

WRITING A CASE STUDY

A case study is a conscious retelling of an experience of “ministry in practice” which may be presented to a group for analysis and evaluation. The experience ought to be an event for which you have some responsibility for the outcome. The case study must be as brief as possible, one to two pages, double spaced. Please carefully select an event, critical incident or conversation which when brought to class will be real to you. We want to invite your peers to prayerfully speak into your life. You have three style choices below to select from as you write up your case study for class. The styles are the Case Study Approach, Verbatim Report and Critical Incident Report. You will want to read through all three and select one or combine elements of all three in order to best bring your experience to light for the class.

OPTION ONE - CASE STUDY APPROACH

BACKGROUND:	Setting the event in context: Where? Include important context information. Who was involved – personal? Pressures? How and why were you involved?
DESCRIPTIONS:	A problem may be stated at the outset. What happened? What did you do? Include essential facts, neither more nor less than needed. Include as much detail as possible in the limited space. Accurately reflect the situation. A verbatim may help. A verbatim is taking a portion of the event and writing exactly who said what; including body language, facial expressions, pauses, and other information which relays the emotion and clarifies the meaning of what is being – and not being – said. (See verbatim section below for further details.)
ANALYSIS:	Identify the issues and relationships that were apparent as you viewed the situation. What was happening? Are these issues apparent in your written version of the situation? Who were you as minister and leader? How was God evident or absent?
EVALUATION:	Estimate your own effectiveness in the event. Did you function effectively? Why? Why not? Did you do what you set out to do? What factors or forces emerged which you did not anticipate? What questions might the group discuss that would be most helpful to you?
CONFIDENTIALITY:	If you do not want to reveal the identity of real persons or institutions, please use fictitious names and places.
AFTER WRITING:	Did your situation come alive? Is there sufficient background information? Are the relevant facts included? Are the relationships clear? Are the dilemmas apparent? Is there an absence of editorializing? Is the length appropriate? Writing case studies is the easy the first time.

OPTION TWO – VERBATIM REPORT

Important elements in a verbatim report

1) Introduction:

- a) Time
- b) Place
- c) Brief description of the person (please maintain confidentiality)
- d) Your relationship to the person (how you came to talk to the person; how long you've known him/her; in what capacity, etc)
- e) The context of the conversation (what you thought and felt about this person and his/her situation before this conversation).
- f) Other relevant details or circumstances

2) Verbatim Record of Conversation:

- a) Write an exact (as possible – make notes soon after meeting) record of the conversation including pauses, non-verbal communications, facial expressions, etc., insofar as they help to catch the “tone” of the experience. If the conversation is longer than can be conveniently reported, give highlights and be sure to indicate where breaks occur, and summarizing missing parts. The effort in this part is to be purely descriptive – omitting explanation of why you did what you did. This effort call for candor that will be, at times, difficult to achieve.

Don't try to “doctor” or edit your report to make it look better. Indicate changed you would make later in your analysis.

3) Analysis and Evaluation:

- a) What took place (where do you and the person stand now in your relationship)?
- b) Intention at the beginning (discrepancy between intention and performance; shift in expectations, etc.)
- c) An evaluation of your responses, trying to identify your dominant feelings during the conversation; not to probe the depths of your unconscious, but a simple effort to catch the feelings on or near the surface (i.e. is this a person who makes you angry, happy, frustrated, etc.?). What did you see as this person's needs and did your responses get at these needs? Are there any points that strike you as particularly significant now: any responses you would certainly want to omit or do differently?
- d) What does this interview reveal about the person and about you? What kind of person are you in this interview?
- e) What effect did this experience have on the person? How did he or she feel when it was over? Why?

4) Goals, Learning, and Future Involvement:

- a) What goals and plans will you have for your next meeting with this person?
- b) What did you learn by studying this relationship and reporting on it (other person; yourself; own attitude to the other person/s, etc.)?

5) Theological Analysis and Evaluation:

- a) What theological doctrine, problem, question, principle, issue, etc., is demonstrated, suggested, or illuminated in this case?
- b) Does your understanding of the doctrine, etc., shed any light on the situation and future possibilities?
- c) Does this help in your fundamental appraisal of the situation (yourself, others, the church, etc)?
- d) What are the theological dynamics of the actual situation (grace, redemption, forgiveness, salvation, hope, etc.)?
- e) How has this report helped you integrate your experiences and theological understanding?

