

North Park Theological Seminary
FLDC 7318 (1 credit)
Theological Reflection Module Syllabus
Instructors: Tim Johnson and Deborah Penny

Pre-requisite

Complete a minimum of half the required internship credits for MDiv or MACF degree programs, or halfway through the MACM degree program.

Course Introduction

We all have had a ministry experience(s) (successful or challenging) that provoke questions about our calling, our responses or God's plan. In addition to reflection, such ministry experience(s) can serve as a learning tool for the student and the peer members to process in a group setting. That is why TRM should only be taken at least halfway through your internship experience, giving enough time for ministry learning incidents to occur.

Course Objectives

1. Reflect upon ministry experiences
2. Develop skills in theological reflection
3. Integrate self-awareness and pastoral formation

Course Description

Two components of your field education, internship, and CPE, are goal oriented with supervision to assist in your goal achievement*, learning and assessment. Theological Reflection Module is structured for individual case study presentation, collegial participation and is non-supervisory. The focus of the module is to broaden ones understanding of theological reflection through lecture, case study presentation and conversations. This field education component helps nurture such reflection through peer support. In preparation of the module, you are required to bring a case study to class for group processing (case study instructions are listed below).

The second part or process of integrating your field education experiences is reflecting on the theological reflection module itself. You are required to complete a reflection paper (2-3 pages) to be uploaded into your portfolio AND submit a copy to the Field Education Department. This is to be completed after the TRM and is due no later than the 2nd Monday after the TRM (2 weeks). Following are the questions to be used to develop your reflection paper:

Theological Reflection Module Field Education Self-Assessment

1. Was the TRM good stewardship of your time? What new insights were gained through this day long experience?
2. As you revisited the time(s) of your field education experience(s), what did you discover about your vocational identity? What did you discover about yourself as a leader?
3. What positive experience(s) has given you new perspective as you move forward? What negative experience(s) was difficult yet illuminating for you?
4. Reflecting on today' experience (as well as your various field education experiences) and anticipating the realities of ministry moving forward.
 - a. how will you be a good steward of your call?
 - b. how will you be a good steward of your spiritual gifts?
 - c. how will you be a good steward of the resources of the ministry setting (i.e. money, facility, tradition)?

Post-requisite

Submit the self-assessment to the field education department and upload to your portfolio.

Course Schedule

9:00- 9:45am	Introduction
10:00 – 10:30am	Lecture
10:30 – 11:00am	Sample case study <i>We Need More Money?</i> (See attachment.) <u>IN PREPARATION FOR CLASS DISCUSSION THIS CASE STUDY MUST BE READ PRIOR TO CLASS (please bring your copy with you).</u>
11:15 – 12:00pm	Student case presentation
12:00pm-1:00pm	Lunch is provided and is designated usually during this hour; we allocate at least ½ hour for a meal together
1:00 – 5:00pm	Student case presentations

The group will spend approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour for each case study.

CASE STUDY INSTRUCTIONS

A case study is a written account of a particular ministry dilemma. It is open-ended and unbiased in reporting the situation, and it leaves the reader with a problem to solve. Critical questions may be raised as teaching notes after the case material has been presented, but the case should not be resolved as such in the written account. This will allow for group discussion to clarify critical issues, attain self-awareness, acknowledge diverse points of view, and enhance the individual growth of group members. Cases are best used in small groups where discussions act as peer consultants.

You may use one of the case studies (listed below) you submitted with your End of Semester Evaluations since they are very much a part of your formation as a leader; or, write a case study on another topic that interests you:

- Pastoral/Group Leadership
- Issue of Identity
- Financial Stewardship

In writing a case, accuracy and objectivity are important. If opinions are expressed, they should be attributed to persons involved in the case and not to the author's bias. Write from a third-person, not first-person, perspective. For the Theological Reflection Module, each case should be **two to three pages, typed and double-spaced**. Each presenter will read the case in class, but also **bring five – eight copies** for the rest of the class to follow along with (documents will be shredded after the course to destroy confidential information). Each case should **focus on an experience in your internship** or other field education experience which you would like to present for class discussion, analysis and learning. The case should include sufficient information for at least an hour's class discussion.

The following components need to be included in a case:

1. **Introduction:** State the problem to be resolved (i.e., decision to be made, a letter to be written, a meeting where a significant issue is to be considered).
2. **Background:** Give important background information on the situation so that the reader will understand the larger context.
3. **Description:** Recreate the situation in enough detail to give the readers an accurate replay of the event. Help the reader to "feel" what is happening.
4. **Summary:** Restate the problem to be resolved.
5. **Conclusion:** The last 2-3 questions listed on the topic are theologically reflective in nature and will serve as your conclusion.

