



MOUNT ST. MARY'S SEMINARY & SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

CINCINNATI † OHIO

*Lay Ecclesial Formation
Project in Ministry Handbook*

Certificate in Pastoral Ministry

Updated: August 2024

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Introduction

The project in ministry is a substantial, culminating work that allows students in the Certificate in Pastoral Ministry program to integrate knowledge and experience. It puts into active use the approaches, techniques, and information learned in a variety of separate courses and experiences. It requires the disciplined use of ministry skills, pastoral planning, and theological knowledge, and provides opportunities to reflect on the entire formational experience.

The project in ministry process helps bridge the gap between academic and theoretical work and professional practice. It models an effective way to plan and evaluate collaborative ministry and provides a solid foundation for future ministry.

Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) document guiding lay ecclesial ministry formation, notes the importance of lay ministers learning the skills of:

- Collaboration
- Discernment of the signs of the times and being familiar with current social, economic, and cultural situations, reflecting on them in the light of doctrinal and spiritual formation
- Gifts discernment and volunteer ministry management
- Change and conflict management skills
- Listening and communication skills
- Administrative skills
- Leadership and organizational development¹

The project in ministry is a process designed to foster, develop, and showcase these skills, attitudes, and approaches, and put them into practice via “practical experience in real situations and by mentored reflection on those experiences.”²

Students complete their work through consultation with their Formation Advisor (either the Dean of the School of Theology or the Coordinator of Lay Ecclesial Formation) and in collaboration with the leadership team and constituents of a specific ministry site.

This handbook will guide the student through carrying out his or her project as well as writing the final project report.

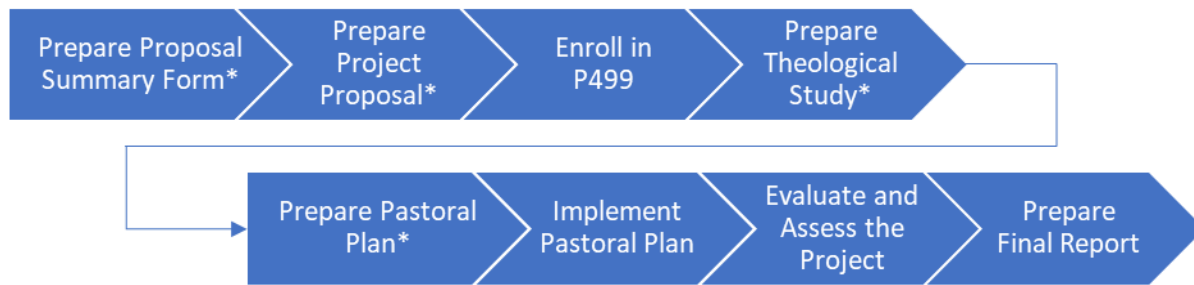
¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005), 48-49.

² *Co-Workers*, 49.

Project in Ministry Operating Principles

- The project must be in keeping with (arch)diocesan policies and Catholic doctrine.
- It must model effective ministry and an appropriate pastoral approach.
- It should reflect the particular interests, skills, and passion of the student and provide something of value to the student, the ministry site, and the target population.
- It may not be either substantively or partially completed, or be of a nature that does not allow for changes, revisions, and input from others. No previously completed ministerial project may be submitted to fulfill the requirement.
- It is an individual effort; it cannot be a joint undertaking or shared experience with another student.
- The project synthesizes theological research with practical experience. Students may only collect anonymous survey data from participants to determine specific needs of the ministry site or to evaluate the success of the project. No identifiable private information may be collected from participants.
- The ministry site should be one that allows the student to take on a leadership position and function within healthy professional boundaries. Students may not engage in interactions with individuals that are intrusive or confidential in nature. The activities of the project must be benign and carry no reasonable potential for harm, discomfort, or embarrassment for the participants.
- The project may be undertaken at the student's field education site, but it must be significantly different from the field education experience.
- Current job responsibilities may not be used to fulfill project requirements.
- If the project requires financial resources, the ministry site must be willing to fund or solicit funding for the project. Students may not pay for implementation.
- The student has one calendar year from the time the project proposal is approved by the Formation Advisor to implement the project and submit the final report.

Process



* Approval needed to proceed.

Prepare Proposal Summary Form

- Initial project idea.
- Fill out the form and email it to the Formation Advisor.
- Receive approval to proceed.

