

Ministry Formation 1
MF 3P1011A/MF 3P1012A/MF 3P1013A
MF 3P1011B/MF 3P1012B/MF 3P1013B

Fall and Winter 2026-27

The mission of McMaster Divinity College is to develop effective evangelical Christian leaders for the Church, academy, and society through graduate-level education, spiritual development, and vocational formation.

Special Note: Ministry Formation 1 is for all students in their first year of ministry formation regardless of what year of studies they are in at MDC.

Course Instructor(s): Dr. Lee Beach (beachl@mcmaster.ca)
Dr. Jim Horsthuis (horsthj@mcmaster.ca)
External Mentors (TBA)

Class Meetings:

Online Orientation Session: Saturday **September 12, 10:00 – 11:30 AM ET** (This class meeting will be held via zoom, details will be sent well in advance. Please plan to attend this important orientation session).

Placements begin the week of Sept. 14, 2026

Online Session: Saturday Oct. 3, 10:00 -11:30 AM ET. This class meeting will be held online (via. Zoom) and will provide further details on course assignments, content and the work of doing theological reflection on ministry experience (which is core to this course). Please plan to attend this session.

First Time Supervisors Meeting: Tuesday October 5, 11:00 – 12:00 PM ET (for first time supervisors). This meeting will be held via. Zoom. Details will be provided well in advance.

***Students are not required to attend.**

Avenue to Learn: An Avenue to Learn site will be activated for the course that will provide information, resources, instruction and a place for student interaction throughout the year. More information will be provided at the beginning of the course.

Course Description

This course is an experiential learning course that encompasses five key components. A ministry placement that requires 8 hours per week of engagement in an ongoing ministry context, the development of a ministry learning covenant that sets learning goals for the placement, connection to an experienced ministry practitioner as a placement supervisor, regular meetings with an external ministry mentor (appointed by MDC) and several forms of evaluation at the end of the placement. Three courses in Ministry formation are required for students in the MDiv (Ministry

Formation 1,2&3) program and one course is required for students in the MTS program (Ministry Formation 1 ~ this syllabus).

Objectives:

Knowing:

Ministry Formation will help students to develop their own theology and the skill to reflect on ministry theologically drawing from personal experience as a resource for theological development. Further it will offer to students the opportunity to integrate theological thought with ministry practice. This includes a focus on the following:

- a. Students will be able to describe the significance of Theological Reflection on ministry experience.
- b. Students will apply the integration of Theological resources with ministry practice

Being:

Spiritual formation is the cornerstone of effective ministry. Formation for ministry must introduce basic spiritual practices for spiritual growth and long-term inner health. These include:

- a. Students will identify specific points of self-care in ministry
- b. Students will cultivate the practice of spiritual disciplines in ministry

Ministry formation should help students get in touch with who they are as a ministering person, both strengths and growing edges. It should help them gain an honest understanding of the potential baggage that they bring to ministry. Further, it needs to provide them with the opportunity to explore and identify their sense of personal calling to ministry. Including:

- a. Students will gain a deeper understanding of their personal calling to ministry
- b. Students will have a greater ability to articulate their gifts and leadership aptitudes

Doing:

This course will help students to focus on the development of ministry skills with a view to skill discovery and enhancement. Including:

- a. Students will be able to identify key skills required for Christian ministry
- b. Students will gain insight into the importance of becoming a collaborative learner through engagement in a learning network of ministry mentors and experienced practitioners

Course Requirements

1. Students, in consultation with the course instructors (Dr. Lee Beach and Dr. Jim Horsthuis) will be required to secure a placement that allows them to invest a minimum of 8 hours per week in ministry activities, preparation and supervision. This can be a new placement, or it may be the students place of employment or current volunteer ministry.

2. This placement is designed to be a supervised placement; therefore, a qualified supervisor must be identified who will agree to meet with the student at least 6 times throughout each semester (12 times total) for support and mutual reflection on ministry experience.