* The goal achievement could also be inclusive of the ones resulting from the MBTI, Enneagram, etc.

His military pension and her salary were not enough for them to live on.

During this time Dan wrote the following in private correspondence:

Looking back, I see a mismatch between me and The Village Church from the beginning. I am sure I answered God's call by going to the church. I thought it was exactly what I wanted. But God's guidance is something of a mystery. It must in the long run serve to bring him glory.

So I leave with a profound sense of sadness. I tried to bring the message of God as I understand it, and it was declined. The people who heard it shoulder their own responsibility. I did not see much response, and therefore I feel they let me down. How did I get involved? It is God's message, and the hearers are responsible to him, not to me. That truth works for my head but not my stomach. My gut keeps score. It is the death of my dream. A word or smile from God would help at this point.

As Dan prepared to leave The Village Church, a church in a nearby community asked if he would be their interim pastor for a year. Dan jumped at the opportunity.

Now Dan's year as interim pastor was drawing to a close. It had been a good year working with committed and mature leaders and a responsive congregation. He was encouraged, and his vision was being renewed, but the pain of his three years at The Village Church was not completely gone.

Out of all the churches where he had sent his dossier, only one church was still considering him. This church needed an associate pastor with responsibilities for pastoral care. Dan was not sure the job description suited his gifts, and he wondered how he would fit on a large pastoral staff. He wondered if there was more disappointment ahead. He wondered, *Is there a place for me?*

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We Need More Money

Money Problems

Ben and Holly had a quiet moment to talk. Their two younger children were down for their afternoon naps, and Todd, their oldest child, was away at school.

Once again they reviewed their options. They had talked about their finances so much before that they were tired of the subject, but tonight would be the annual meeting of the church. The congregation's decision about Ben's salary would guide their decision regarding whether Ben would resign from the church and seek a better paying job or continue as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church. They wanted to stay with the church, but they had long ago learned that what they wanted was not always what they got.

Ben felt called to be a pastor and had felt called in high school. Holly supported him and enjoyed the ministry with him. They met at seminary, and both were seminary graduates. After seminary they planned to go overseas to minister with an English-speaking congregation in another culture, but they first wanted to gain church experience in the

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U.S. So Ben eagerly accepted a call to a Baptist church where he would serve as an assistant pastor with particular responsibility for youth.

Then Todd was born, and that changed everything. He was multiple-handicapped and had hydrocephalitis. Not only did their plans for overseas ministry change, but finances became a problem. Holly needed to stay home to care for Todd, and so could no longer continue her career as a school teacher. Ben's salary at the church was not even adequate for the two of them, let alone to handle the expenses of a handicapped baby.

As they now discussed the church meeting coming that night, however, money was not the only factor influencing their decision. Health care and adequate schooling for Todd were paramount in their minds. Leaving the ministry would mean a change of health insurance carriers, since the Baptist General Conference provided their insurance. It was available only to full-time pastors and church workers in the denomination.

The social worker who assisted them from time to time had indicated that obtaining other medical insurance would be a problem if they ever let their current coverage lapse. Medicaid helped to cover some expenses, but it was not sufficient for the treatment and care Todd needed in his special education classes; their health insurance covered the rest of the expenses.

Ben and Holly were in their mid-thirties. Bethel Baptist Church was the third church they had served. Sunday attendance was around one hundred, comprised mostly of older people who were conservative both in theology and financial management. They took great pride in the church building and had spent over one hundred thousand dollars the last three years remodeling it. Meanwhile they only paid Ben a yearly salary of twenty thousand dollars plus health insurance and retirement. From that salary, Ben had to pay rent, since the church did not own a parsonage. The church

had sold its parsonage a number of years ago when the pastor at that time wanted to obtain his own house. The money from the parsonage sale had helped this pastor with the purchase of his own home. Some people in the church still resented the decision to sell the parsonage and help that pastor, and they had vowed to be more careful in the future with how they compensated their pastors. Ben knew this affected how they felt about his financial situation.

Ben's salary was barely enough for his family of five to live on. At one point he obtained a part-time job as a security guard to supplement his income, but church leaders made it clear they wanted him to drop the position and serve the church exclusively. Ben discussed his needs with them, but they did not offer him more money. He did, however, quit the part-time job—partly out of respect for the wishes of the church and partly out of a desire to be home in the evenings to help Holly with the children, especially with Todd.

Although Ben and Holly loved the people of Bethel Baptist Church and saw them as essentially good people, they were occasionally frustrated over the attitude they sensed in many members. Most had paid for their homes long ago. Even though many talked about their limited retirement incomes, they could afford to take vacation trips each year. Some even spent the entire winter in the South. They could buy new cars every few years. In contrast, Ben and Holly lived in a small, three-bedroom apartment and had never driven anything but "rust buckets."

