

Ongoing Theological Reflection

In the Field Education program at San Francisco Theological Seminary, ministers are conceived as reflective practitioners. Therefore, one of the key expectations of interns, supervisors, and Shepherding Committees is engagement in regular times of theological reflection. Such reflection involves taking the time with a given situation or case study to intentionally engage in thoughtful and disciplined consideration of questions such as:

- “Where does God fit in all of this?”
- “What does the Gospel of Jesus Christ offer in this situation?”
- “What does it mean to be a community of faith in this neighborhood development situation?”
- “What core values might a church-related agency contribute to this community forum?”
- “What are the Biblical foundations for my response?”
- “How did I decide what was the appropriate ministry response to this person’s need?”

Such questions are essential, not only during an internship experience, but throughout one’s practice of ministry as well. These questions not only provide reminders of the center of the church’s ministry – they can help ministers be centered in their ministry.

Accordingly, one of the activity requirements of the internship is regular engagement in supervised theological reflection upon the intern’s practice of ministry. In addition, one of the written work requirements involves the submission of four theological reflection papers to the Office of Vocations.

Foci for Theological Reflection

Reflection sessions may focus upon, but not limited to, the following:

- the student’s emerging vocational identity
- the student’s spiritual growth
- the student’s ministerial skills
- the student’s capacity for understanding and relating to other persons
- the student’s ability to understand and relate to social systems in the ministry setting and community

The student’s ability to relate theological understandings to experiences in ministry Reflection papers may focus on, but not be limited to, the following:

- examining one’s faith in the light of an experience in the light of one’s faith
- addressing the question about where God is present in a situation and the implications of that presence
- focusing on what one believes and how one lives out of that belief in a particular setting
- looking back upon an experience of ministry to identify and assess the Biblical and theological resources operative in one’s practice in this situation
- looking beyond the experience to explore Biblical and theological resources which may shed additional light on the situation
- looking ahead to identify Biblical and theological resources which may inform one’s continuing practice on ministry in similar situations

Paper Guidelines:

- Calendar your TR papers and turn them in as defined on your worksheet.
- These papers are to be 2 – 3 pages in length
- Each theological reflection paper should address the intern's ability to practice a "Habit" or "Skill" of ministry. Start the theological paper by naming the "Habit" or "Skill" selected and focus the reflection on your practice and learning of this skill.

Components of the Reflections:

- Description of a particular event or critical incident in ministry
- Personal reflection / response to the event, feelings aroused, etc.
- Theological implications
- Ministry issues raised and / or implications for future ministry

A variety of formats can be used. Supervisors are encouraged to suggest possible approaches to reflection.

- Verbatims or case studies to describe the situation or event. When choosing an event, do not just examine the "successes"; the greatest learning often results when one reflects on what may appear to be failures.
- Metaphors are helpful in describing responses and feelings
- Identify biblical images and theological issues i.e. guilt, grace, justice, mercy
- Identify theological implications of particular leadership styles

REMEMBER:

Two of the four papers are to be presented to the supervisor for discussion during a regularly scheduled time and signed by the Supervisor.

After the discussion, the supervisor signs and dates the paper. Intern submits paper(s) to Dean's Office.

Recommended Reading – one of these 2 books:

The Art of Theological Reflection. Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer. Crossroad, New York. 1998.

How to Think Theologically. Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke. Fortress Press, Minneapolis. 1996.