

A Guide to Best Practices in Community Ministry

Practical Wisdom by Community Ministry Practitioners
for Community Ministry Practitioners

2012 Edition



The Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries

Introduction

The origin of this Guide to Best Practices in Community Ministry is in the Community Ministry Summit held in June 2003. At the meeting a plan was created to develop documents that would help Community Ministry Practitioners. A two-step process was devised.

The first part, a Guide to Affiliation for UU Congregations and Parish Ministers, was completed and published in 2009. The Guide to Affiliation is intended to help Parish Ministers and congregations who are considering entering into Affiliation with a Community Minister who is in Ministerial Fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association. It is available from the websites of the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries and the Unitarian Universalist Association.

The second part of this plan is now complete with the publication of this document, A Guide to Best Practices for Community Ministry. This document is intended to be helpful to persons taking up the work of Community Ministry, be they clergy, laypersons or seminarians.

This Guide to Best Practices is envisioned as a “straight talk” sharing of wisdom created by Community Ministry Practitioners for Community Ministry Practitioners. Persons taking up a bi-vocational ministry that includes community work will also find it of value.

This Guide has two parts. The first is a series of questions and answers about Community Ministry that a Community Minister Practitioner might wish to use to explain his or her work. This section also defines the terms we use in this Guide and sets forth a basic understanding of Community Ministry Practice.

The second part of this Guide is an explication of what many Community Ministry Practitioners consider Best Practices for creating and sustaining a healthy and happy Community Ministry. It is organized into three sections: Boundaries, Business and Balance.

This Guide is intended to be a living document that will be revised as needed. The UUSCM Board is currently developing an ARAOMC Portfolio to cover antiracism, anti-oppression, and multicultural issues. We have subtitled this portfolio “Reconciliation and Creative Cultural Transformation,” and we look forward to adding materials to this Guide about that as the portfolio is developed.

The Board of Directors of the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries would like to thank all who contributed to the creation of this guide, especially the late Rev. Jody Shipley who first suggested it and the Revs. Deborah Holder and Maddie Sifantus who shepherded it through its early development. Thanks are also extended to the UU Funding Panel for providing funds for the earlier part of the project and to the Rev. Sarah Lammert at the Unitarian Universalist Association for several helpful suggestions.

Part One: Questions and Answers

1. What is Community Ministry?

Generally speaking, Community Ministry is ministry “beyond the walls” of the local congregation. Someone doing Community Ministry works with the wider community rather than with a gathered congregation. In many cases a Community Ministry Practitioner is not paid by a religious congregation but receives payment from the secular community itself in some way.

2. What is Ministerial Fellowship, and is it required for Community Ministry?

Persons who have had seminary training and who intend to undergo Ordination in the Unitarian Universalist tradition may choose to receive a form of certification from the Ministerial Fellowship Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Association called Fellowship. This is a rigorous process that requires specific training, education and reflection. Only those in Ministerial Fellowship are recommended to congregations by the Unitarian Universalist Association to work as parish ministers. However, Ministerial Fellowship is not required for many forms of Community Ministry Practice, and is never obtained by a layperson. Many laypersons practice Community Ministry without going through the Fellowshiping process.

3. What is a Community Ministry Practitioner?

In this Guide we use the term Community Ministry Practitioner to refer to any person lay or ordained, who is doing some form of Community Ministry Practice.

As this Guide to Best Practices is intended to assist all Community Ministry Practitioners, we use the more inclusive term where possible. However, be aware that it is equally appropriate to call a Community Ministry Practitioner who is a layperson a “Lay Community Minister,” while one who is a clergyperson can be referred to as a “Community Minister.” There is no standardization, and some people prefer one term rather than the other. All of these titles are considered appropriate, so long as care is taken that members of the public do not confuse laity and clergy.

4. Do all Community Ministry Practitioners have the same training?

Not at all. Community Ministry Practitioners vary widely in their training and interests. For many, it depends on the context in which they desire to practice.

Community Ministry Practitioners who seek to be denominationally recognized clergy in the Unitarian Universalist tradition are required to hold Ministerial Fellowship and have the same training as clergy who serve a congregation. They also may have additional specialized training such as in a secular field. Community Ministry Practitioners of this sort will often be engaged in some form of Community Ministry Practice that requires a high level of credentialing. An example would be Board Certified Hospital Chaplaincy, which requires ordination, denominational endorsement and several years of additional training.

Other forms of Community Ministry Practice may be done by a clergyperson without holding formal denominational recognition. An example might be Hospice Chaplaincy, which may be done by any ordained person without the additional level of training required for formal credentialing by a denomination.

Some forms of Community Ministry Practice can be done by either a clergyperson or a layperson, provided some other specific credential has been obtained. Examples include Pastoral Counseling or Spiritual Direction.

Finally, many forms of Community Ministry Practice can be done by any person who possesses the relevant skills. Examples would be Non-Violent Communication Consultants or Congregational Consultants.

