



Guidelines for Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) Project Proposals and Examination

The Ministry Project

The Ministry Project will involve the design, implementation, and evaluation of an action in ministry. That is, you are going to **do** something, introducing something new into your ministry. What you do should address a significant situation or issue within your ministry setting, something that you and your partners in ministry care about. The project should set out a strategy to effect change that will transform and/or intensify the faith and practice of your ministry community. And you should be able to reflect on what happens in a way that makes your learning relevant beyond your particular community and therefore adds to the general body of knowledge about and practice of ministry. Becoming a “doctor” of ministry means that you have learned something new about how ministry happens and are able to reflect on that learning in a way that enables you to be a “teacher” of ministry.

Deciding what to do

The *Colleague Seminars* offer you the opportunity to develop the basic components of your Ministry Project Proposal. During the first two years of the program, as you deepen your understanding of your ministry context, explore and articulate your theology of ministry, and sharpen your skills in the practice of ministry, you will lay the foundation for your Project. What you choose to do should be thoroughly grounded in what you have learned about your setting and about your own theology and practice of ministry.

Because Ministry Projects are grounded in a particular place, you should also think early about how to involve participants *within your ministry* (or other appropriate partners) in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Ministry Project. Most students will put together a D.Min. support group that can be an important sounding board and partner in developing a focus for the Project.

In addition for information you receive in the first two years of Colleague Seminars, the most important person in this process is your *faculty advisor*. You should work closely with your *advisor* throughout your program, but especially as you begin to focus and clarify your thinking about the Project. *Approval by the advisor is required before a proposal may be submitted for examination.*

Ministry Project Proposal Workshop

Each year, in May or early June, a *Ministry Project Proposal Workshop* will be offered to introduce students to the procedures for preparing a proposal. This one-day, non-credit workshop may be attended at any point in your program, but must be completed before the Proposal is submitted for examination.

Writing the Proposal

The writing of the Proposal is both a necessary step toward completing your Project and a means of demonstrating that you have gained the learning and skill necessary to proceed. This document is your “qualifying exam.” The faculty will be looking for evidence that (a) the issue is sufficiently defined and delimited to be manageable, (b) the issue is broad enough to be of more than merely parochial interest, and (c) the proposed action of ministry has promise as a means of addressing the issue.

Of course, the best demonstration that you have the necessary insight and skill will be in the coherence and appropriateness of what you propose to do. However, you should also be explicit about the learning on which you are drawing, showing how what you plan to do is informed by an understanding of the social and cultural context, how it is

grounded in theology of ministry, and how it draws on the best insights of those who have thought about and practiced the kinds of ministry you propose. Your sources should be named and appropriately cited throughout the proposal. This is not simply a “review of the literature,” but it should demonstrate that you *know* what others have had to say about the issues and strategies you plan to engage.

Submitting the Ministry Project Proposal

You may submit a Proposal when:

- (a) you have successfully completed your Colleague Seminars I and II, and
- (b) you have completed at least four electives, and
- (c) you have attended the Proposal Workshop, and
- (d) you have the approval of your advisor.

The approval of your advisor usually means that you have submitted a preliminary draft to him or her, received comments, and revised the Proposal to his/her satisfaction. You should assume that it will be at least a few weeks between when you give your advisor a first draft and when you are ready to be examined. Examinations usually take place between September and May.

Contents of the Ministry Project Proposal

1) Ministry Project Title: The title should describe the ministry project in clear, concise language so someone who sees the title knows what the project is about. Your goal is to describe the project, not sell a book.

Good Title: “Strengthening Grace Episcopal Church’s Ministry with Families through a Program of Intergenerational Retreats.”

Bad Title: “From Brokenness to Wholeness: the experience of a Congregation.”

2) The proposal should begin with a succinct statement of what you hope to accomplish. What are your goals, and how will your project move toward those goals? This should be no more than 1-2 paragraphs.

3) You should give explicit attention to how this Project addresses and grows out of the realities of internal and external to your setting of ministry. Why this Project in this place? What do you understand about the social and cultural realities of your setting that has helped you think about how to lead toward change? Here you should be drawing on the work you did in your first year Colleague Seminar. This section will usually be 4-6 pages in length.