None of the churches Ben served had paid well, but at least the attitude of the people in the first two churches reflected more concern for the well-being of Ben's family. In fact, people in the other churches apologized for not being able to do more. But in Bethel Church people seemed to think Ben and Holly were the problem. The leaders told Ben they thought he and Holly had "a problem managing money," and suggested they get advice from a financial counselor. That hurt.

Both Ben and Holly had educational loans they were repaying. In addition they owed the government seven thousand dollars. An agency had mistakenly given them that amount for Todd's care, and now Ben and Holly were in the process of paying it back. But this government money was not something they had intentionally taken as a loan; it was clearly a mistake of the government. Although when the error was found, the money had already been spent for Todd's care, Ben agreed to pay it back—even though some friends suggested he get a lawyer and fight it.

Their combined educational loans of seventeen thousand dollars required them to pay two hundred dollars a month for ten years. The payment took over 10 percent of their salary, and this seemed to be what bothered some of the older people in the congregation, who did not believe people should take out loans for education. Ben and Holly did not see how they would have gotten their education without borrowing money. Both had gone to state schools for their undergraduate education, where tuition was less than private schools, so their only borrowing had come while in seminary. Many couples they knew had far greater loans. When they borrowed the money, they did not think it would be difficult to pay it back on time. In fact, with both of them working they anticipated paying off the loans early so they could go overseas five years after graduation, knowing that no mission agency would allow them to go to the field with indebtedness. But they hadn't planned on Todd's disabilities.

When they first went to Bethel Baptist Church, which was located in the Chicago area, they lived for a while with Ben's mother. They did this primarily to save money, but the arrangement was not entirely satisfactory, and they quickly saw it as a short-term situation. Not only did both Ben and Holly find it awkward to be around his mother all the time, but the space they had for themselves and their children was only one and a half rooms.

When Ben and Holly were able to get their own apartment, the one they currently lived in, the rent, though good for the Chicago area, strained their modest income to the limit. Even though the apartment was small, Ben and Holly liked to entertain church people, regularly having others into their home for meals or meetings. On one occasion when some women were at the apartment for a meeting, however, one of them actually criticized Holly for having such a small place to entertain in.

Before Todd was born, Holly had feared giving birth to a handicapped child. At one point she said to Ben, "God will never give us more than we can handle, and he knows I will have a nervous breakdown if we have a handicapped child." Her brother had fathered a handicapped child. Her parents were not Christians, and Holly also prayed that the baby would be the means of their coming to faith (which in fact happened, but not for the reason Holly first prayed).

When Todd was born hydrocephalic, Holly was shocked to the core. In the days following his birth, she felt like Job, and on more than one occasion she said she wanted to "curse God and die." Were it not that Ben was the youth pastor of the church and had to be at church services, Holly did not think she would have gone to church at all in the weeks following Todd's birth. She had taken good care of herself during the pregnancy, and she and Ben had given their lives to the service of God. It just didn't seem fair.

The church was very supportive of Ben and Holly when Todd was born. Todd was the first baby born to one of their pastors in many years, and the people were excited about it. The women gave several generous baby showers during the pregnancy. News of Todd's disabilities caused tears to abound throughout the congregation, and the people surrounded Ben and Holly with love, prayers, and support. One woman even insisted on staying with Todd one day a week when he first came home from the hospital so Holly could have a day off.

In addition to being hydroencephalitic, Todd “failed to thrive.” He was in and out of the hospital many times during his first few months of life. When he was nine months old, he had a gastrostomy tube inserted into his stomach for feeding. At the time, doctors doubted he would live beyond a few more days, but he did. The membrane around his brain was no thicker than tissue paper because of being so compressed by water. He was later diagnosed as being legally blind, and there was doubt whether he was educable.

Holly handled her grief primarily through anger, describing her feelings as “a rage like a cancer eating me up.” Ben handled his pain by throwing himself into the work of the church. At first Holly’s anger frightened Ben. He feared she was turning away from God. He, on the other hand, was desperately seeking God and felt driven to him. So for a short time there was tension between them, but before long love and open communication brought them together in a deeper level of understanding.

Holly’s anger helped her not to be overcome with sorrow, and enabled her to channel her energy to advocate for proper care for Todd. The institutions of society that Ben and Holly thought would be there for them—medical care, social welfare, and education—were at times not there. Holly’s anger forced decisions to be made in Todd’s interest that might not otherwise have happened.