Community Ministry Practitioners should always be careful how they describe themselves when offering services to the public. They have an ethical duty to be clear with regard to their training, credentials, services and limits.

5. Why would the work of a layperson be considered ministry?

Within Unitarian Universalism there is a lot of confusion around the term “minister” and the term “clergy.” They are not synonyms. Unfortunately in Unitarian Universalism we often confuse these two concepts, even in denominational documents. In this Guide we use these words in their strict sense as given below.

A minister is someone who does ministry. Ministry is behavior. It is the act of helping others for spiritual or theological reasons. There is a sense in which any person can be a minister if he or she engages in ministry. In the sense used in this Guide we distinguish ministry from secular work done for the common good (for example, social work or work for a charity). The difference is that ministry has an explicit grounding in a religious tradition or community that is not expected in secular work.

Members of the clergy have undergone a specific Rite of Passage called Ordination and who consider that experience pivotal in their sense of themselves. This identity is shaped by the denomination in which the ordination was conferred. For some denominations, ordination

reflects an identity conferred solely through an act of ordination by fellow clergy after a period of training and mentorship. Within Unitarian Universalism, ordination reflects an identity conferred by a congregation, and members of the congregation recognize that a particular individual's gifts of ministry so thoroughly shape that person's identity that the congregation wishes to recognize this fact through an Ordination Ceremony.

In the Ordination Ceremony, the mutuality of relationship established between the ordaining congregation and the ordinand is honored, along with hopes and expectations for the ordinand's ministry to future parishes or the larger community. Hence clergy status is an identity and not simply a behavior, though society may expect certain behaviors of clergy as well.

Within the Unitarian Universalist tradition, an ordained person may also seek Ministerial Fellowship from the Unitarian Universalist Association. This requires particular training, recognition and accountability. However, Ministerial Fellowship is separate from Ordination.

It should also be noted that ministers who are ordained by congregations but who are not in Ministerial Fellowship are often restricted by the Unitarian Universalist Association in their recognized ministries and status to the congregations that ordain them, and they generally do not receive professional services or assistance from the Unitarian Universalist Association.

In Unitarian Universalist polity and tradition, while the Unitarian Universalist Association may revoke Ministerial Fellowship, only the ordaining congregation has the right to revoke an ordination, in other words, to "defrock" a minister. Since this latter process is very rare in our historical tradition, the Unitarian Universalist Association views engaging in the Ministerial Fellowship Process as an additional best practice for clergy to enhance overall accountability.

While anyone can be a minister if he or she engages in ministry, there is no sense in which everyone can be a member of the clergy. Ministry is a behavior. Being a member of the clergy is an identity. Therefore, both laity and clergy can do ministry. However, laity are not clergy.

6. What are Congregational Affiliations and Congregational Covenants?

Many Community Ministry Practitioners find it helpful to have a relationship with a local congregation beyond that of simple membership. In these cases the congregation announces that it views the work of the Community Ministry Practitioner as an extension of its own work in the larger community it serves.

Typically, such relationships involve no compensation but do give the Community Ministry Practitioner visibility with a local congregation. Clergy who are going through the Ministerial Fellowship process are required by the Unitarian Universalist Association to have such a relationship for a minimum of three years. Beyond that, it is optional.

When a congregation forms such a relationship with a Community Ministry Practitioner who is a layperson, it is called a Covenant. When it is formed with a Community Ministry Practitioner who is a clergyperson, it is called an Affiliation.

From time to time it is common for congregational leaders to ask a Covenanted or Affiliated Community Ministry Practitioner to do some things “within the walls” of the local congregation. Examples might be occasional preaching, Rites of Passage, etc. However, care is always taken to make it clear that a Covenanted or Affiliated Community Ministry Practitioner is not the spiritual leader of the congregation.

7. What is a Business Entity?

Any Community Ministry Practice will have a legal existence of some sort and be subject to regulation by the Internal Revenue Service and State and Local Government. Most Community Ministry Practitioners need to set up some sort of legal structure for their work, unless they are employed by a community ministry agency, such as a hospital, and covered for liability by that agency. Examples of a Business Entity might be a Sole Proprietorship, a Partnership, a Professional Corporation, a Non-Profit Corporation or a Limited Liability Company. We call the legal structure that is selected by a Community Ministry Practitioner the Business Entity of the Community Ministry Practice.

8. Does the Unitarian Universalist Association provide a certification for laypersons who are Community Ministry Practitioners in the way it provides Ministerial Fellowship for clergypersons?

Not at the present time. However, consideration is being given toward the creation of some form of endorsement and accountability for laypersons engaged in Community Ministry Practice. Beyond this, membership in good standing in the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries means that a Community Ministry Practitioner has agreed to follow specific Standards of Practice and is held accountable to the Society for doing so through our Good Offices process.

Part Two: Best Practices

Boundaries

It is generally believed that it is a sign of health to have good boundaries for oneself, and it is appropriate to expect others to have the same. For complex organizations to function smoothly, duly constituted roles must be protected, and for human communities to be healthy, covenants need to be respected.