Prepare Project Proposal

- Confirm ministry site and then conduct a needs assessment. Identify a target population. Validate the need in the community and examine past/present responses to the need.
- Write these topics in narrative report form and format as specified.
- Submit to Formation Advisor.
- Receive approval to proceed.

Enroll in P 499 Project in Ministry

Prepare Theological Study

- Discuss with the Formation Advisor the key theological issues and concepts of the project.
- Write a three-to-five-page synthetic research paper examining the pastoral need to be addressed by the project in terms of the larger Church or broader community—how the project connects with the mission and ministry of the universal Church. Have at least three footnoted references with a bibliography. Format as specified.
- Submit to Formation Advisor.
- Receive approval to proceed.

Prepare Pastoral Plan

- Write the details of what the project will be. Include these sections: Project Goals, Program Design/Action Plan, Resources, Contingency Plan, Evaluation Plan, Financial Plan/Budget, Communication Plan.
- Format as specified.
- Submit to Formation Advisor.
- Receive approval to proceed.

Implement the Pastoral Plan

Evaluate and Assess the Project

- Write an evaluation and assessment report, including sections on: Review of Project Implementation, Evaluation of the Project, Personal Spiritual Growth, Ministerial Understanding, and Theological Understanding.

Prepare Final Report

- Assemble all of the components of the final report into one document.
- Format as required.
- Submit the report (paper copy, bound) to the Dean of the School of Theology.
 - If your Formation Advisor is the Coordinator of Lay Ecclesial Formation, final approval must be given by the advisor before forwarding the final copy to the dean.
- The Dean of the School of Theology determines if all requirements for P 499 have been satisfactorily met and enters a pass/fail grade in Populi.

As you plan, implement, and evaluate the project, you will—in effect—be writing your final project report in stages along the way. The “Table of Contents” for your final report must have the following structure of headings and subheadings. (This diagram is to illustrate the headings and subheadings—your page numbers will be particular to your report.) The brackets to the right show that three documents will need to be submitted to your Formation Advisor at designated intervals. The final report will consist of those three documents plus the final sections and a title page.

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PREPARE PROPOSAL SUMMARY FORM

This signed summary form should be submitted by the student to his/her Formation Advisor as an attachment via email. After the Formation Advisor and/or Dean approves the initial project idea, then the student may proceed to the next step of preparing the project proposal.

**CERTIFICATE IN PASTORAL MINISTRY PROGRAM
PROJECT IN MINISTRY PROPOSAL SUMMARY**

Name: _____ Date: _____

Formation Advisor: _____

Provisional Project Title: _____

Brief description of initial project idea:

This form should be submitted to the School of Theology Dean after having been signed by the student and his/her Formation Advisor.

Student

Formation Advisor

Dean

PREPARE PROJECT PROPOSAL

Overview

Research your initial idea to solidify your proposed project. Meet with a key contact at your proposed ministry site and conduct a needs assessment at the site if possible. Identify a target population and key stakeholders. Validate the pastoral need in the community and examine past and/or present responses to the need. Refine your project idea as needed based on your findings. Keep in mind that a project must have a clearly articulated goal as well as definite beginning and ending dates for evaluative purposes.

Write these topics in narrative report form. The document should be typed double-spaced with Times New Roman 12-point font.

Submit the project proposal document to your Formation Advisor via email. Your advisor may request changes to the proposal. If so, continue to refine the proposal with his/her direction until it is approved.

Select a Ministry Site

It is helpful to think of a variety of possible locations prior to selecting a project ministry site. Typically, this will be in a parochial setting or other ecclesial institution, like a school, but other possibilities for the ministry site may be proposed.

Consider these points as you evaluate potential sites for your project:

- What is your motivation for selecting this site? What is your relationship with this site?
- Will the leadership team/administration of the site welcome your participation? Are there any conflicts of interest?
- Will you have the support needed to complete a project?
- Will you have access to necessary information and resources?
- Will you be able to collaborate with others in this location?
- If this is your place of employment, you must be able to identify a need to address that lies *outside* of your job description. Will undertaking a project in the workplace put undue pressure on working relationships and dynamics?
- Will this location bring out your best gifts? Do you care about the people in this place and want to serve them?
- Is the leadership/administration open to the results of a needs assessment or do they want to assign you a need to address?
- Are there other students undertaking projects at this location? Will that be a problem?
- Are there events, initiatives, or issues occurring at the ministry site or in the community where the ministry site is located that will impact your project?

