

# ATFE BEST PRACTICES ESSAY

## The Role of Theological Reflection within Field Education

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Theological Field Education provides places to practice ministry and spaces to reflect theologically on that experience to the end that the seminarian experiences growth towards ministerial competency that has theological integrity. Theological reflection is a cornerstone of all field education programs, where it is a pedagogical practice leveraging the experiences of students in order to form them as ministers. Formation in ministry has to do with developing competencies, to be sure, but it also has to do with meaning-making. Seminarians in field education learn to minister authentically and faithfully by learning to make sense of themselves and their experiences. This work takes space and time and a community of practice that invites accountability. The practice of theological reflection, however it is done, creates the space for communal meaning-making that forms thoughtful and competent ministers who minister with integrity and faithfulness.

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN SCRIPTURE: A METAPHORICAL EXAMPLE

Before defining what we mean by theological reflection, let us begin with a metaphorical example from scripture. The story of Pentecost can be taken to

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illustrate an early practice of theological reflection. Confounded by hearing about God's deeds of power in their own languages, those present raised the theological question, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12). Hearing their question, Peter interprets their shared experience by connecting it to a scriptural text from the prophet Joel, with which he assumed they would be familiar.

*In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
and your sons and daughters shall prophesy...*

—(Acts 2:17)

Peter then goes on to narrate their recent experience (or at least what they had heard) of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection into the covenant promises made to King David and David's prophesy regarding the Messiah. The crowd's shared awareness, if not full understanding, of the prophet's message with its messianic expectations and promise of covenant renewal prompts the crowd to ask another theological question, "What should we do?" (Acts 2:37). By way of an answer, Peter calls upon the crowd to respond to the new covenant by repenting and being baptized in the name of Jesus the Christ. He assures them that they will receive the promise of forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. "In these and many other words he pressed his case..." (Acts 2:40, NEB).

Luke clearly intends for the reader or hearer of Acts to understand that Peter's theological reflection and proclamation is ultimately delivered for the benefit of those gathered from around the world to hear this witness and carry it to the ends of the earth. At the same time, it is not too difficult to imagine that Peter's sermon was directed first to those initial recipients of the Spirit who were befuddled by seeing tongues of fire and comprehending foreign languages. As he seeks to be helpful and comforting in answering the questions of those most immediately affected, Peter employs Scripture, theological categories and the history of God's people. He effectively does theological reflection on this extraordinary event!

#### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION DEFINED

Students in field education may not have experiences as dramatic as those early believers gathered at Pentecost, but they too urgently desire to make sense of what is happening to them. To their experience of being formed for ministry, they bring the same questions: What does this mean? and What should I do? Helping them in their sense-making task, field educators help

them cultivate a practice of reflection. The development of theological reflection methodology has a long history within field education, clinical pastoral education, practical theology, and systematic theology. Before and since Anselm called it “faith seeking understanding,”<sup>1</sup> thoughtful Christians and other believers have sought methods of linking action and belief in coherent ways. It is not our aim to cover that ground here. In fact, by “theological reflection,” we do not mean an overall approach to or philosophy about doing theology. Our aim is closer to the ground than that. We mean to analyze pedagogical practice, that is, the actual activities that field educators do with ministry students in classrooms. To underscore the difference, we shall from now on call it “ministerial reflection” in order to distinguish our discussion from that of others who theorize the link between belief and action.

As a pedagogical practice, ministerial reflection still needs to be defined, however, and it is risky to attempt any single definition. But let us risk generalization and define ministerial reflection in field education as follows: ministerial reflection is reflection upon lived, embodied, unfolding experiences in ministry that seeks to make sense of practice and form reflectors in habits for competent ministry. We shall take each part of this definition in turn.