One of the greatest sources of tension in Community Ministry concerns the issue of boundaries between the Community Ministry Practitioner, congregations and Parish Ministers. Therefore, it is a Best Practice to minimize the possibility for misunderstanding by having obvious boundaries and good agreements between yourself and others. These boundaries should be clear, simple and easy to say so that you can fit them into almost every introduction you make for yourself and they can be the basis for any professional agreements you may write.

Best Practice: Join the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries

This Best Practice should be the first step on your path: become and remain a member in good standing of the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries. UUSCM is the independent professional association for Community Ministry Practitioners in the Unitarian Universalist Association. Being a member will set a boundary between yourself and persons who are not Community Ministry Practitioners.

For laypersons, UUSCM is intended to be the primary link between Unitarian Universalism and yourself. While you may have other professional associations that certify aspects of your work (such as coaching or spiritual direction), UUSCM will be what ties you into the flow of information about and connection with the UUA and with your fellow Community Ministry Practitioners. For you, the relationship with UUSCM will be very much like the relationship Parish Ministers have to the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association.

Clergypersons who choose to also belong to the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association will find that membership in UUSCM becomes an important supplement. It will bring you into regular contact with colleagues who understand and speak the language of entrepreneurial ministry. They will understand your ministry in a deeper way than do colleagues who primarily serve a congregation. UUSCM will be your advocate with the denomination and with the UUMA, should that be needed.

Some clergypersons may find membership in UUSCM sufficient and settle into our organization as their primary ministerial association. As a matter of policy, UUSCM neither encourages nor

discourages this. However, we will always strive to be the best professional association we can be.

Best Practice: Use Clear Titles

An excellent place to set a good boundary is in what you call yourself. The selection of your Title of Practice will set the stage for all interactions you have with colleagues and congregations.

If you are a member of the laity, be sure to introduce yourself that way. Make it clear that you expect the formal address of “Mr.,” “Ms.,” or “Mrs.” or whatever formal address you feel is appropriate. However, never allow yourself to be addressed as “Reverend” by accident. Go out of your way to correct that if anyone makes a conversational mistake in your hearing. This may seem silly, but it will be deeply reassuring to Parish Ministers and clarifying to congregational leaders. It is also an ethical practice not to misrepresent yourself or to allow yourself to be misrepresented.

If you are a member of the clergy who was ordained by another religious community or by a Unitarian Universalist congregation, but you are not in Ministerial Fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association, do not conceal that. Never permit a congregational leader or parish colleague to assume that you are in Ministerial Fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association unless you are. While it would be acceptable to expect to be addressed as “Reverend” or, if you possess an earned doctorate, as “Doctor,” always make a point to clarify that you are not in Fellowship when introduced to congregational leaders and especially to parish colleagues. You will lose no points for being clear. You may disqualify yourself in the eyes of others by failing to be clear. Again, this is an ethical issue regarding accurate representation.

The Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries recommends that all ordained members, or members seeking ordination, apply for Ministerial Fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association. Ministerial Fellowship is the “gold standard” for legitimacy and accountability if you want to be considered as a member of the clergy. The improvement in your perceived legitimacy and accountability will be well worth the time and effort, as will the additional national access to collegial clergy relationships.

However, the issue of Ministerial Fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association is difficult for some. The process is rigorous and time-consuming and is not needed for many forms of Community Ministry Practice. Certifying Organizations and Licensing Boards often do not require it nor do many organizations that employ Community Ministers. One does not have to look far to find examples of colleagues who did not fare well with the Ministerial Fellowship process, but who went on to have successful careers in Community Ministry Practice. That said, the benefits of Ministerial Fellowship are significant and that forms the basis of our recommendation.

Finally, a factor to bear in mind is that some community ministers become parish ministers later in their career and vice versa. If you believe there is any chance you might creatively flow back and forth in the location of your ministry, or develop hybrid ministries, then you may find it beneficial to seek Ministerial Fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Best Practice: Set Good Congregational Boundaries

Another area where you have an opportunity to set a good boundary is in your relationship with Parish Ministers and the congregations they serve.

Community Ministry Practitioners have a choice. While you must be a member of a Unitarian Universalist Congregation to be a member in good standing of the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries, there is no requirement to do more than that. Deeper relationships with a congregation, hereafter called Affiliation or Covenant, are optional for everyone except those in the Preliminary Fellowship process with the Unitarian Universalist Association.

If you choose not to seek an Affiliated or Covenanted relationship with a Unitarian Universalist Congregation, your relationship to that congregation is identical in every respect to that of any other member. You would be well advised to be mindful of the concerns and recommendations given below, but you are under no obligation to do so.

However, if you wish to have a formal relationship with a Unitarian Universalist congregation in which your ministry is recognized, then you should seek an Affiliation Agreement if you are, or are seeking to be, ordained. If you are a Lay Community Minister you will seek a Covenant Agreement.

