

Making the Hard Decision

What to Do When the Relationship is Not Working

Our UCRS Practitioner Code lists minimum requirements for Practitioners. Ministers can expand upon those standards to reflect the vision for their particular Church.

At San José Center for Spiritual Living we are training Practitioners for Church leadership, not just for private practice. We realize that there are some who enter Practitioner II that ultimately may not fit that vision. With this in mind, the expectations are made clear before class begins. Those Practitioner candidates who may be in question are given personal, structured feedback at regular intervals, with the intention of guiding them towards licensure. Following is the basic structure that is in place:

Sign-up sheet

Our sign-up sheet for Practitioner II class states:

"Practitioner II students are expected to be devoted to San José Center for Spiritual Living. Devotion is measured by active, loyal and supporting participation as defined by the Practitioner Code, as well as expectations of the Center. Participation in Practitioner II does not guarantee licensure.

Practitioner II is not for everyone. Only those who demonstrate both devotion to the Center and the Calling to serve the Center will be considered." (See Practitioner II flyer in Pre-Class documents)

Pre-class Interview

Before class begins the facilitator and one other person (usually the teaching assistant) meet for a 30-45 minute one-on-one interview with each Practitioner II candidate (See "Practitioner II Interview" in Pre-Class documents). The intention of the interview is as follows:

1. To ascertain student's expectations regarding important elements of Prac II
2. To clarify the level of commitment required for Prac II
3. To determine questions, hesitations, agendas, fears
4. To educate the student regarding CSL's desire to equip student for an effective, viable Practitioner ministry at this Center
5. To develop effective spiritual leaders at San José Center for Spiritual Living

A series of options is listed at the end of this interview, including use of non-violent

communication to deny entrance into Practitioner II at this time, if appropriate.

Some may be admitted to class on a probationary basis. They are given a verbal explanation of areas where change/growth is indicated. They are given a specific date for a follow-up conference, generally within a few weeks from the time of the interview. They are encouraged to ask questions and, at any given time, inquire about their status. They are sent a follow-up email within 24 hours reiterating the areas that were discussed in the interview.

At the end of the interview, those accepted into class are handed a Class Agreement of Information and Expectations, to be read before the mandatory pre-class meeting.

Practitioner II Information and Expectations

This document clarifies the expectations for San José Center for Spiritual Living Practitioner II students. The following section, which refers to their facilitator(s) and minister, continues the dialog regarding licensing:

"We are committed to our expectations for you as a Practitioner. We are invested in your success and devoted to being the best mentors we can be.

In support of your Call as licensed Practitioner, we expect that you will move through Practitioner II class as an example of someone devoted to God and to your spiritual practice.

We are watching, and we will ask you about anything we see that needs attention. If we see things that we believe could be "temporary challenges" becoming "chronic" and appearing to block your intended path, we might very well urge you to take a year off or seek professional help to work on the challenge, and take Practitioner II at a later date.

Our expectation is that you will rise to the level of your own magnificence this year. We are here to be of service to you in any way we can. Ultimately it's up to you, and we will hold your hand as you rise to the breadth and scope of your own commitment." (See "Practitioner II Information and Expectations" in Pre-Class documents)

Mandatory Pre-Class Meeting

During this meeting the Practitioner II Information and Expectations document is fully discussed, followed by Q & A.

At San José Center for Spiritual Living Practitioners are seen as Church leaders. In that respect, they are asked if they can say, "Yes" to the following:

1. My life is a reflection of my personal relationship with God.
2. My Call to this ministry is noticeable by how I show up in the world.
3. I am cheerful a majority of the time.
4. I embrace change a majority of the time.
5. I look for Good in everything a majority of the time.
6. I have a noticeable absence of victim mentality.
7. I am supportive of Church leaders. Whenever I do not feel supportive/supported, I handle such conflicts with integrity and grace.

These, along with the basic requirements of active, loyal and supporting with a visible devotion to the Church, become the ongoing guidelines by which recommendations are given and decisions are made. (See "Practitioner II Information and Expectations" in Pre-Class documents)

It is made clear that completing Practitioner II does not guarantee licensure. Students are assured that if there are hesitations about the appropriateness of moving forward they will be notified and the problems thoroughly discussed; there will be no surprises. At the end of the meeting students sign and date it. A copy is made of the signed document, and the original is given back to the student. (See "Agenda for Pre-Class Meeting" in Pre-Class documents)

Observation

Through observation, both in and outside of class, we may find a concern about someone that wasn't detected before class began. A private meeting is held, either one-on-one with the facilitator or with the facilitator and the teaching assistant. Feedback is given, questions are asked and answered, and together with the student, next steps are discussed.

Again, it is reiterated that if there is any hesitation whatsoever, they will not be recommended for licensing. The tone, however, is one of hope and expectation. A date for another meeting in one month's time is set, with the option for dialog sooner if either party requests it.

The minister is informed and kept apprised of the situation.

Documentation

Documentation is important. Copies of pertinent homework/email are kept in a file. Behavior in class is noted. Documentation is objective; it consists of a written or typed journal of what is seen and heard, not what the recording person thinks about it.