**** The Ministry Formation office is able to help students identify potential field placement sites, including churches of various denominations, para-church organizations, healthcare facilities, campus ministries, correctional institutions, and community service agencies. There are many placement sites that have indicated their willingness to welcome and supervise student interns. Student-initiated placement proposals, however, are also considered. Placement selection is a collaborative process involving the student, the proposed supervisor, the placement site, and the Directors of Ministry Formation. Every effort is made to match students with a placement setting that is consonant with their vocational goals, denominational affiliations, geographic preferences, and ministry interests. (See Appendix below for further information on finding a placement, the role of the supervisor, etc. Pages 6 & 7).**

3. Students will also be connected with an external mentor appointed by the school. Mentors and students meet 6 times over the course of the academic year. Meetings with the mentor will include specific topics and themes. Students will present personal and ministry reflections at each meeting and mentors will offer feedback and ask questions regarding the presentation and any other issues that they and/or the student want to discuss (some details of these meetings are offered below, more will be provided through the course orientation on Sept. 12). Meetings will be approximately 45 - 60 minutes and will be arranged at a time that is suitable for both the student and the mentor. It is assumed that these meetings will be conducted in a virtual format, although face to face meetings are certainly fine if both parties are agreeable. A combination of both is also an option.
4. Students will form a Ministry Learning covenant (including three specific learning goals) at the beginning of the placement. A template for this covenant is included as one of the appendices toward the end of this syllabus. More detail will also be given at the Sept. 12 orientation meeting.
5. As the placement reaches its conclusion three evaluation forms will be required. A supervisor evaluation, a student self-evaluation and a student evaluation of their placement and mentoring experience. Specific forms for each will be provided part way through the winter semester.

Assignments Overview (descriptions below)

Assignments:	Assignments Schedule
Learning Covenant	Oct. 5
Spiritual Autobiography (1 st year students only)	Mid-First Semester (Set date with Mentor)

Mid-Year Reflection	Early Jan (Set date with Mentor)
Ministry Reflection Report	Mid-Second Semester (Set date with Mentor)
Evaluation Forms	April 9

Assignments Descriptions

The following assignments will be course requirements that the student will complete and be graded on. Specific information on how to develop and fulfill these assignments will be provided in the online introductory session (**Sept. 12**) and written guidelines will also be provided prior to that time.

1. Ministry Learning Covenant

Students will construct a “Ministry Learning Covenant” at the beginning of the school year. This covenant invites students to set three specific learning goals and action steps for each goal. As well as provide details of their placement. A template for this covenant is included in this syllabus (Pages 8-10). Details on how to craft and complete this covenant will be given at the **Sept. 12 online** gathering.

The Ministry Learning Covenant is due Oct. 5, 2025 and should be sent to the Associate Director of Ministry Formation (Dr. Jim Horsthuis) as an email attachment. It is worth 20% of the final grade.

2. Ministry/Theological Reflection Reports

In the Fall semester students will write a personal spiritual autobiography reflecting on their own spiritual journey and formation (see the appendix below for guidelines on how to construct this report. Page 11).

In the Winter semester students will write a reflection based on an experience from their own ministry/placement experience. Templates for how to construct these reports are included in this syllabus (see below for the template entitled theological reflection report on page 12). Both of these assignments will be discussed in detail at the **Sept. 12 orientation** session. These reports will be presented to your external mentor and will form the basis for two of the student – mentor meetings.

Due dates for these reports are TBD (one in the mid to late fall semester, one in the mid to late winter semester) in conversation with the external mentor. These reports are *each* worth 25% of the final grade (25 X 2 = 50%). They should be submitted as email attachments to the external mentor on the date specified by the external mentor.

3. Mid-Year Reflection Report

Students will write and submit a mid-year reflection report that offers a reflection on how they believe their placement is progressing at the halfway point. The reflection should include a recap of activities that the student has participated in and some reflection on key points of learning. Most importantly the report should reflect on the progress being made toward the student’s learning goals and any adjustments that need to be made. Honest reflection on positive strides made and places for further attention should be discussed. A template for how to construct these reports

is provided in this syllabus (see below—Page 14). These reports will be presented to your external mentor and will form the basis for one of the student – mentor meetings.