Best Practice: Have a Clear Affiliation or Covenant Agreement

A Covenant Agreement with a congregation is a written document in the form of a Letter of Agreement with the congregational Board of Directors, Board of Trustees or perhaps the congregation as a whole. It sets out that the work of a Community Ministry Practitioner who is a layperson is understood as “ministry” within the tradition of Unitarian Universalism but that the Community Ministry Practitioner is not understood as a member of the clergy.

Members of the clergy are empowered to speak with some degree of authority on matters of faith and practice. The Letter of Agreement in a Covenant relationship should make it clear that as a layperson, the Community Ministry Practitioner will not seek to do that.

An Affiliation Agreement with a congregation is similar to that of a Covenant Agreement, except that it states that the Affiliated Community Minister is recognized as a member of the clergy.

The Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries publishes an exhaustive [Guide to Affiliation for Unitarian Universalist Congregations and Parish Ministers](#). It is available from the UUSCM website at www.UUSCM.org and from the Unitarian Universalist Association directly. We recommend its careful study. For clergy seeking examples of affiliation agreements, the UUSCM provides such examples in our "Members Only" section of the website.

Best Practice: Avoid Congregational Politics

There are many examples where the addition of an Affiliated or Covenanted Community Ministry Practitioner to a congregation has been a wonderful experience for all involved. This is especially true when all parties perceive the work of the Community Ministry Practitioner as extending the work of the congregation into the larger community. This sort of win-win scenario must always be the goal. However, it is also true that many Parish Ministers lack education in or awareness of Community Ministry practice issues, needs, and potential congregational value. Some Parish Ministers may present themselves as less than enthusiastic about your presence and as an additional possible political complication in the life of the congregation. This requires patience and persistence on your part, as well as networking with the wisdom of your colleagues in the UUSCM.

In order for a Community Ministry Practitioner to be understood as a congregational asset by a Parish Minister, the latter must be confident that the Community Ministry Practitioner will not allow him or herself to be drawn into congregational relationship systems in an unhealthy way. The Community Ministry Practitioner must always be vigilant. However, if the Community Ministry Practitioner is careful about such matters, a mutually supportive relationship can come to exist between the Practitioner and the Parish Minister to the benefit of both. Again, a clearly established written agreement with boundaries can be helpful in establishing this relationship."

Even the healthiest congregations have an internal political and psychological life. Stories and scripts from Families of Origin and past congregational patterns are acted out in the life of every congregation. The Community Ministry Practitioner should assume that there are always some in every congregation who are unhappy with the current state-of-affairs. The Community Ministry Practitioner should assume that there will always be some who will seek to co-opt any perceived authority the Community Ministry Practitioner has in service to an agenda of dissent. There is no way to win this game except not to play.

If you allow yourself to be drawn into political or personal conflicts in a congregation, you will lose something. You may lose the support of some in the congregation, or you may lose the support of the Parish Minister. In terms of the political life of a congregation, it is a Best Practice for the Community Ministry Practitioner to stay as neutral as possible.

A good way to promote appropriate boundaries with a congregation is to encourage any congregation that Affiliates or Covenants with a Community Ministry Practitioner to amend the Parish Minister's title to that of "Senior Minister," even if there are no other ministers serving the congregation. Understand that this is simply something to consider. In some cases congregational bylaws may require a different titling arrangement. However, we believe it will be of value in many cases.

It must always be remembered that in most situations it is the Parish Minister alone who has received a Congregational Call to serve a congregation. An Affiliated or Covenanted Community Ministry Practitioner has, at most, a Letter of Agreement that can be rescinded at any time. There is no comparison in congregational authority between the Parish Minister and a Community Ministry Practitioner. The Parish Minister is the spiritual leader of the congregation.

Community Ministry Practitioners will find it a Best Practice to keep a low profile with an Affiliated or Covenanted Congregation and to allow that profile to grow as trust is built over a period of years. Many also find it helpful to negotiate a Letter of Understanding between themselves and the Parish Minister that can cover other aspects of their relationship.

To avoid role confusion, it is wise for a Community Ministry Practitioner to decline elected office within the congregation.

As a member of the clergy it is not unusual for an Affiliated Community Ministry Practitioner to occasionally function as a celebrant for Rites of Passage, to preach, or to assist in the pastoral care or counseling of the congregation at the request of the Parish Minister.

As a member of the laity, a Covenanted Community Ministry Practitioner will not normally do this except with both the explicit permission of the Parish Minister and explicit authorization from the Church Board.

Business

All Community Ministry Practices have a business side. They must be funded. They must abide by the law. You do yourself no favors if you ignore these requirements.

Best Practice: Know How To Monetize Your Ministry

If you are planning on setting up a Community Ministry Practice, one of the first questions you must answer is how you are going to "monetize" your Practice. That is, how are you going to get paid for what you want to do? There are basically six ways.

First, you can get a job with an organization or corporation that will hire you. This is what institutional Chaplains do. They become employees of a Health Care System, a prison, college or some other organization and receive a regular paycheck and benefits package.