OPTION THREE – CRITICAL INCIDENT

- 1) Specify the context within which the Critical Incident occurred. Situation, climate or mood and brief description of the person(s) and/or circumstances.
- 2) Specify the behavior and/or conversation that led up to the incident.
- 3) Describe the critical incident as you perceive it, specify both the surface issues and the underlying issues as objectively as possible.
- 4) Specify the level, type and intensity of the response(s) to and results of the incident.
- 5) Theologically reflect on the incident.

SAMPLE CASE STUDIES

SAMPLE “A”

BACKGROUND: My church is located in a “bedroom community” of about 5,000 highly trained technicians and engineers in a population center of over 100,000. Most of the people who have joined our new church are young couples with small children. We had no young people beyond ninth grade, and only four in the ninth grade. My attempts to get acquainted with young people in the community were met with suspicion and hostility at first, but we got a small group started. Youth meetings were structured largely by the group, my method being to get acquainted first, and then begin to structure the group after they had confidence in me.

Chris is a 15 year-old ninth-grader I have tried to involve in our church and youth group. His parents are sensitive, hard-working, intelligent people of culture and refinement. They enjoy their home and their work. They have no TV in their home- they can’t be bothered with such trivia. Chris has two older brothers - one in the Peace Corps and the other in the university. Chris did not want to attend our bi-weekly meetings but came at the insistence of his parents.

At one of these meetings, the person with the program did not come at the last minute, and the group decided to talk about drugs. Without any advance preparation, Chris gave what amounted to a lecture which covered such things as the origin of marijuana, heroin, and LSD, the chemical analysis of each, the physiological effects on the boy, etc. He did this with the competence of a college professor explaining it to a group of lay (people).

DESCRIPTION: One evening not long after this I called at Chris’s home. His parents were away, and he was studying. He invited me in. He told me he was reading Dante’s Inferno in research for an assigned composition which was “to select some historical character you believe has gone to hell and tell why you think so.” In the conversation that followed Chris told me he had read extensively in science, philosophy, and current literature - and that he did not believe in the existence of God. I tried to suggest he might not have all the evidence yet to make such a decision; that many scientists believe in God. I was inclined to accept his statements as evidence of one who had given considerable thought to them.

ANALYSIS: I was so overwhelmed with this boy’s knowledge and his probing mind which was questioning the things I didn’t until my college days that I froze. I felt it was obvious to him I had little to offer to challenge him at his intellectual level. He is an exceptional boy, but I have discovered that many young people in this community are not far behind.

EVALUATION:

1. How do I minister to young people like this?
2. How can I prepare myself to handle situations where my incompetence in science and technology is so obvious?
3. How can I handle the “freeze” situations?

SAMPLE "B"

BACKGROUND: As in most denominations presently there is a great amount of tension arising from different understandings of the nature and mission of the church. Within our denomination there is a divisive group, composed mainly of lay (people) who have been circularizing the church and seeking to sow seeds of ill will and dissension, particularly in setting lay (people) over against the ministers. I heard of an organization meeting of this group in our city and decided to attend the meeting even though it was really intended for lay (people) only. Five of the members of our church were there. It upset me greatly that this divisive group might get a foothold in this church. In the weeks that followed all the officers received information through the mail from this group, with attacks and insinuations about the subversion of the church. I determined that I would have to do something about this meeting of the officers.

EVENT: I chose to speak on this at the next monthly meeting of one of the boards. During the meeting some of the (people) made charges about the denomination which had obviously come from this dissident group. They alluded to the stand on social issues, control of church property, and the lack of value of the church magazine. Much to my surprise, some of the (people) who support the church wholeheartedly were mute that evening. I felt very much alone as I tried to answer some of these unfounded attacks. At the end of the meeting it was customary for me to speak to the group about any matter that concerned me. I talked about this dissident group and their insinuations about the leadership of the church. I maintained that such a group in the church was more of a problem than a solution, and stated that if we were more faithful in seeking guidance from God's Word we would have a better and more effective church. Finally I told them that I disagreed with them and disapproved of this group, and it was my responsibility as their pastor to tell them how I felt.

ANALYSIS: I am sure that my speech alienated some of the (people) at the meeting, at least for a time. I was really very threatened by the discussion that had taken place, and even though my personal security in the church was not threatened I took it very personally. I was very defensive, and later realized that I had manipulated them emotionally at the very time that I was denying any manipulation. My advice about more use of the Word of God was a smoke screen, because I had not used the Bible in the meeting any more than they.

