

Ministry in Context, A Guide to Theological Field Education and Ministry Internships in Australia and New Zealand. By Richard Trist, ed., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022, 184 pps.

Field Education is a multifaceted endeavor and when done well invites students, sites, and supervisors into a reflective practice where all can flourish within their context. Unlike many disciplines in a Theological School, most Field Educators, do not have a terminal degree in that subject area but rather come, like the author, Richard Trist, as a seasoned practitioner with many years of pastoral experience. This book will be an asset to anyone new to their role, looking for insightful ideas and practical guidance in developing and overseeing almost any aspect of field education. “It has been written for students, field placement supervisors, and theological college coordinators to introduce the basic principles and practices of theological field education and ministry internships” (P. xi).

Although the book is specific to the Australian and New Zealand context, its value is not limited to those countries. Chapter two, “The Changing Context for Ministry,” includes country-specific statistics, which reflect an increasingly secular and diverse environment in which to do ministry. They also indicate a more culturally diverse student population and acknowledge the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the changing context in other countries may not be the same as those “Down Under” the insights in the chapter are relevant. The need to continually exercise imagination and discern new forms of ministry engagement due to changing demographics is universal. The short section in that same chapter on changing relationships with First Peoples is relevant for all of us who live with a history of colonization and are seeking ways to live into right relationships.

The contributors, 6 men and 3 women are all members of ANZATFE and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the task. In reviewing the credentials of the contributors, all are well-known and respected in their fields, although there does not appear to be a great deal of diversity in terms of culture or ethnicity.

Readers will appreciate the stand-alone nature of each chapter and the comprehensive introduction which provides an excellent overview of each essay, allowing the reader to quickly determine which section will be helpful. Each of the 10 chapters is filled with insights and practical advice on the various aspects of field education like learning goals, assessment, theological reflection, and the many ways and places it occurs. In Chapter 9 the subject of leadership is explored through the “twin lenses of the biblical description of church leaders as navigators and the ancient Polynesian practice of wayfinding” (p. xiii). Wayfinders as those who are perpetual learners; know themselves, their community, and their people, can respond to changing contexts, and “look for and recognize what is not seen and heard” (p. 146). The challenge for our Field Education programs and respective communities of faith is to embody this Way finder attitude with a willingness to experiment as we chart our path into the unknown territory of tomorrow.

The concluding chapter, which could also have been the first, is focused on vocation and calling. It is the call of the Holy Spirit that brings us to this vocation. It is easy, as those charged with the responsibility of training students for ministry, to forget our grounding in Christ as we focus on the development of essential skills.

New and long-time Field Educators will benefit from adding this book to their shelf of resources. There is much wisdom to be gleaned and much to be shared from its pages.

Susan MacAlpine-Gillis
Atlantic School of Theology
Halifax, Nova Scotia