### *Experience*

Field educators keep ministerial reflection inescapably grounded in experience. Reasons for doing so are both pedagogical and philosophical. Pedagogically speaking, the heart of most field education programs is the time students spend actually practicing ministry in the field. The accumulated and assorted experiences from that practice become the “assigned text” within this area of the theological curriculum. Field education students may be given assignments to read or write, but reading and writing are not the central pedagogical activities of field education. Field education is premised on the conviction that one learns by reflecting on doing—indeed, that one can learn by reflecting solely on doing—and consequently, the doing of ministry is its ultimate ground. Indeed, though students who identify as their primary learning goal the simple “Gain experience in ministry” may make field educators wish for loftier aims, those students are not (in one sense) far off the mark. They recognize that nothing substitutes for experience as a source of learning and reflection. If they bring little experience to bear upon the enterprise of ministerial reflection, they will learn no more than students of classical theology who never crack open their texts.<sup>2</sup> In field education, for better or worse, experience is the raw material—the primary text, if you

will—that we have to work with in the pedagogy of field education. Admittedly this material gets filtered through an interpretive lens before it even reaches the classroom or peer reflection group, but if there is anything distinctive about the pedagogy of field education within the rest of theological education, it is this.

More philosophically, field educators would generally agree that purely abstract theological thinking, untethered to human experience, ultimately fails at the task of ‘faith seeking understanding’. Claims made in ministerial reflection that do not spark at least some affirmation of the experience of the reflectors will ultimately neither foster understanding nor increase faith. Such claims will go unrecognized and unclaimed by the student of theology. This is not to say that experience should become the *sine qua non* of ministerial reflection. Neither does it make ministerial reflection into an entirely subjective or personal enterprise. In the end, it must ring true, at some level, with what students know from their experience of ministry. One womanist theologian put it this way about theological reflection on women’s experience: it should be about “the messy particularity of everyday lives examined with excruciating care and brought into conversation with the great doctrines of the Christian tradition.”<sup>3</sup> That is also true of ministerial reflection.

### *Lived*

As the quote above demonstrates, ministerial reflection can and must take the messiness of experience into account. In their ministry practice every week, students encounter sin as well as redemption, judgment alongside love, finitude counterbalanced by freedom. Many different scriptural passages speak to them. Many moments from their own past experience come to mind, as well as wisdom from the fields of pastoral care, ethics, sociology, and more. We are using the term ‘lived’ to suggest that conscious interpretation begins with experience as it is actually manifested, whether or not that experience neatly corresponds to inherited theological categories, Scriptural texts, or other lessons. On one level, of course, all experience is necessarily lived (what would ‘unlived’ experience be, after all?), but what we emphasize in our use of this modifier is the desire within ministerial reflection to let the contradictions and inconsistencies of experience stand, for as long as possible. Reflection upon experience, like any way of “seeing anew,” can all too quickly produce a 20/20 image without acknowledging the refraction.

When they first start doing ministerial reflection, students are sometimes tempted to “rewrite” the text of what happened in ministry so as to fit

the categories they have learned in the classical disciplines of theology. Field educators sometimes exacerbate the problem by asking a favorite but, in our minds, less-than-helpful question: 'Where did you see God this week?' This question is too grand and overly directive. By directing students to find something in their week's quotidian experience that showed forth the hand of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, it risks manipulating the meaning of their experience. It is better to start by asking questions such as 'What is going on?' and 'What is happening?' and thereby press for thicker descriptions of experience.<sup>4</sup> It is pedagogically desirable not to begin ministerial reflection with theological or ministerial categories at all. By insisting that they stick with the stubborn particularities of life as its grounding, ministerial reflection may become more difficult but ultimately richer and more fruitful. It may never look as neat as traditional theology but it more accurately reflects with integrity the experience as it is lived.

### *Embodied*

By 'embodied,' we mean that the practice of ministry is experienced with the whole self—intellectual, affective, spiritual, and, physical—and so, too, is reflection on it. Naming these dimensions and incorporating them into ministerial reflection lends integrity to its practice. One specific experience that has practically become a trope within field education reflection groups is the first time a student who is new to ministry dons a collar or vestments or some other symbol of the ministerial office in the course of an internship. The experience always generates reflection back at school: upon the meaning of vocation, the identity of the minister, the theological significance of ordination, and more. But it is not simply an intellectual exercise. Wearing a collar is a physical event that literally causes the student to feel different. It also elicits emotions. These emotions might be as diverse as satisfaction, trepidation, or pride. Wearing a collar carries spiritual significance, and may cause the student to affirm—or doubt—her calling. To reflect on the moment a student puts on a collar for the first time without recognizing these aspects of the experience would be short-sighted. Lifting up the physical, affective, and spiritual dimensions of an experience adds texture and richness to ministerial reflection. Indeed, one way that ministerial reflection is set apart from more systematic theological reflection is by honoring the fact that knowledge is gained in ways that are not purely rational nor even capable of expressing in words.