For your project proposal:

Describe the ministry site, its history, and demographics. Explain why you have chosen this site; include answers to some or all of the questions above.

Conduct a Needs Assessment and Identify Target Population

If appropriate, and if the ministry site will allow it, conduct an assessment to determine current conditions and needs as well as a target population. If you were suggested a project by the ministry site leadership, a needs assessment could be used to validate the need and the target population to be served. The following are some possible assessment strategies:

- **Informal listening and observation.** Use the occasions that spontaneously present themselves to speak with members of the proposed target population. Invite their questions, perceptions, and suggestions.
- **Formal interviews.** In-person or phone interviews are usually scheduled in advance for a particular time and place. In a completely structured interview, all of the questions are carefully designed ahead of time to provide the necessary data, and all interviewees are asked the same questions. In a semi-structured interview, there are some questions designed to be answered by all interviewees, but also flexibility to follow the lead of the person being interviewed.
- **Focus groups.** In this assessment strategy, a number of respondents are called together into one place where they participate in a group process carefully designed to elicit the kinds of input desired.
- **Paper/electronic surveys.** Respondents anonymously fill out a carefully constructed questionnaire designed to secure the exact kind of data desired. Responses are then tabulated.
- **(Arch)diocesan directives and initiatives** that have not been implemented in your community.
- **Parish-wide survey** results that provide a listing of needs and gaps. For this to be valid information, the survey should have been conducted within the last three years.
- **Parish records or community census data analysis** that confirms dramatic, unexplained, or unaddressed changes in demographics, finances, or levels of participation in the community.
- **Information gathering sessions with key committees in the community**, such as long-range planning, stewardship, leadership, education, or advisory councils. Analysis of meeting minutes from these committees can facilitate discussions of unmet needs.

Correctly identifying the target population—those who will directly benefit from this project—and key stakeholders early in the planning process is critical. Keep the target population focused and narrow in order to be realistic. Also identify key stakeholders, such as those who will help implement the project, those who will have a vested interest in the outcome, and those who will receive the project “deliverables.”

For your project proposal, address these questions:

- Were you able to conduct a needs assessment? Which strategies did you use?
- What service, product, or information will be provided as a result of your project?
- What target population will you be serving? If there is more than one target population, prioritize them as primary beneficiaries, secondary beneficiaries, etc.
- Who are the key stakeholders who will be impacted by the project?
- What are the pertinent demographics of the target population, such as population size, diversity (age, gender, ethnic, social, linguistic, economic, educational), and stability over time?

Responses to the Need

For your project proposal, answer these questions:

- Has the overarching pastoral need been addressed at this ministry site in the past? If so, by whom and with what results?
- Is this pastoral need being addressed at this ministry site by another individual or group? If so, by whom? How will your project differ from what is already being done?
- How has this pastoral need been addressed in other places, such as similar parishes or institutions?
- What gifts do you have that can be useful in responding to this need?
- What personal values are involved in your response to this need?
- What personal challenges do you anticipate?

PREPARE THEOLOGICAL STUDY

Overview

After your project proposal has been approved, consider the pastoral need your project will address in terms of the larger Church or broader community. Discuss with your Formation Advisor the key theological issues and concepts of the project. Research what others have said about these concepts.

Write a three to five-page report examining the theological issues at the heart of your project and how the project connects with the mission and ministry of the universal Church. Include at least three footnoted references with a bibliography. The document should be typed double-spaced and use Times New Roman 12-point font. Footnotes should be in Times New Roman 10-point font. For information on citing references and writing papers, see the "[Citation Guide](#)" and the "[Course Papers Guide](#)" on the Maly Library website.

Submit the theological study document to your Formation Advisor via email. Your advisor may request changes to the paper. If so, continue to refine it with his/her direction until the report is approved.

For your theological study, consider these or similar questions:

- What are the areas of theology that intersect with your project? For example, if your project is to organize an evening of reflection for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, what are the principles of sacramental theology, liturgical theology, and ecclesiology that provide the foundations for this project?
- When recalling the various themes drawn from the courses of the pastoral ministry program, what areas of overlap do you find between those courses and the needs that have been expressed at your ministry site and with your target population?
- How is the Church's theological vision of herself as the Mystical Body of Christ made more evident through your project?

