

Case Study D: Third Phase

The conversation takes place over coffee in a break during a Presbytery meeting. Margaret is a retired minister who is still active in various supply placements and other projects – mostly for the Presbytery. She is well respected and often called on to mentor ministers and pastors. Nathan is an inexperienced Minister of the Word, about a year into his first Placement. Nathan is placed in a team ministry at 80% with specific responsibilities for families and children's ministry. In previous conversations with Margaret, Nathan has expressed a strong call and commitment to his current role, but also that the work is enjoyable and often fun – even when it is exhausting. After some discussion about life and ministry the time comes to head back into the meeting.

Nathan: We should catch up for a longer chat – maybe a coffee or something.

Margaret: Sounds great. How about 10am next Thursday morning?

N: No problem – I quite like the Grounded coffee shop near my church.

M: I know it, thanks (*short pause*) Oh isn't Thursday one of your days off? I just like to check when making plans with ministers.

N: Don't worry. It'll be fine (*chuckles*). I haven't had a real day off in 3 months, so Thursday is all good with me.

M: oh.. ok... see you Thursday then.

N: done!

As they move off into the meeting, Margaret feels like she should say more. She has no formal oversight or mentoring role with Nathan, but is concerned about his workload and ability to make space away from demands of ministry. As she prepares for their upcoming meeting Margaret considers if and how she can gently raise the topic with him.

Questions

1. In what ways can a minister in their first placement, or a lay person in their first ministry position, be more vulnerable to not maintaining good self-care?
2. Part-time ministry adds additional challenges, particularly in the expectations the minister often still being that of a full-time ministry. How might these challenges be addressed before and throughout the ministry?
3. Within this families ministry the parents, as is common to their life stage, would describe themselves as "time-poor", and often prioritising their children's growth in the faith over their own. What do Nathan's actions as a leader model about Sabbath for these parents?
4. How should Margaret go about raising her concerns with Nathan, what might be the next steps if he thanks Margaret for her concerns but clearly dismisses them?

Case Study E: Responsibilities to Family

Syng Joi is a minister serving in a suburban church while carrying significant family caregiving responsibilities. Her elderly parents migrated with her and struggle to adjust to life in Australia. Joi provides ongoing practical support, such as medical appointments and daily assistance, as well as emotional and psychological care shaped by cultural and language differences. Alongside this, she manages the full demands of church ministry.

Shaped by strong values of family duty, Joi experiences deep guilt when taking annual leave or prioritising rest. When speaking with colleagues or Presbytery ministers, responses to her situation have focused on offering practical solutions rather than empathetic listening and understanding, leaving her feeling misunderstood and unsupported.

Joi raises these pressures in professional supervision, hoping for a safe space to reflect. Her supervisor works with several ministers from similar cultural backgrounds. During one session, the supervisor describes a similar family situation but slips and uses the other minister's name without noticing. Although intending to normalise Joi's experience, the slip raises serious concerns about confidentiality for Joi. Joi begins to worry whether her own story might be shared in the same way, affecting her trust in supervision and her ability to practice healthy self-care.

Questions

1. When caring for family is a deeply held responsibility, in what ways can the church support ministers to rest without making them feel guilty or unfaithful? (consider 3.8c and 3.8e)
2. Confidentiality in supervision is more acute in connected communities with a shared touchstone of identity (e.g. culture or language, LGBTQI+, the Diaconate, ministry networks such as church planters, chaplaincy or youth ministry), what harm can be caused when it is not handled carefully? With your answer in mind, how would you advise Joi to proceed with her supervisor in this specific circumstance?
3. When stress or exhaustion in a colleague is difficult to notice, possibly due to the minister being used to staying silent and appearing strong, what might be observed and how would you approach the minister?

Case Study F: Retirement and Ministry

Please note: The sections added to the Code of Ethics July 2025 of 3.2 (h) and (i) relevant here.

Sunrise Bay Uniting Church is in a coastal town popular with retirees. When Dean, a Minister of the Word, was called to this as his second placement four years ago, he was both excited and nervous about the several retired ministers who are part of the congregation. Now when asked, Dean says having retired ministers in the congregation is, on balance, a very good thing. Citing the example of some retired ministers offering, and when invited, taking preaching slots on a Sunday freeing up Dean to focus on building important relationships with local community groups during those weeks.

However, two retired ministers are a source of ongoing stress for Dean.

Phillip is a well-loved previous minister of the Congregation. When Phillip and his wife retired, they bought a house in Sunrise Bay. They regularly travel to visit family or caravan around the state. However, every time Phillip returns, congregation members invite him to Congregation events, asking him to MC, say grace and other duties normally offered to the congregation minister. Despite repeated requests, Phillip does not check in with Dean before accepting these invitations, the travel makes Phillip's appearances unpredictable, and Dean dreads the periods when Phillip is in town.

Wendy, another Minister of the Word whose ministry was in various wider church resourcing placements, retired to Sunrise Bay eight years ago, joining the Church Council before Dean arrived. Council meetings can become tense, with Wendy frequently directing discussions and blundering into sensitive pastoral matters. An issue that Dean has taken to their Presbytery Minister for assistance. Recently, during a difficult week marked by another surprise appearance from Phillip, Dean and the Presbytery Minister met with Wendy, at the suggestion of PRC, to request Wendy become a Minister-in-association with clearly defined responsibilities. Wendy reacted angrily, stating that the way she chooses to contribute to her church community in retirement is her decision, no one else's. If Dean doesn't like that he should leave Sunrise Bay Uniting Church.

The meeting, with its hostile tenor, held during an already difficult week, broke something in Dean. He has spent some nights crying and has difficulty sleeping. Dean loves serving in this congregation and community but is doubting an otherwise vital call because of two individuals. Dean is considering requesting Early Release from the placement.

Questions

1. When reflecting, one of Dean's main hesitations about leaving is he will be 'passing the buck', that the next minister is going to have the same issues, and it would be irresponsible to pass this on unresolved. How would you advise Dean around the balance between responsibility to the ministry and responsibility for his own wellbeing?

2. Phillip loves the Sunrise Bay church and local community. He does not understand Dean's concerns. How would you frame the issues to Phillip to aid Phillip in understanding Dean's concerns? *Perhaps consider Code of Ethics of 3.2 (h) and (i)*
3. A week later Wendy shares their point of view of the meeting with another retired minister who directly challenges Wendy on her words. Wendy, with hindsight, now understands she overreacted and violated boundaries. Wendy still feels strongly that her contribution is important and valid. Nevertheless, Wendy knows self-reflection and restitution is required. How would you suggest Wendy proceed?

Ethical Ministry Refresher 2026B

RESOURCE BOOK for
FACILITATORS AND PARTICIPANTS

**This material has been developed
by the NSW & ACT Synod Vital
Leadership Team and adapted for
use in Victoria and Tasmania**

If you have any questions regarding
its use, or are interested in
attending an ***Ethical Ministry
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