At times, field educators may capitalize on the embodied nature of an experience by employing theater exercises, games, art, and other creative activities to help students construct the meaning of it. When these educators invite students to do ministerial reflection as whole persons, they celebrate the emotional and spiritual character of ministerial reflection not always found in the doing of academic theology. They also create pedagogical spaces not always found in other classrooms of theological study, and these alternative strategies may in fact yield otherwise unidentified theological and ministerial insights.

Patricia Killen writes that “reflection begins when one pauses and ponders” about an incident and that is best done when one does not try to “wrest meaning from [the] incident.”<sup>5</sup> She is writing about the reflection that teachers do on their practices of teaching, but her insights pertain equally well to students of ministry starting ministerial reflection. In a nod to the embodied nature of reflection, Killen stresses the importance of retaining the “affective connection” to events being reflected upon. She is convinced that it is the combination of affective connection and intellectual distance that causes reflection to work. Although seeming to be contradictory impulses, affective connection and intellectual distance together produce meaning. While intellectual distance allows reflectors to step back and gain the kind of perspective that comes from thinking a little more theoretically, affective connection allows them to stay close to the event and to keep its experience fresh by continuing to feel it.<sup>6</sup>

### *Unfolding*

All reflection takes time, but field education places a special importance on the way that time affects how one learns from experience. Perhaps even more so than learning from classic texts, experiences and their learning often have to settle in. Typically, therefore, field education involves gathering groups together for sustained reflection over the course of students’ internships, which often last up to a year. Students in field education have the advantage of continuing to revisit events that are unfolding and to reflect on them more than once. They are also exhorted to go back to the field and test out the insights generated by ministerial reflection. Often students are asked to report back to the group with whom they originally reflected. In this way, everyone is able to see that further action makes a difference to how they understand ministry events. Therefore we could argue that field education

actually moves beyond an action-reflection model toward practicing what might be called an action-reflection-action model.<sup>7</sup>

Field educators who understand that experience generates wisdom ultimately realize that wisdom will only be made manifest in further experience. Ideally, they are able to see tangible results of ministerial reflection within the time frame of the students' internships, but field educators must have the confidence that the "unfolding" of meaning and knowledge will extend beyond internships and into future ministry.

Robert Kinast summarizes the action-reflection-action movement well. He writes:

Theological reflection is action-oriented and often change-oriented. Although the words theological reflection strongly suggest mental activity, the term as it is actually used includes something more and different from mere headwork. Theological reflection arises from activities such as the events of ministry. It helps a minister recognize God's role in the ministry. This recognition may entail some changes in the minister's self-awareness, outlook, motivation, and decisions. These changes become the basis for new action—the way a minister conducts the ministry and changes in the process.<sup>8</sup>

In this regard, let us consider another potent biblical example of ministerial reflection from the story of the Church in The Book of Acts. Peter, in Acts 10, receives an extraordinary vision of a large sheet coming down from the sky. In it are all kinds of four-footed creatures, reptiles, and birds. The descending sheet is accompanied by a voice that Peter hears, saying: "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." Peter, initially disgusted by the thought, says: "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean!" However, Peter hears the voice a second time say, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This same exchange happens three times and Peter is left dismayed and confused, not knowing what to make of the vision.

Peter is soon thereafter visited by Gentiles who have been sent to bring him to the home of Cornelius, who is not only a Gentile but the Roman Centurion. Peter shows hospitality to the three emissaries. He "invited them in and entertained them." Then they lodge with him overnight. The next day they set out on foot, walking from Joppa to Caesarea, a distance of about 35 miles. When Peter arrives at his home, not just Cornelius, but a group of his friends are there too and they are eager to hear a message from God through him. Peter "begins to speak," and as he does so it becomes clear to him that the animals in the sheet do not just represent kosher dietary laws but rather a revelation from God about God's generous love for all people. His inter-

pretation of his vision is that “God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.”

