# Reflective Supervision

Why is good supervision important?
and
What is the model of supervision we are encouraging?

The Church of England
Diocese of Ely

*June 2023*

## What is Reflective Supervision?

All those who are in a training position (curates, LLMs-in-training) are entitled to access to regular, well facilitated supervision that supports their formational development. Regular supervision is also an expectation for those who hold other lay roles within the church: e.g., LLMs, Anna Chaplains and other volunteers. We would also argue that those who inhabit other leadership roles in the parish would also benefit from regular, good, well facilitated supervision (clergy, ALMs, youth workers, children's workers etc). Creating a supervision culture within our churches is healthy as it can reduce isolation, can prevent the formation of bad habits, can build trust and can be beneficial for both the supervisor and supervisee.

The supervision session can create a framework within which all aspects of work, learning and the working relationship can be negotiated and agreed. It provides a focussed time for reflection and should be a safe space where honesty is valued. It also provides a boundaried, safe space within which differences, disagreements and causes of friction can be dealt with healthily.

The reflective supervision session is not a placed for diary-management conversations or issues of day-to-day arrangements. The focus is on the supervisee and their growth and development. The supervision session should be an uninterrupted time which can enable the supervisee to reflect on both practice and theology ("Where is God in this?")

We believe that the relationship should be a growth-centred. Whilst there will be times when knowledge needs to be imparted, we also recognise that the use of good, effective questioning, where the supervisee is encouraged to do the thinking, will enable the deepest transformation to take place.

*Reflective Supervision is not:*
Counselling, coaching, mentoring or line management.

*Reflective Supervision is:*
Holding a space to enable some deep practice-informed reflection and exploration to take place.

Research shows that in many cases where there are relationship breakdowns between incumbent and curate/LLM or issues in the ministry of the curate/LLM, there has been little or no structured supervision sessions operating.

## Reflective Supervision within Anglicanism:

*Scripture:*
There are a number of places in scripture where a reflective supervision relationship, it could be argued, developed between a particular individual and leader. These were places where experience was shared, insecurities and doubts explored and where deep, searching questions were asked. These relationships brought a transformation within the person being supervised.

*Reason:*
There has been much research carried out on the benefit of reflective supervision relationships, not least the role that it can play in reducing isolation, preventing unhelpful patterns of behaviour developing, improving an individual's sense of wellbeing and creating a safer church. Bill Mullally in his article '*The effect of presence and power in the pastoral supervisory relationship*' suggests that: '...professional pastoral supervision is an essential and beneficial practice for those in ministry and for the wider Church. It is an area that needs to be developed and 'normalised' in the lives of those who respond to this vocation. All ministers within the Methodist church must regularly undertake supervision.

*Tradition:*
The Anglican church has a long history of supervision relationships that are significant in the formation of individuals. These are found, not only in the parish and deanery context, but are also rooted in the monastic rhythms of life as well as other religious communities that have existed.

## The shape of the Supervision Session:

We use the **C L E A R** structure for each session.

**C** **Contract**: a conversation about how you will work together in that session, identifying what the supervisee wants to get out of the session. It creates good boundaries.

What would you like to focus on today?
What would you like the outcome of our conversation to be?
How will you know if you've had a good session today?

**L** **Listen**: After contracting, the supervisor may ask questions in relation to their chosen area of focus. These may be questions for clarity and detail, connections.

**E** **Explore**: The supervisor starts to ask more probing and targeted questions of the which help to explore the focus.

Using effective, open, probing questions can really help explore an issue in depth:

*I wonder if....?*
*It sounds like....*

**A** **Action**: The supervisor and supervisee then agree a set of actions they could take following the supervision session (if appropriate).
The types of questions a supervisor could ask at this stage are varied and depend on the specifics of the conversation, but some examples may include:

What do you think you need to do next in relation to this?
How will you start this process?
What's the first thing you will do to help make this happen?
Who might you speak to about this?
When will you start working on this?
How will you feel once you've started your actions?

**R** **Review**: Towards the end of the session the supervisor summarises some of the key points from the session, reflecting on the session objectives and what progress has been made. This helps both parties reflect on what has been discussed and helps ensure that the initial contract has been adhered to and that, hopefully, benefit has been achieved.

At the next mentoring session, it is worth revisiting the review section and identifying the action (if any) has been taken. This grows a mutual accountability and gives the mentoring sessions a sense of momentum.

## Things to notice:

***Who 'owns' the supervision?***
The supervision agenda is 'held' by the supervisee. But, supervisor and supervisee negotiate the focus and jointly taking responsibility for the pre-supervision thinking and preparation. The form at the end of this document may be a helpful resource to support the preparation process, helping the supervision session become focussed and have clear direction and impact. Both need to be committed to the supervision sessions and find the time for them to take place. Both need to agree the focus for the supervision session. The supervisee should normally take responsibility for initiating the completion of the form (if used) and the writing up of the session as appropriate.

***How regularly should supervision take place?***
We recommend that supervision takes place for an hour, to an hour and a half, once a month. It should be in a mutually convenient place and at a mutually convenient time where there will be no interruptions. These sessions should be fiercely ringfenced times in the diary.
The focus of the supervision is the growth and development of the supervisee.

We recognise that for those with responsibility for LLMs, this may represent a dramatic change to the current practice. Whilst we maintain this monthly ideal, we appreciate it may be unattainable for some at the moment and would recommend the approach that 'some supervision is better than no supervision' and that the ideal is something that is worked towards over time in a mutually agreed way. It is also possible to supplement 1:1 supervision with group supervision sessions.

***Being aware of the balance of Power***
There is a need to be fully aware of both the balance of power that exists within the relationship between curates/LLMs/ALMs and the incumbent. The power is there and must be accepted as well as acknowledged, not matter how uncomfortable that may feel for both supervisee and, at times, the supervisor. It cannot be removed, but it can be redistributed:

*Venue*: If the supervisee chooses the venue for the supervision session, this can disrupt the power dynamic

*Room arrangement:* moving seats can help change a power dynamic, supervision while walking also changes the dynamics. Giving the pen to the supervisee to draw/write shifts the power balance.

*Who sets the agenda:* it is inevitable that the setting of the agenda enables power to be focussed within that person.

In many relationships (e.g., the incumbent-curate relationship) the clergy can wear a lot of different hats: assessor, pastor, encourager, educator. It is important that there is clarity about which hat is being worn within the supervision session (and when that hat is changing).

## Supervision and wellbeing:

Whilst rewarding, supervision is exhausting for both parties. The sessions can be intense, with much active listening, formulating appropriate questions to open up further thinking and with simply holding the space for someone else.

We would recommend that it is best practice for both the supervisor and supervisee to diarise some space for themselves after the supervision session, space which is used for your own resetting and restoring.
Time should also be set aside for preparation and reflection prior to the session.
As a supervisor, you will receive support and will be part of a 'supervisor community' which will meet at various times during the year.

**See also**: Supervision form for those exercising ministry: paid and unpaid as a template for your supervision conversations.