It's also important to document every private meeting with the candidate. Take time afterwards to write down what happened and what was said. When appropriate, a follow-up email is sent to the student reiterating what was said in the meeting. The email is printed out and saved, along with any replies.

If there is continued hesitation about a student, it is wise to have a third person at all meetings, so that two people are hearing what's being said. Both add to the ongoing documentation.

If it is clear that a student isn't a match, a discussion with a plan such as the one following may be implemented:

- We have 4 more classes before the mid-point of Prac II studies.
- We need palpable, tangible evidence of your Call or we can't let you past class 15.
- We need your help. We need you to show us that your Call is center stage and your anger has moved to the wings.
- We need to see how God works in your life.
- We can't tell you how to do that; you need to have a conversation with God.
- It's all the same God – we will know it when we see it.
- If not we can't let you go on.
- This is not personal. Our task is to select spiritual leaders for this Center.

It is important that the student get as much feedback as possible, letting them know if it's still not working. By the time the student is told they are not a match and are being let go, they are not surprised. If there is a shift and things work out, all is well.

If the student has started class and then clearly doesn't match the vision for CSL, we don't wait until the end of the 30 weeks to release them. It may happen anytime, but generally happens by the halfway point. There are two reasons for this letting them go at this time:

1. It gives the student time to apply to Practitioner II class at another church, if they so choose. If the minister of that church inquires, we explain honestly that they didn't fit the vision for our church, giving as much background as is requested.

2. The absence of that person changes the atmosphere of the class; there is a palpable shift.

Dismissing a Student from Class

When it is clear that a student is not suited for Practitioner licensing at our Church, the following sequence occurs:

- The facilitator and minister meet, so that everyone is on the same page.
- The facilitator calls a meeting with the student and one other person, usually the teaching assistant.
- After an opening prayer, the facilitator gives genuine positive feedback to the student regarding areas of strength.
- The facilitator goes over the vision for CSL Practitioners once again, and then begins a discussion, which includes statements like:

1. In the past Practitioners were sometimes allowed to continue the licensing process, only to be turned down at their oral panels.
2. Those who didn't fit the vision and were licensed anyway usually became unhappy, frustrated that their Call wasn't serving them or their spiritual community.
3. Although in the short term this was easier on the Church because it avoided the "hard" conversations, it really wasn't fair to anyone. In the long term our denomination ended up with Practitioners who eventually self-selected out after becoming angry and disenfranchised.
4. We believe it skirted the Church's responsibility to be honest about the candidate's potential for serving the Church.
5. At CSL we are willing to follow the advice of JFK, "Long term solutions often come with short term difficulties." That's why we're willing to have the hard conversations.
6. The articulated vision is the part we already discussed – it's the vision for CSL Practitioners.
7. Below the surface of that vision is what's driving it, and there are only two answers to that – yes or no. It's our obligation to say no if we're not a match.
8. At this time I bet you are not surprised to be told that we indeed are not a match. It's nothing personal.
9. You have options. You can still be a Practitioner, just not at CSL at this time.
10. Should you choose, you can apply to other churches in order to join their Practitioner training with the intention of licensing with their Church. We will be happy to introduce you to local ministers.
11. You can do some personal work and re-apply for Prac II next year.

12. Reach out to embrace the person to let them know they are still loved with comments such as:
 - a. Please know that you are a valued member of this Church, and we absolutely wish the best for you.
 - b. We don't want you to go away because of this.
 - c. You are still a valued member of this community.
 - d. If there's anything you need please ask.
 - e. If you would like to see a Practitioner you may have a certificate for a free Practitioner session (no expiration date).
13. Do you have any questions?
14. (Following questions and answers). I will send you a follow-up email with all this information so we will all be clear with what we've discussed. (The minister and teaching assistant should be copied on the email.)
15. Please let me know if you'd like to talk further. I'm as near as the telephone or the nearest keyboard.

The follow-up email is added to the documentation, along with any further correspondence.

Personal phone calls are then made to each remaining Practitioner II student, giving them a short explanation of what occurred, so they don't hear about it secondhand. It's important that the explanation is gentle, supportive and without blame. The tone of the conversation is similar to information given when releasing an employee, ie. " ____ was released from class today with clarity, dignity and compassion. We have had ongoing conversation, so this didn't come as a surprise to him/her. Please hold him/her in your prayers and we will discuss it during our next class. Do you have any questions for me right now?"

At the next Prac class, the topic is discussed openly, without the specifics of why their classmate was let go. Generally, they already know. There will be some fear about, "Will I be next? Am I okay?" This leads to a renewal of the Church's vision and a re-commitment to their part in it, as well as their own spiritual growth. It may take more than one class meeting to get it to the point where everyone is comfortable. Within a few weeks, they can sense a difference in the dynamics of the class.

Practitioner Core

When there are changes in the expectations for Practitioner students, and then some are actually released, it may cause discomfort for the existing Practitioner Core. This presents a beautiful opportunity for everyone to take a look at their own commitment to the Church and their personal Call. The opportunity to explore these re-commitments, and the dialog surrounding them, is perfect fodder for a Practitioner Retreat.