The next five options are available for you if you plan on doing an entrepreneurial Community Ministry Practice. They are:

Fee-for-service. This is private practice in its simplest form. You minister to people who pay you for the service. Examples would be a Pastoral Counselor or a Spiritual Director in private practice. There are some legal issues with this model and they are discussed below.

Direct contribution ministry. In this model you hold what you are doing out to the public as a charity and ask people to make contributions to fund your work. There are legal issues that you must meet in order to be able to do this lawfully and to allow the people who make the contributions to take a tax deduction for their donations.

Grant-funded ministry. In this form of ministry you fund your work by soliciting grant money from charitable organizations that provide funding for benevolent work. An example of this form of ministry would be urban ministry agencies that provide assistance to runaways, drug addicts, or sex workers.

Business-ministry partnerships. In this form of ministry you are working as a consultant or contractor to businesses and organizations that pay you for your services or provide other services in lieu of payment. An example of this form of ministry would a congregational consultant with a conflict management organization.

Church-ministry partnerships. In this form of ministry you receive funding from a worshipping community to do a specific form of ministry in the community. An example might be someone hired by a congregation to run a food pantry.

Best Practice: Resolve All Legal Issues

Community Ministry Practices must conform to the law. You will need to set up a Business Entity and should seek guidance from an attorney licensed to practice law in your state. The rules vary dramatically from state to state.

If you set your Business Entity up as a non-profit corporation you must obtain approval from the Internal Revenue Service and often from your State Government, which will set further rules in terms of financial reporting. For example, you may be required to submit a Certified Financial Audit each year. In addition, you will need to have a governing board, officers, annual meetings, corporate minutes and other things that your attorney will explain to you.

The simplest form of Business Entity is the Sole Proprietorship. In this model you are in business for yourself. Funds received are income and funds spent are expenses. Any funds remaining belong to you. However, depending on your credentials and applicable state law, this model may not be available to you. You can create your Business Entity as a Sole Proprietorship only if you possess the necessary secular credentials to do what you want to do.

As a Community Minister Practitioner you will be earning your livelihood as a helping professional. In order to protect the public from people who would abuse a position of trust to take advantage of others, secular governments have laws about who may do certain helping activities. Some of those laws exempt people who are engaged in the practice of a legal ministry, some do not. You must make certain that your Community Ministry Practice does not run afoul of applicable laws.

Many people mistakenly think that because something feels spiritual to them or is part of their religious practice, they are entitled to do it. However, this is not true. For example, there are religious groups that authentically consider the use of certain drugs or the practice of polygamy part of their religion. Yet the secular governments can and do prohibit those activities.

A couple of examples may help make this clear as it applies to Community Ministry.

The first example is Susan. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who became a UU minister. She wants to set up a practice in pastoral counseling. She's good to go. While almost all states regulate who can practice counseling as a livelihood, Susan's social worker license lets her do so. She can open her practice, and it doesn't matter what sort of Business Entity she sets up. She has a secular license to do the counseling she wants to do.

The second example is Jack. He got his M.Div with a strong emphasis in pastoral care and has done advanced units of CPE and a training program in pastoral psychology. He wants to set up a practice in pastoral counseling. He's got a problem. In his state only social workers, professional counselors and clinical psychologists can practice counseling. His M.Div. does not qualify him to sit for the license exams for any of these professions.

However, there is still a way for Jack to do what he wants to do. All of the license laws mentioned above contain an exemption that allow a "person engaged in the practice of religious ministry" to counsel without needing to be licensed. So Jack can open up his pastoral counseling practice but he's got to set up his Business Entity as a ministry, meeting the organizational and operational tests described below. If he uses any other business structure he is breaking the law by engaging in the unlicensed practice of psychology, counseling or social work. Note that it does not matter if Jack is ordained or not. The exemption only applies because the work he is doing qualifies as a ministry in his state by meeting the organizational and operational tests.

The government applies two legal tests to determine if what you are doing is ministry rather than a business that should be taxed and regulated.

The first test is the “organizational” test. Simply, the government will verify that whatever legal entity you set up (a professional corporation, a non-profit corporation, a sole proprietorship or a limited liability company) has its paperwork in order so that it falls within the Religious Corporation Laws of the state where you practice. Assuming that your attorney did a proper job when you set up your business entity, and that you have continued to keep the paperwork in order, this test is not a difficult one to meet.

The second test is more of a problem in many Community Ministry Practices. This test is called the “operational” test. Your State Government has a right to examine what you are doing and to decide if it looks more like a ministry or more like a private business. You cannot simply operate a business and call it a ministry.

The major way the operational test is applied is to examine how the money that passes through your Business Entity is handled. No ministry can be run for the enrichment of any person. While a ministry can pay its staff a reasonable compensation, you cannot simply run a business, pay your expenses and put the balance in your pocket. There must be some larger, obviously charitable purpose that is being served.

In the case of Community Ministry Practices that are doing things like street ministry, food pantries or social justice work, the charitable purpose is obvious. In cases like a Pastoral Counseling practice the situation becomes somewhat more murky.