It took most of the first year after Todd was born for Holly to get over her intense anger. She read a book by the mother of a child who died of cancer. The mother prayed for healing for the child, but it did not happen (not in the earthly sense at least). Holly felt intensely angry at God for letting something like this happen to innocent children. But she was suddenly aware that God was also angry at what happened to that child and what happened to Todd. God was angry at sin and the effect of sin on humankind. That’s why he sent Jesus. Jesus not only identified with suffering people and comforted those who were in agony, but he took action

at the cross to abolish sin and its effects forever. These truths burned a new path into her soul. For the first time she began to feel that God *shared* the anger she felt. Slowly, the anger within her began to dissolve in tears.

Even though their first church was supportive of Ben and Holly in many ways, it was also having trouble with its own finances. Ben was the first youth pastor the church had ever hired. In fact, it was the first time they had ever had a second minister on staff. So even though the congregation wanted to pay Ben more, the money just wasn’t there. Ben felt he needed to get a church where he could exercise all his gifts in the broad aspects of pastoral ministry, so he sought a call elsewhere. He and Holly had concluded that they did not need to go overseas to fulfill his call to pastoral ministry. Todd’s situation had effectively closed the door for overseas ministry.

In a short time Ben received a call to pastor a Baptist General Conference church in rural Illinois, about three hundred miles from Chicago. So three years after Ben and Holly came to their first church and two years after Todd was born, they said their good-byes on Easter Sunday. Holly told the congregation, “I have learned through Todd’s condition that we serve God because he is God, not because he does nice things for us.”

The ministry in their second church went well. Like the first church, the people of this church surrounded them with love and support during some anxious moments. Holly became pregnant and soon suffered a miscarriage. She conceived again. But this time she gave birth to a normal, healthy girl whom they named Kristy.

Ben went to this church expecting to stay for a long time, but low salary and inadequate medical facilities nearby to care for Todd became important issues. After talking openly with the leaders of the church and praying over the course of several months with the whole congregation about what to do, the congregation and Ben and Holly agreed it would

be best if they returned to the Chicago area where Todd could get the medical treatment and schooling he needed. So after a little more than two years in the church, Ben received a call from Bethel Baptist Church to be their pastor, and he, Holly, Todd, and Kristy moved back to the Chicago area.

Todd was now four years old. In addition to the home care provided by Holly and Ben, a visiting nurse came to the house several times a week. Holly also took Todd to physical therapy, speech therapy, and special education classes several times a week. With the move, Todd was able to begin special education classes in a full-day program five days a week. Even though he had been diagnosed earlier as being uneducable, he was showing signs of the ability to learn and do some things for himself. Ben and Holly thought it was important for Todd to get all the professional help he could in the educational system, and once again their advocacy skills were brought to the fore as they confronted systems reluctant to help.

In their second year at Bethel church, Holly gave birth to their second son, Lee. When Lee was born, some people in the church hinted that it was time Ben and Holly stopped having children. It was too much of a risk for them, people said, and children were a big expense. This was another reason why the church leaders suggested Ben get some financial counseling.

Such advice seemed ironic to Ben and Holly since several of the church people came from large families and had large families themselves. Ben and Holly concluded that having children was their decision with the Lord and no one else's. It did not help, however, that Lee cried a great deal and was very demanding, leaving Holly tired much of the time and unable to be active in the church. People said they understood, but Holly also got the feeling that some people expected her to do more.

Another point of tension with church leaders was Ben's

distance from church. The commute from the apartment to the church building was ten miles through heavy traffic, but Ben could not afford to rent an apartment closer to the church. Church members wanted Ben and Holly to live nearer the church and did not understand why the salary they paid Ben would not allow for that.

In preparation for the annual meeting, Ben had talked with the church leaders about his financial situation. He had gone over every detail of the family budget with them, including rent, educational loans, and the personal costs for caring for Todd that Medicaid and insurance did not cover.

The numbers surprised some of the leaders, and they said they wanted to see the church increase the salary, but they weren't sure the church could afford it. Others frowned at Ben being so forthright about such a private matter. A few thought Ben's action was another indicator that he could not manage money and wanted others to do it for him. Ben thought it was quite clear that twenty thousand dollars a year was not sufficient for a family of five to live on in the Chicago area—not in the 1990s and especially not with a handicapped child needing costly care. He said the church should put more effort into improving his salary than redecorating the building. That comment upset a few people, but Ben had done what he thought was right, and he had done it in a way he thought honored the Lord. Now it was up to the church.

So in their quiet apartment after lunch, Ben and Holly talked. Holly said reflectively, "God is in charge of everything, isn't he? And he gives us grace each day for what we need. For a long time I demanded answers from God, but now I just want to obey and trust him for everything."

Ben was silent for awhile, and then said, "Yes, you're right. And I'm encouraged in my own faith to hear you say it. I don't know how we would have survived what we have without the Lord. I wish I knew what the congregation was going to decide tonight. We need more money. What should we do if the church says no?"