PREPARE A PASTORAL PLAN

Overview

The pastoral plan should include the specific details of the project: goals, program design/action plan, resources, contingency plan, evaluation plan, financial plan/budget, and communication plan.

Write these sections in narrative report form (typed double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font). Submit the pastoral plan document to your Formation Advisor via email. Your advisor may request changes. If so, continue to refine the plan with his/her direction until the pastoral plan is approved.

Project Goal(s)

A goal is a clear statement of the desired outcome in concrete, specific, achievable, and measurable terms. Determine a goal that states what the target population will be able to do as a result of the project after a specified period of time. It should describe a concrete, tangible result or a performance that is expected of members of the target population.

For your pastoral plan, clearly state your goal and how/why it meets the following criteria:

- Is the goal statement specific? Is it stated in terms of the desired end state of the target population?
- Is it measurable (focused as much as possible on the *doing* component of the target population's behavior)?
- Is it achievable and realistic?
- Is it relevant and worthwhile? Is it rooted in one or more mission purposes?
- Is it time-bound? Does it have a fixed beginning and fixed ending point?

Program Design/Action Plan

The program design is a systematic, step-by-step means established to achieve your goals. Programs of very limited scope might be carried out in a handful of steps, while larger and more complex programs may call for extensive linking of steps within steps. Individual steps should not be overly complicated and should be able to be achieved in a proportional time frame to the overall project. Each step should have clear points of reference as to who is responsible to achieve the respective task of the program design.

For your pastoral plan:

- Give a detailed, step-by-step description of who will do what and by when.
- Consider providing a flowchart or schematic as a graphical, easy-to-follow visual of the action steps.

Resources

As you plan your project, determine the resources needed to implement the project successfully.

For your pastoral plan, answer these questions:

- What human resources (persons or groups) are necessary to adequately respond to this need? With whom will you collaborate in this ministry? How will you divide the tasks, if appropriate?
- What material resources will you need?

- What financial arrangements do you need to make?
- What physical resources are needed (e.g., meeting space, microphone, refreshments, unlocked doors)? Are these readily available? If not, where will you find them?

Contingency Plan

A contingency plan is a backup plan designed to address unexpected events or risks that could impact the project's successful implementation. For example, if your project involves an outside event, what is the contingency plan for a rainy day?

For your pastoral plan:

- Describe some of the possible obstacles or challenges that could occur during the implementation phase of this project.
- Explain your backup plans if such instances happen.

Evaluation Plan

After the project has been completed, how will you determine whether and to what extent your goals have been achieved?

For your pastoral plan:

- List the information you will need to assess the attainment of your goals.
- Choose an appropriate format (e.g., interviews, documentation, questionnaires, tests, observation, recording).
- Explain why you chose this evaluation method.
- Include a sample of all evaluation forms you plan to use.
- Explain to whom (other than your Formation Advisor) you will provide the evaluation results (and for what purposes) after the project is complete.

Financial Plan/Budget for the Project

In the planning phase of a project, it is important to consider how much the project will cost and who is responsible for providing or obtaining the funding.

For your pastoral plan, address these questions as applicable:

- What is the projected monetary cost for implementing your project?
- How was the cost of your project determined? What factors did you take into consideration?
- If you solicit bids for services and supplies, how will decisions be made concerning which vendor(s) to employ?
- What is your source of funding? (Personal funding for the CPM project is prohibited.)
- Has your funding source(s) made a firm commitment to fund your project, and if so, what is the maximum amount they have agreed to fund?
- How will you address cost overruns?

Communication Plan

Effective pastoral ministry must always include clear and concise communication. A successful communication plan can prevent most project communication challenges before they even arise.

For your pastoral plan:

- Explain what needs to be communicated (specific information or content), to whom, and by when.
- Decide and explain what each communication is intended to accomplish (inform? update? invite? etc.).
- Plan and describe the most effective tool to use for each communication.
- Describe how often communication should take place.
- Determine and explain who is responsible for each communication.

IMPLEMENT THE PASTORAL PLAN

Overview

Implementation occurs after the pastoral plan has been approved by your Formation Advisor and by a key contact at your ministry site. Depending on the scope of the project, you may need to recruit an implementation team to further develop and implement the plan at the ministry site.