If the Pastoral Counselor is working on a sliding scale to insure that no one is turned away who needs help, the government would almost certainly agree that this serves a charitable purpose. If the Pastoral Counselor does not offer a sliding scale but has some other charitable program, that would also qualify. However, if the practice of Pastoral Counseling appears otherwise identical to a for-profit practice of Clinical Psychology, there would likely be a problem.

The place to consider these matters is in the formulation of your Business Plan as discussed below. Unless you are absolutely certain that what you want to do is legal in your state, be sure you consult an attorney as part of creating your business plan.

Finally, if you are a member of the clergy and your Community Ministry Practice is Affiliated with a congregation or other religious corporation, the board of the congregation or corporation may be able to authorize that part of the revenue of the Community Ministry Practice be considered a Housing Allowance which can be an important tax benefit. Consult with an attorney knowledgeable about ministerial tax law to be sure.

Best Practice: Follow the Rules

Almost every helping profession has one or more organizations that provide credentials and enforce a Code of Ethics and Standard of Care. In the case of regulated health professions such as Psychology or Social Work, the Code of Ethics may be legally enforceable.

Unitarian Universalist Ministry also has rules. Members of ministerial associations such as the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association or the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries have agreed to follow specific Codes of Practice and Guidelines. In addition, the Ministerial Fellowship Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Association has its own set of rules and policies.

You must follow all applicable rules in your Community Ministry Practice. Unfortunately, you may discover that there are circumstances where the rules conflict.

For example, in all states Social Workers are required reporters for child abuse and must contact state agencies when they learn of it. However, in some states clergy are specifically exempted from required reporting laws. This would leave a member of the clergy who is also a Social Worker with a dilemma.

A similar example might arise when a congregation votes to immediately close down a public service program, but the Community Ministry Practitioner is also a Psychologist and is under a legal obligation not to “abandon” clients. He or she must find a way to transition all clients to another provider and cannot therefore close immediately.

In most cases the appropriate action is to consult legal counsel to determine what your obligations are as a Community Ministry Practitioner. Usually you are required to make a good faith effort to follow the most rigorous rule. However, if circumstances do not permit you to do that, the fact that a good faith attempt was made may discharge liability provided you retain records that show you made the attempt.

In cases involving the required reporting of child abuse, drug abuse, reckless endangerment or similar social problems, the legal situation can vary immensely depending on case law in your state. Legal consultation is strongly urged should you find yourself in this situation. It is not difficult to find examples of laypersons and clergypersons who got into trouble because they assumed they knew what to do in these situations.

Best Practice: Have a Business Plan

Sincerely believing that God will provide is not a Business Plan.

It is amazing how many colleagues leap into a Community Ministry Practice with minimal planning. It is not amazing how many quickly fail. To be successful you need a Business Plan. Some prefer to call this a Ministry Plan, and if that pleases you that is fine. However, for all practical purposes they are identical.

In a Business Plan you set down on paper what you want to do and how you propose to do it. You write about the services you will provide. You rough out an estimate of your overhead expenses to provide those services. You set down how much you need to earn to cover your expenses, provide yourself with a living and fund an obvious charitable purpose.

Further, you examine your “market” or the nature and resources of the people you want to provide ministry services to. You estimate their ability or willingness to pay you, and you explain how you will reconcile that with the amount you need to earn. You take a good look at any competitors and figure out how you will deal with them. Finally, you explain how you will fund your ministry over a “start-up curve” so that it eventually becomes financially stable.

There are a number of excellent training and certificate programs in entrepreneurship which could be valuable to you as you make these plans. Also, the Small Business Administration also coordinates training programs in how to create a Business Plan and obtaining start-up financing.

All this may seem like a lot of work. However, if you dedicate a week to creating the Business Plan, you will find it is actually quite straightforward.

If you are seeking investors or the support of other organizations in setting up your Community Ministry Practice, your business plan should take the form of a bound document that follows standard templates that you can easily find on the Internet or in software that will walk you through the creation of a good Business Plan.

If you are not seeking outside support for your ministry, your Business Plan can be much less formal. However, you will find the discipline of creating it to be immensely helpful in the years ahead. It can keep you from making expensive mistakes.

Much of the resistance reported by those setting up Community Ministry Practices to creating a Business Plan is that it makes one answer hard questions and wrestle with issues. However, it is far better to do that before you have taken the leap of opening up your Community Ministry Practice than after.

It would be wise to do the following calculation before entering entrepreneurial ministry.

1. Determine your overhead. This is the cost of rent, health and liability insurance, legal and accounting fees, supplies and the cost of any other services you may need (such as secretarial, accounting or attorney fees). If you plan to keep your overhead low by working from a home office, be sure to check that your zoning allows a home office for the purpose you intend.

2. Determine how much you need to make from your ministry to have a reasonable lifestyle. Be honest. This sum will be your primary material reward for your work. You have to provide for your family, your retirement, your medical care and such quality of life as you wish to have.

