

Developing A Case Study

“We are committed to case study, for our students and for our own ministries, because it helps us see clearly the reflective component of ministry. Ministry is about faithful response to God, the communities with which we work and worship, and the women and men who make them up. To respond faithfully requires a theological process that illuminates: ourselves and what we bring to the ministry situation, the context in which the situation exists, and the ways that God’s people have sought to understand and do the will of the Holy One. The practice of ministry simply cannot be separated from the practice of reflection.”

Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, Carol J. Allen. Shared Wisdom: A Guide to Case Study Reflection in Ministry (Nashville, Abingdon, 1993), page 105.

Consider a critical incident with which you are still struggling that relates to a situation/dilemma in your field placement. Remember the purpose of a case study is to have colleagues reflect with you about an incident with which you are still working.

Please choose an incident about which:

- *you have not already done a previous reflection assignment*
- *you have a willingness to go deeply theologically*
- *you have a desire to explore the implications for ministry*

Concisely describe the incident including:

- (a) your role in the situation
- (b) others who were involved
- (c) your feelings about what happened
- (d) what you were hoping would happen
- (e) the questions with which you are now left

Write up an account of the incident. Provide enough detail to give a good sense of what is going on, between half and a full page, typewritten. While focus on brevity is in part a concern for the limitations of time, it also encourages the discipline of focus which is valuable in and of itself. To write a case study requires editing experience and reflection in order to share with others the information that is most important and the questions that are central to our practice of ministry.

Remember the purpose of a case study is to have others reflect with you about an incident/situation/dynamic with which you are still working - either continuing actively in the situation or trying to discern how you might handle a similar situation differently another time. The process is future-oriented.

The case study model assumes a consultative style of ministry that turns to colleagues to test perceptions and deepen understanding. Case reflection is less about advice giving (although suggestions sometimes are helpful in broadening options) and more about clarifying our values, theology and appreciation of ministry. Theological reflection is a crucial aspect of the process through scriptural connections and wrestling with important questions of the nature of God, the Church’s role in the world, and vocational identity.

Case reflection makes accessible, and thus vulnerable, not only the presenter but those persons in the case. This demands the disciplines of confidentiality be practised. In the writing of the case study, presenters are asked to disguise names, mark the document as confidential, to collect the documents and destroy them at the end. These actions do not guarantee that others in the case conversation won’t recognize someone, but they serve as reminders about the importance of confidentiality.