Your role is that of a coordinator and facilitator who will keep the work on track, on time, and within budget. You are responsible for determining mid-course corrections, ensuring effective communication among team members and the ministry site, maintaining documentation, charting progress, and encouraging others in service.

As your project unfolds, some changes or surprises may occur. Document the reasons for any necessary deviations from your original proposal.

At the appropriate time, carry out the evaluation method (interviews, documentation, questionnaires, tests, observation, recording, etc.) as outlined in your pastoral plan.

Save communications, publicity items, agendas, handouts, and other materials generated as part of project implementation for inclusion in your final report.

EVALUATE AND ASSESS THE PROJECT

Overview

Following project implementation, write an evaluation and assessment report. The following sections should be included: review of project implementation, evaluation of the project, personal spiritual growth, ministerial understanding, and theological understanding.

Write these sections in narrative report form (typed double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font).

For your evaluation/assessment report, address the following questions:

Review of Project Implementation

- What happened as you implemented your plan of action?
- How closely did the implementation follow your original pastoral plan?
- Was your action plan refined or revised in any way? If so, how and why?
- Were there any unanticipated or unintended outcomes, positive or negative? If so, what is your best understanding of how those outcomes came about?

Evaluation of the Project

- Was the evaluation of your project based on your goals as stated in the pastoral plan? If not, why not?
- What individuals or groups were involved in the formal evaluation of your project?
- How was the evaluation of your project administered?
- What were the results of your target population's evaluation of your project? Provide summaries of hard data.
- What does the evaluation data demonstrate or imply concerning the achievement or non-achievement of your goals?
- What does the evaluation data demonstrate or imply concerning the extent to which the target population's needs were met?
- To what extent do your own perceptions or impressions of the project and its results differ from what the evaluation results show?

Personal Spiritual Growth (spiritual formation)

- Were any of your personal assumptions about the project changed or challenged during its implementation?
- What do you define as the successes and failures of your project?
- What theological or cardinal virtues or personal values influenced the project?
- Has the project impacted your relationship with God and with the Church?

Ministerial Understanding (human and pastoral formation)

- What did you learn from your project about your own capacity for ministry?
- What did you learn about your personal strengths and limitations?
- What insights have you had into your own needs for development and areas of growth?
- What did you learn about collaboration with others in ministry?
- Did your project prepare/assist others for ministry? If so, how?

- How did this project call upon you to minister with creativity and adaptability?
- What did you learn about ministry in the context of the Church?
- How does your experience reflect the tradition of ministry in the Church?

Theological Understanding (intellectual formation)

- Reflect on the themes presented in your theological study research paper. Did any other theological themes surface for you while working on this project?
- What new theological understandings and conclusions have you come to as a result of working on this project?
- Has your understanding of tradition, scripture, or ministry developed by your project experience? If so, how?

PREPARE THE FINAL REPORT

The final phase is to assemble all of the components of your project (Project Proposal, Theological Study, Pastoral Plan, and Implementation/Evaluation Review) into one final report document. Add page numbers so that they run consecutively throughout the report.

The report must be typed double-spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font. Include a title page formatted according to the example provided at the end of this handbook. The final report must also have a table of contents formatted according to the example provided at the end of this handbook. All headings and subheadings must be included as shown. There is a downloadable MS Word template on the MTSM website that you may also find helpful when preparing your final report. It has the correct pagination, fonts, a cover page, sample bibliography, etc. Explanations and tips are provided to help you with formatting.

Supplementary material produced as part of the project implementation—such as publicity items, agendas, and handouts—may be placed at the end of the final report as appendices.

When all components have been assembled into one document, print the report on 8.5 x 11 white paper and bind it (e.g., three-ring binder, glued edge, spiral binding). Submit the report to the Dean of the School of Theology. (If your Formation Advisor is the Coordinator of Lay Ecclesial Formation, final approval must be given by the advisor before forwarding the final copy to the dean.) The dean will determine if all requirements for P 499 have been satisfactorily met and will enter a pass/fail grade in Populi. The project report will be kept on file in the Lay Ecclesial Formation office for ten years.

Title Page Example

[Title of Project]

at [Name of Parish or Institution]

[City, State of the Parish or Institution]

A project in ministry submitted to the faculty of
Mount St. Mary's Seminary & School of Theology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Certificate in Pastoral Ministry

By

[Your First, Middle Initial, Last Name]

Cincinnati, Ohio

[Date]

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