3. Determine how much you are willing to work. Will your ministry be full- or part-time? If you are going to work full-time, how many hours does that represent? Are you planning on working no more than 40 hours each week, or do you think 60 hours each week is more reasonable?

4. Determine how many of your work hours will be paid hours. In most helping professions, even when a practice is fully established, each paid hour represents at least another hour of work for which you are not paid. In a start-up situation, the balance is more likely to be three or four unpaid hours worked for each paid hour.

For example, a Pastoral Counselor who works a 40-hour week will probably spend only 15 hours each week meeting with clients. The other 25 hours will be marketing, record keeping, study, planning, etc. So a 40 hour week is really only 15 paid hours. Also, it is unlikely that you will want to work 52 weeks per year. You will want some time off and may need time away for continuing education. A 48- or 44- week year is more reasonable.

Do the math. Let's assume you are a Spiritual Director. You want to work a 44-week year and about 40 hours a week. You can reasonably expect that you will be paid only for 20 of the hours you work each week once your Community Ministry Practice is well established.

Therefore, your work year consists of at most 880 paid hours per year and another 880 hours that you will spend marketing, record keeping, planning or developing resources.

Let's assume you want to earn \$40,000 per year before taxes. You have fixed expenses of \$10,000 each year for rent, fees, etc. You also want to save 10% for pension and your health insurance will cost you \$14,000 per year. Therefore, you need to earn \$64,000 each year to run this practice as you want. As you will work only 880 paid hours each year, your clients will need to pay you about \$73 per hour.

Your Business Plan is where you ask yourself if that is reasonable. For example, what are other Spiritual Directors in your area charging? If the average charge is \$25, there is a problem. If the average charge is \$125 then you may want to charge more than \$73 per hour.

Further, as indicated above, realize there is no possibility that you will have that many clients at your start. It will probably take you three to five years to build your practice to that level, and even then most solo practitioners would consider 20 client contact hours a week to be an absolute maximum. It might be more reasonable to plan for 15 client contact hours each week.

How will you stay open during the three to five years it will take to build your client base? Do you need a bridge job or another source of income from grants, donations, workshops, the sale of books, CDs or other products, etc.? Don't open your doors until you have these questions answered.

A similar sort of calculation should be done for whatever form of Community Ministry Practice you want to undertake. How much will it cost? What are the overhead expenses you must cover? How much do you need to have available? How will you get that? What sort of competition do you have?

Best Practice: Practice like it is the 21st Century

As a Community Ministry Practitioner, you are most likely in competition with secular providers of services similar to your own. Even if you are an obvious non-profit ministry, you will still face competition from secular charities.

All of your meaningful competition will be using technology to market and deliver services. You will need to do so as well. If the secular consultant shows up to deliver a lecture using a polished PowerPoint Presentation, you will not look credible if you stand up with a handful of index cards. There is no faster way to discredit yourself in the eyes of your target audience than to appear clueless about the technology of the contemporary global marketplace. You have to create a "brand" for your Community Ministry Practice that will help you appear credible.

Here are some things to reflect upon as you construct your "brand." Organizational consultant Michael Hyatt suggests attention to details such as those paraphrased below:

- What does your email address suggest about you? An email address that takes the form of "firstname.lastname@gmail.com" looks much more professional than one that takes the form of "sexydude345xxx@hotmail.com."
- Most people use the automatic signature feature of email software to put a note at the end of each email. What does yours say about your Community Ministry Practice? Be sure it appears as a complement to your brand.
- You will probably need a brochure and business cards. Rather than just throwing together something, it may prove well worth the cost to pay a designer to put them together for you. The same goes for your website. Resist the temptation to fill your website and brochure with dense blocks of text. Today people skim as they read. They expect short sentences, brief paragraphs and lots of graphics. Your brochure and website should not be miniature versions of an academic paper.

- Regardless of how you feel about it, your social networking profile will be important. All practitioners of helping professions use on-line social networks to build connections between themselves and their client base. You will need to do the same. You should construct your social network profile with care. There are many good books on the subject and there are consultants who will be happy to help you.

People who go into helping professions tend to be “high touch” persons rather than “high tech,” and there is often a reticence to acquire computer and technology skills. Be that as it may, technology is the force that drives our society, and you do not have the option of ignoring it if you want to be successful. It is the way professionals hold out services to the public in today’s world. That is not going to change, even if it takes you out of your comfort zone.

Balance

All forms of ministry are stressful. Unless a Community Ministry Practitioner is careful that stress can adversely affect health, relationship, spirituality and mood. You owe it to the ministry you want to practice to keep your life in a healthy balance.

Best Practice: Practice Good Self-Care

Protecting the principal tool of your trade is a good idea.

As a helping professional, the Community Ministry Practitioner’s primary tool is his or her personality and sense of self. What you do in your Community Ministry is heavily affected by who you are as a person. As they interact with you, other people get a sense of your emotional, psychological and spiritual condition. If they perceive you as exhausted, unhappy or upset, you will lose personal authority with them and will be unable to help them.