The due date for this report will be near the beginning of the winter (second) semester (exact date TBD in conversation with external mentor). The report is worth 20% of the final grade. It should be submitted as an email attachment to the external mentor on the date it is due as specified by the external mentor.

4. End of Year Evaluations

Students are required to provide three evaluations based on their learning goals and overall experience in the course. A supervisor evaluation, a student self-evaluation, and a student evaluation of their placement and mentoring experience are required. Specific forms for each will be provided part way through the winter semester. It is the student's responsibility to gather these forms and submit them to the Associate Director of Ministry Formation (Dr. Horsthuis).

End of the year evaluations are Due Apr. 9, 2026. They should be sent to the Associate Director of Ministry Formation (Dr. Jim Horsthuis) as email attachments. All three evaluations must be submitted in order to receive the full grade (10/10); incomplete submissions receive a 7 or lower grade. The evaluations are worth 10% of the final course grade.

** Grades are assigned by the Director of Ministry Formation. The ministry reflection reports and mid-year reflection report will be presented to the external mentor at one of your meetings. The mentor will offer a suggested grade to the DMF for their consideration.

APPENDIX: FURTHER INFORMATION ON PLACEMENTS

MEETING WITH THE DIRECTOR

Selecting and arranging a placement is a collaborative process. Students begin by arranging to meet individually with the Director of Ministry Formation or the Associate Director to discuss their ministry interests, vocational goals, and learning objectives. This consultation meeting with the Director must take place before any arrangements are negotiated with a particular placement setting or supervisor.

The Ministry Formation office is able to help direct students to potential placement sites. Student-initiated placement proposals are also considered. After meeting with the Director of Ministry Formation, the student arranges an inquiry interview and potential site visit with a prospective supervisor to determine if there is a mutually agreeable fit. The student, the supervisor, and the Director of Ministry Formation must all be in agreement before the placement is finalized.

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A PLACEMENT

- Students are encouraged to select placements that provide them with a *broad* exposure to the tasks, responsibilities, and challenges of Christian ministry within their chosen field.
- Students are expected to be self-directed adult learners who are proactive in pursuing the kinds of experiential learning opportunities that meet their individual learning needs and vocational goals.
- Students in the MDiv program are encouraged to have at least one placement in a church setting. Students heading towards ordained congregational ministry should have at least two out of the three placements in a church.
- To maximize new learning experiences, MDiv students should seek at least one placement in a church where they do not currently attend or hold membership. If, however, the student is in a paid ministry position, he or she may arrange to fulfill their ministry formation requirements in that setting provided that a placement supervisor is appointed and objectives for new learning and development are set and met.
- MDiv Students may remain in a placement for three consecutive years only if deemed appropriate to the attainment of new learning goals.

GUIDELINES FOR INITIAL INTERVIEWS BETWEEN STUDENTS & PROSPECTIVE SUPERVISORS

The following are useful questions to consider when students and prospective supervisors are meeting for an initial inquiry interview:

- What personal learning goals does the student hope to meet in this placement?
- What ministry opportunities, learning experiences, and resources can the placement provide?
- What knowledge, experience, and skill does the student bring from previous experience and training?
- What does the supervisor consider to be his/her ministry strengths and supervision style?
- What is the student's preferred learning style and how does this fit with the supervisor's approach?
- What are the supervisor's expectations of the student's participation in the placement in terms of roles, responsibilities, level of independence, etc.?
- Is there a match between what the student expects and what the supervisor and placement can offer?

THE ROLE OF THE PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR

Placement Supervisors are qualified, experienced ministry practitioners who serve as ministry mentors and engage the student in the process of theological reflection and ministry formation. They are responsible for coordinating, facilitating and assessing the student's learning in the placement. The placement supervisor may function at various times as a mentor, role model, coach, accountability partner, colleague, and consultant, but the primary focus is on education for ministry. In special circumstances, arrangements may be made for co-supervisors or for an off-site supervisor.