EVALUATION: I was not very effective in combating the attitudes of some of those officers because of my defensiveness. I do feel that I had to take some stand for the sake of those who did not understand it. The one good thing that emerged was that they expressed gratitude that I told them how I felt, even though they may have disagreed. I need to learn how to deal more effectively with hostility and opposition. How might I have handled the problem more effectively?

Case studies taken from Putting It Together in the Parish, by James D. Glasse (Nashville: Abington, 1972), pp. 79-83.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER IN YOUR CASE STUDY

Please answer all of the questions below. Not all of the issues listed below may be relevant to your case study.

1) Why are you bringing this case study to class? What are you hoping for?

2) Finish these sentences, in light of this situation:

Everything would be OK if _____.

My real problem is _____.

What I'm really worried about is _____.

I really hope _____ doesn't happen.

- 3) What fears or anxiety does this raise in me? How do I respond to those fears? Could I possibly be reacting to this situation as I am because this is close to another experience in life? Is there anyone I'm avoiding or want to avoid in this?
- 4) In what ways do I trust God in this situation? In what ways have I place my trust in myself or others?
- 5) What do I fear God may ask of me in this situation?
- 6) Where do I see evidence of Christ-like love in this situation? Where do I see faith and hope? Where are God's promises and ways being lived out?
- 7) Where is sin alive?
- 8) How is my well-being impacted by the outcome of this situation?
- 9) What dreams am I nourishing? Are there dreams I need to let go of? Am I putting my hope in a dream rather than in God?
- 10) Read Philippians 4 – where have I set my mind? What's going on in my mind?
- 11) Am I thinking of myself more than I ought? Less of myself than I ought?
- 12) How is this situation impacting my self-acceptance, both in terms of accepting my own strengths and weaknesses? Who do I think is "watching?"
- 13) Is anyone in this situation not 'finishing well' because they do not believe God will do what God says God will do?
- 14) Who could be a resource to me as I am seeking resolution of this situation?

READING A CASE BEFORE YOU COME TO CLASS

Read the entire case before coming to class. Fill out the theological reflection chart (below) while thinking about the following questions:

- What are the relationships to one another?
- What are their backgrounds?
- What views are expressed?
- What is happening?
- What problems appear?
- What are the key issues?
- Be prepared to share your observations with the group.
- Use psychology, sociology, education, theology insofar as you are able.
- What alternatives do you see?

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION FORM

DEFINITION OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

“Process of examining one’s actions in order to identify the assumptions which are behind the actions, scrutinizing the accuracy and validity of the assumptions and reconstituting these assumptions to include new insights, in order to make the assumptions more integrative of the experience of reality.” (*Experiencing Ministry Supervision*, Pyle and Seals, 110) Good theological reflection leads to maximum growth in terms of your “personhood” as minister as we bring life experience in dialogue with the Christian tradition which promises to bring wisdom and guidance.

Seeking meaning, purpose and values

ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

- God is present in human lives.
- God cares for us.
- Deeper knowledge of God and self are possible
(Killen and De Beer, xi)

What is ideal is timely feedback so that learning can be internalized: consistency between belief and practice.

Formal Theology = What we say we believe
Functional Theology = How we live

MOVING TOWARDS GROWTH THROUGH THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION OF THE “MINISTER’S ISSUES”

Professional Skills: *How can I do it?*
Personal Identity: *Who am I?*
Vocational Identity: *Is this for me?*
Theological Reflection: *Where is God in all this?*

MOVEMENTS IN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

- Entering into the experience - exploration towards: Defining experience, thoughts, avoiding judgments and jumping to conclusions
- Feelings/Identify an Image - encountering feelings, naming feelings, images, giving shape and voice to feelings
- Insights - Conversation between: Christian heritage, our lived experience, our culture, and our faith community in the journey of faith.
- Action – Applying insights to our lives in a way that brings change.

Source: Killen, Patricia O'Connell and John De Beer. *The Art of Theological Reflection*. New York: Crossroad, 2003.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Experience	Feelings/Identify an Image	Issues	Christian Tradition as Truth & Resource (Bible: themes or story; theology; Christian history; church tradition; Christian ethics...)	Insights (Insights from this reflection leading to primary issue(s) to be responded to and what would be drawn upon from Christian tradition in order to respond.)	Insight Leading to ACTION (Responding in ministry with the <i>character and nature of Christ</i> by utilizing the resources God has provided.)	Spiritual Formation