Just as a musician takes steps to protect the instrument he or she plays, wise helping professionals know that self-care is the first step to helping others. You cannot be there for others if you have not first been there for yourself.

Yet self-care is often not encouraged among religious workers. Perhaps it is the darker side of religious culture that encourages us to “sacrifice” ourselves for others. Religious workers in every denomination report a higher than average incidence of burnout and other symptoms of exhaustion.

Therefore, self-care and balanced living are Best Practices for Community Ministry Practitioners.

As a first step you should remember that the intense emotional circumstances you will encounter in your Community Ministry will affect you. There is no way to avoid this. There will be times when you will feel upset, outraged, angry or frustrated. You will face compassion fatigue, burnout, behavioral problems, relationship disruptions. You may even have to cope with threats of physical harm.

Compassion Fatigue is an emotional condition caused by secondary trauma. Another name for this problem is Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder. That is, the energy you expend helping someone who has experienced a major life trauma causes such a drain on your own emotional system that you pick up some of the characteristics of the trauma secondhand. For example, if you counsel a rape victim you may find that the experience affects your own sexual life with your partner in an adverse way. Over time Compassion Fatigue results in an inability to empathize with others due to an unspoken fear that doing so harms oneself.

Burnout is an emotional state where your own coping mechanisms have become so overwhelmed by the demands of your work that you go numb emotionally. This numbness can extend to all emotional circumstances in your life so that you are unable to take joy in your own accomplishments and successes. Such numbness also can cause you to make poor ethical decisions and compromise your ministry.

Best Practice: Have an Early Warning System

Experienced Community Ministry Practitioners develop ways to observe themselves and look for signs of trouble due to lack of self-care. Typical signs are insomnia (the inability to sleep well) or hypersomnia (the desire to sleep all the time), unhealthy eating habits (it is no accident that helping professionals often become overweight), increased use of alcohol or other mood-altering drugs, low energy, inappropriate anger, excessive spending, gambling, crying, fighting with loved ones or fighting with ministry team members.

Many Community Ministry Practitioners find journal keeping, spiritual direction, or supportive psychotherapy useful tools to function as an “early warning system” of emotional problems ahead. Often, in team ministry situations the members of the team have permission to confront one another if they see signs of a lack of self-care.

Best Practice: Have Self-Care Accountability, Techniques and Insight

At times of great stress, experienced Community Ministry Practitioners pull back and create a self-care plan, or re-emphasize a plan they already have in place.

One of the first things to do is to reach out to others, be they partners, team members, colleagues, spiritual directors or counselors. It is never a good idea to try to improve self-care without some accountability to another person. This accountability will keep you mindful of the need to take care of yourself.

A good second step is to revise your work environment to make it more appealing, and to include in every day some activity that you will find enjoyable.

Many helping professionals create rituals such as prayer, meditation or visualizations to remind themselves not to let the emotional state of the people being helped contaminate the mental or spiritual health of the helping professional.

An example of such a ritual might be a visualization where the helping professional imagines him or herself encased in a protective “bubble” so that only a “safe dose” of anguish can get through from another person. Some consultants advocate imagining the troubled energy of other people being washed away every time the helping professional takes a shower. Such rituals may seem silly, but they can be surprisingly effective.

Finally, seek to avoid an over-focus on your ministry. Your helping work should not define you. It is only one part of your life. You should also have a relationship life, a spiritual life, hobbies and other passions. If your work requires giving your time and energy to others, be sure you have strength-based activities elsewhere in your schedule to provide a balance.

Best Practice: Use a Good Officer

It is never a good idea to face trouble alone. We all benefit from consultation and support. When problems arise in your Community Ministry Practice you can reach out to a colleague by asking him or her to function as a support person or as a professional advocate. We call such colleagues “Good Officers” when they are in that role.

In the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries, one Board officer carries the Good Offices Portfolio. He or she may offer to render support and advocacy directly in some cases, or will guide you to another colleague who can function in that role. Do not hesitate to contact the UUSCM Good Offices Director if you are in difficulty.

However, as Community Ministry Practitioners often make their living as helping professionals, please understand that all Good Officers in the Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries will set limits around how much help they extend. It is not appropriate to expect to become a nonpaying client of a colleague because he or she agreed to help you with a problem. Good Offices interventions are focused and short-term. They do not become on-going helping relationships.

Best Practice: Support the Unitarian Universalist Association and its Member Congregations

Finally, there is a Best Practice that we lift up in closing. As religious professionals, Community Ministry Practitioners need to be involved in the Unitarian Universalist Association. In most cases this will mean, at a minimum, active participation in a member congregation. In many cases it will mean more. While a Community Ministry Practitioner should decline elected office at the congregational level, he or she should consider becoming an active participant at the District, Regional or National level of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Community Ministry Practitioners should be Unitarian Universalists par excellence.

While all of the best practices listed in this Guide may seem daunting at first, they are a distillation of much practical knowledge from your experienced colleagues. When setting up a ministry that will be fulfilling as well as one that will support you, care must be taken. This Guide can be a reliable friend.