Specific responsibilities of the placement supervisor include:

- Submit a *Placement Information Form* to the College (supplied by the Director of Ministry Formation upon request).
- Interview prospective student(s) and collaborate with the Director of Ministry Formation in discerning a good match.
- Collaborate with the student in developing a learning plan outlined in the *Learning/Ministry Covenant*.
- Facilitate learning and ministry opportunities that will foster the student's growth.
- Encourage independent yet supervised experience.
- Meet with the student regularly, at least six times per semester (12 times in total) for supervision focused on theological reflection on the student's ministry experiences.
- Provide continuous feedback to the student throughout the placement in addition to a formal written evaluation at the end of the placement.
- Participate in orientation workshop offered by the College (online).
- Liaise with the College through the Director of Ministry Formation.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT AS A PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR

Supervisors are considered as field instructors working in partnership with the faculty of McMaster Divinity College in educating students for ministry. They are selected and approved on the basis of the following criteria:

- Agreement with the mission and purpose of McMaster Divinity College.
- Theologically trained with a proven record of effective ministry (some flexibility may be allowed on theological training).
- Engaged in a ministry setting that is supportive of educating students for ministry.
- Well-established in their current ministry context for a minimum of one year (some flexibility may be allowable).
- Committed to facilitating the student's identified learning and ministry goals. Desire to learn and engage in the process of theological reflection on ministry experiences.
- Willing to follow the Ministry Formation Program objectives, expectations and evaluation methods.
- Completed the Ministry Formation component of their own personal program at McMaster Divinity College (where applicable), if the supervisor is a current student. (A current student cannot be supervised by another student if they do not meet this criterion).

LEARNING/MINISTRY COVENANT

Ministry Formation Program, McMaster Divinity College

Appendix C2

Instructions: The Student and Field Supervisor work collaboratively to formulate Covenant. It is the Student's responsibility, however, to submit the final version to the Ministry Formation Office by the due date (electronic submission only).

STUDENT NAME:

Program and Year of Study:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

FIELD PLACEMENT NAME:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

SUPERVISOR'S NAME:

Mailing Address (if different from above):

Home Phone (optional):

Email (if different from above):

PLACEMENT DATES AND PLANS:

Starting Date of Placement:

Termination Date:

Days/Times of Attendance:

Day/Time/Place of Weekly Supervision:

Vacation Periods/Planned Absences:

Remuneration Arrangements (optional):

SPECIFIC LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Formulate three specific and detailed learning objectives. Specify the ministry activities that will enable the objectives to be fulfilled.

Objective 1:

Action Plan for Achieving Objective:

Objective 2:

Action Plan for Achieving Objective:

Objective 3:

Action Plan for Achieving Objective:

SPECIFIC MINISTRY/WORK EXPECTATIONS:

Specify other activities, tasks, assignments, services, meetings and responsibilities that the intern is expected to attend or perform as part of the field placement.

PLAN FOR WEEKLY TIME ALLOCATION

Time per week in direct ministry:

Time in meetings, planning sessions:

Time for preparation:

Time for supervisory sessions:

Total number of hours per week:

(Note: Total time commitment over the course of the placement equate to a minimum of 192 hours).

SIGNATURES:

We pledge to honor the commitments and terms of this Covenant. We agree that it will not be broken without a conference meeting with all three signatories:

Student:

Date:

Supervisor:

Date:

Director of Ministry Formation:

Date:

Guidelines for writing and presenting a Spiritual Autobiography (First Assignment for First Year Students)

Purpose and Desired Outcomes

- Opportunity for the student to reflect on their own story and their personal formation.
- Students will identify the way that God has worked in their lives and reflect on the implications of this in their own theological and spiritual formation.
- Students will identify people, churches or other groups that have had an important impact on them, both positively and perhaps negatively.
- Students will develop a greater sense of who they are as a ministering person and what they bring to the ministry context.