4) You should include an explication of the theology that calls forth the proposed Project’s action. What do you believe about the nature of the church, ministry, and God’s activity in the world that draws you to this proposed action? Why is this ministry fitting? Here you should include attention to scholarly theological sources, as well as to appropriate sacred traditions, to relevant theoretical analyses, as well as your own experiences and convictions. This section should draw on the work you did in the fall of your second Colleague Seminar year and will usually be 4-6 pages in length.

5) There should be a detailed outline of the transformative actions you wish to undertake. This need not be a complete set of all the plans and resources, but it should include sufficient detail to make clear how you actually hope to achieve your goals. What do you actually plan to do? Additionally supporting details (e.g., sample sermon outlines, lesson plans, event descriptions, and the like) may be added in an appendix. This outline will normally be 3-5 pages in length.

6) Having described what you are going to do, you should discuss why you have chosen these particular strategies. On what theoretical and practical wisdom are you drawing? How are your actions grounded in an understanding of the specific practices of ministry you will use? For example: what theories of learning, change, conflict management, communication, spiritual formation, etc., are relevant to your work? The work you did in the spring of your second year should be helpful here. This section will normally be 3-5 pages in length.

7) Finally, there should be a brief description of how you plan to evaluate the proposed Ministry Project. How will you know what happened and why? What will count as “success” and why? How will you gather information on the responses

of participants? What sorts of changes will you be watching for? This section will normally be 1-2 pages.

8) You should end with a brief statement about what sort of support you have for the project from (1) those in your ministry setting (both participants in the project and support for/ownership of the project by your governing board) and (2) various Seminary and other advisors. Who will be helping you, and how will they be doing it? This will usually be a paragraph.

9) The text of the proposal will be followed by a bibliography. The first section of the bibliography will be the “works cited” in the Proposal itself. The second will be a list of “additional resources” you anticipate using in your project. While the faculty recognizes the bibliography will grow and change through the course of your project, it is important that a provisional bibliography be developed at this stage. The bibliography must be in proper academic form.

10) After the bibliography, add any appendices you deem useful in helping the committee to understand the details of the project you propose. Examples of items to be included in the appendices are sample sermon outlines, lesson plans, event descriptions, sample questionnaires, etc.

11) The total length of the proposal should be 20-25 pages—double spaced, 10-12 point type, with margins of 1 inch all around. Consult the Seminary’s *Guidelines for Writing a Research Paper* for detailed instructions on format.

Other Items to Submit with the Proposal

You should make copies of your theology of ministry paper from the fall semester of the second year of the Colleague Seminar for your examining committee. The paper will not be the subject of the exam, but will serve as background for the committee.

Also, you should provide a detailed time-line for completion of your D.Min. work. The time-line should include any remaining course work to be completed and should project a date for the project’s completion and submission of the final report.

The Examination

Scheduling the Exam

When you and your advisor are satisfied that your Proposal is ready, you should go to the Dean’s office to request the scheduling of the candidacy exam. Before you go, you and your advisor should agree on several possible dates, generally at least two weeks after you make your request. Examinations normally take place between September and May.

The Exam

During the examination you and your committee will have a collegial discussion of the ministry you propose. They may ask you to explain why you have chosen certain strategies, or they may ask you to expand or clarify what you have written. The goal of the discussion is to work together to produce a clearly focused and doable project.

At the end of the discussion, the committee will normally deliberate for a few minutes in private to determine whether in their judgment you are ready to proceed. They may pass, fail, or pass with requirements. A student whose Proposal is not approved may be permitted re-examination within six months following the initial examination.

Next Steps

The examining committee’s approval of the Proposal constitutes admission to candidacy for the Doctor of Ministry degree. If you have elective courses to take, you will still need to schedule those in the next term(s). But you can proceed with the Project and then write the final report.

Ministry Project Colloquium: Most students find it useful to join the “Ministry Project Colloquium” (DM-795-9) at this point. This non-credit and no cost seminary focuses on continued learning and support specifically for students working on their Ministry Project. The Ministry Project Colloquium begins with the first D.Min. Monday of each semester and is facilitated by a Doctor of Ministry program graduate.

Final Ministry Project Examination

Once the Ministry Project has been completed and the Project Final Report written and submitted to your advisor, an examination of the Ministry Project Final Report is scheduled. The Ministry Project Final Report is examined orally and approved by a committee of faculty convened by the faculty advisor and chosen by the Dean.