

Case Study Instructions

The intent is for you to identify an issue that arises in an area of your current ministry and reflect on it theologically. To do so, you will need to take this issue and modify it for confidentiality. The goal is not problem-solving, nor is it social scientific research. The goal is to aid you in your theological reflection: to help you identify theological questions that arise in everyday encounters, to recognize how different theological points of view affect these encounters, to clarify your understanding of those issues, and to think through how you might respond as a resident theologian and mentor in your ministry setting.

Process:

Background – describe the setting, people involved in your case situation, time, place and current “emotional” context.

In order for our use of case studies to be compliant with Human Subjects Research policies at MTSO, we ask that all identifying information about the organization (name, location, etc.) and individuals (name, age, gender, race, etc) be masked through the use of pseudonym and general descriptions in classroom discussions and other official field education contexts. Cases shall not be discussed in other contexts, not even pseudonymously or generally.

Case situation - describe the event or conversation arising for theological reflection.

Identify theological issues – in general, what are the theological issues that pertain to this situation? (For instance, is the spoken or unspoken issue about authority of scripture, Christology, the nature of church, *imago dei*, etc.?). See the theological reflection sheet provided in your packet for pertinent questions. What other theological areas might be affected by your understanding of this issue? For instance, would a revised understanding of scriptural authority affect the participants’ outlook?

Identify the pastoral issues – briefly identify the pastoral care concerns, if any, arising in the scenario. How does theological reflection relate to pastoral care responses?

Next steps – What kinds of things need to be surfaced? What do you need to find out in order to proceed? What are your own areas of growth?

Class discussion:

You will present your case study to the class for discussion. It is helpful to send the case study via e-mail before class so that class can be filled with discussion

rather than reading time. Please avoid “fix it” discussion and spend most of your time working with the theological aspects of the case.

FE 2009-2010

Sample Case Study

Crossroads Church, est. 1958

Background: Crossroads Church had never grown very large. Its founders were more interested in providing a gathering place for the local farmers and tractor manufacturing plant workers to worship and celebrate community events. Celebrations were well-attended, worship was not. Unperturbed, Crossroads members gathered together on Sundays with their friends and sang fine old hymns tunes to Suzie’s slow-paced piano accompaniment. Ministers came and went, but the congregation maintained itself with few concerns.

Until last year.

Last year, five out of eight founding members died. Two of the spouses, also founding members, decided to move away, closer to their adult children or grandchildren. That left one founder to remind the congregation about its origins and history, but Thira was not always able to come to church. Her attendance depended on the weather.

To make matters worse, the local manufacturing plant had laid off thirty percent of its workers six months ago. The community feared that the company would relocate, perhaps overseas, within the next two years. Other than farming, there was little work available in the community.

Crossroads Church members knew that they had a crisis on their hands, not only for their own church but for the entire community. Second generation leadership, namely Tom, Cynthia and Mark, were turned to with questions and concerns about the future. These three held most offices in the church and had done so for over a decade.

Crossroads Church always had a minister, usually a “green” one as the members referred to seminary graduates. They realized that their ministers had some experience in church leadership, but usually had not stayed long-term in any small church.

Scenario: Members understood that their current minister, Sophie Chai Lee, would not stay more than three years, five at the most. While she led a good worship service and preached from the bible, Sophie was a newcomer to their area and wouldn’t understand their relationships, traditions or customs. Sophie also came from a foreign family, even though she was American. Clearly, Sophie wouldn’t invest much time in settling in to the parsonage either. She claimed that it was in such a state of disrepair that she and her family could not

live there for more than a few months while other arrangements were made. No, Sophie was going to be of little help.

Sophie had become frustrated with the small congregation of 45 within a month of her arrival. She was trained to be a minister in the small church setting, so she knew that relationships were more important than any other aspect of church to the people of Crossroads. She tried to become acquainted with each person attending and all of the housebound relatives and friends in the first two weeks. She was careful not to change worship customs or leadership offices in the first year. She had been warned that there was a seldom-addressed dispute between two of the leaders, but no one would discuss the situation with her. Sophie also felt growing concern for the entire community as the tractor plant began to show signs of leaving the area. The majority of Crossroads Church members were employed by that plant; the rest were farming families.

Sophie experienced some anger as parishioners ignored her attempts to help them come to terms with what seemed to be a grim future. Her anger grew when she approached the trustee committee with concerns about her family's living situation; the parsonage had mold growing in the basement and wallpaper peeling from the walls in most rooms. Carpets were stained and someone had owned a cat at one time in the life of the house's history. Clearly, the church had not spent time or money on the parsonage in the last ten years.

Sophie realized that she lived in a conflicted situation as the minister: she needed to persevere to make sure her family lived in adequate housing while at the same time, she needed to be pastoral to people who were facing a dying church and perhaps, community for the first time. She knew that Crossroads members already believed that she would be a short-termer and therefore, they had no incentive to spend money on her home.

Tension was beginning to build in the congregation between two leaders, Tom and Cynthia. Members were more careful about what they said in front of either leader. Most Sunday mornings included time talking about how to save jobs and find new members so that Crossroads Church would not die. Congregational prayer always addressed the need for the minister to bring in more young people as well as the usual list of health concerns and hospitalizations. People felt an impending sense of helplessness and struggled hard to find ways to save their church and community.

Theological Reflection

Pastoral Issues

Next Steps

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