Overview

The autobiography should be 3-5 single spaced pages (approx. 2000-3500 words). It will be presented to your external ministry mentor on an agreed upon date at one of your regular mentoring meetings in the fall semester. The autobiography should be sent to your mentor at least 48 hours prior to the meeting date. At the meeting the student will share a brief (5-10 minute) synopsis of the autobiography and then the student and their mentor will reflect together on the autobiography and discuss key points and experiences.

The mentor will also share some of their autobiography with the student and discussion will take place around the mentor's autobiography also.

Framing Questions for the Autobiography

- Describe your background and offer some basic information about your upbringing, adolescent and adult development.
- What have been some of the key milestones or developmental experiences you have had in your life? What have been some of sacred events that have formed you spiritually?
- Who have been some of the important people in your journey? Have there been any key groups or communities that have had a significant influence on you?
- Where have you seen God at work in your life? How have your experiences in life shaped your own understanding of who God is and how he works in the world?
- What do you see as some of your own strengths and weaknesses?
- What Biblical passages, narratives or characters resonate with you in a special way and why?
- How do you see your past and present life experiences contributing to your current and future sense of vocation?

*** It is not necessary to answer all of these questions, they are here to guide your thinking as you prepare your autobiography. The overall tone of the autobiography should be a narrative (story). These questions are here to guide you as you seek to tell and reflect on your own story.*

Guidelines for Writing a Theological Reflection Report: The L.E.A.R.N. Method of Reflection on Experience

Look back on recent experiences in your placement in which you personally played a role.

- Select one that stands out for you as particularly challenging, thought-provoking, puzzling – or that raised questions and dilemmas for you.

Elaborate and describe what happened during the event.

- Answer the basic questions of “who, what, when, where, and how.”
- Include your feelings and thoughts.
- How did you specifically respond? How did others respond?

Analyze the experience.

- What key issues seem to be operative in this situation (e.g. interpersonal dynamics, intrapersonal dynamics, power differentials, ministry dilemmas, value conflicts, sociocultural issues, communication issues, unclear assumptions, etc.)?
- What do you think influenced your responses and actions in this situation?
- What seemed to be effective? Ineffective?
- Why is this experience important to you?
- What specific questions are you bringing to the group for reflection?

Reflect theologically on the experience.

- What theological issues or themes are present in this situation?
- What Biblical stories, passages, images, metaphors or principles (not proof texts) seem applicable?
- What learning and insight from your studies/readings are relevant?
- How do you perceive God to be present in this situation?
- How does your denominational tradition inform this experience?

New insight for action.

- What insights have surfaced from your reflection that you can take with you into similar situations in the future?
- What do you want to remember to do, or avoid doing, in the future?
- What is your action plan?
- How do you perceive that this experience will shape you in the future?

Note: Maximum 5 typewritten pages.

Adapted by J. Clark Ph.D. from: Witmer, D. (1977). Reflective practice: What does it mean for me? Communique, 14.

Mid Year Reflection

Description from the Syllabus

Students will write and submit a mid-year reflection report that offers a reflection on how they believe their placement is progressing at the halfway point. The reflection should include a recap of activities that the student has participated in and some reflection on key points of learning. Most importantly the report should reflect on the progress being made toward the student's learning goals and any adjustments that need to be made. Honest reflection on positive strides made and places for further attention should be discussed. These reports will be presented to your external mentor and will form the basis for one of the student – mentor meetings.

Key Questions to Answer in your Reflection Report

1. What is the overall impression you have of your placement thus far?
2. What have been two of the best experiences you have had thus far?
3. What has been one or two challenges that you have faced?
4. Are there any key points of learning that you want to identify? Any new self discoveries? Any gifts or interests that you are discovering or are honing?
5. Offer an evaluation of your progress on your learning goals thus far. Are you on track? If not, what are some reasons for that? What, if any adjustments could be made for the second semester? What areas of focus could be identified to enhance your current progress thus far?