Everything in Peter’s own formational experience as a descendant of Abraham and Sarah and an Israelite who had practiced a life-long habit of honoring dietary laws would naturally have led him to reject the message of the vision out of hand. However, the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the experience over time, while practicing hospitality to Gentiles and walking with them to Caesarea, yielded an action that could not have been predicted. One could say that Peter experienced change (in “self-awareness, outlook, motivation, and decisions”) in his own messy action-reflection-action story.

Because ministerial reflection is done on experiences that are unfolding over time, it is never complete. Ministerial reflection is always improvisatory. Its conclusions are provisional. The most interesting moments in field education occur when students come back to their groups and make revised claims about events from earlier in the year. The best field educators guard against premature interpretations of ministry events. As Killen says, “Reflection involves slowing down the meaning-making or interpretive process to look again at an event.”<sup>9</sup>

#### *To Make Sense of Practice*

As articulated above, ministerial practice has to do with both meaning and competency. Field education aims at both. Field educators seek to form students of ministry who are both competent at their practice and able to make sense of it.<sup>10</sup> Often in their eagerness to become successful at ministry, students tend to privilege the former. They want to know what to do and how to do it, whether the task is worship leadership, pastoral care, or growing their church. They may initially be quite uninterested in what these tasks mean and how to re-envision them for ministry today. But field educators try to follow the rhythm of the curious church at Pentecost: students are encouraged first to ask, ‘What does this mean?’ and only later to ask, ‘What should we do?’

Ironically, then, one of the best starting points for ministerial reflection is an event whose meaning is unclear! While the overall aim may be making sense of ministry practice, reflection is often effectively triggered by something discordant that does not make immediate sense or for which multiple interpretations are possible. After all, as Abigail Johnson points out, humans engage in reflection all the time—even through the act of dreaming—in or-



der to make sense of their daily lives. Reflection becomes more deliberate as life events become more “unsettling:” “Most of the time, our reflection is unconscious, helping us to put our world in order...Yet not all our reflection is unconscious. At times we need to deal with situations and issues that demand attention. Usually what stands out is an event that touches our feelings or unsettles our ways of thinking.”<sup>11</sup>

A student might experience a ministry event that doesn’t make sense because it is unusual or unexpected, but events worth reflecting on do not necessarily have to be negative. The church at Pentecost experienced something quite delightful: the sudden and unexpected ability to understand those who spoke in foreign languages! The salient feature of a ministerial reflection event is its disruptive quality. As Killen writes: “Humans tend to pay attention to events, interactions, or texts when they disrupt habitual processes and categories of interpretation. Exquisite beauty, moral collapse, personal loss, intense conflict, a gap between aspiration and fulfillment, and more may grasp our attention.”<sup>12</sup> Disruptive events grasp students’ attention and become fodder for reflection because they are literally nonsensical, at least for a time, and demand that sense be made of them.

One should note, however, that the attention of theological students, like all humans, is naturally drawn toward the sensational and dramatic. It is worth pointing out, therefore, that disruptive does not necessarily mean sensational. Students sometimes fail to attend to events that arise in ordinary everyday ministry experience if they do not find them exciting enough. They prefer to bring to the group stories of outlying behavior or stunning notoriety. But even ordinary events are disruptive and, therefore, provide interest when examined closely enough. Sometimes the best theological reflection is generated by seemingly trivial events that at first glance seem idiosyncratic to one student’s ministry but yield layers of meaning so as to become relevant to everyone’s practice. So long as they somehow disrupt traditional categories of interpretation and cause reflectors to take a second look, simple events matter in ministerial reflection.

Finally, when attempting to make sense of ministry practice, field education tends to encourage multiple meanings to emerge. In other words, ministerial reflection tends to eschew “right answers.” It ultimately favors what some practical theologians call “thick descriptions” over quick answers. As Herbert Anderson says, “insisting on ‘thick descriptions’ is a way of ensuring that we hear the whole story, listen for unheard voices, leave no stone unturned” in our reflection.<sup>13</sup> At the point of meaning-making, field

educators insist that there be no single theological or ministerial meaning assigned to a particular experience. Rather, students are invited to bring their diverse and distinctive perspectives to bear upon the same event, often resulting in more than one interpretation. As one field educator put it, ministerial reflection often shows that in searching for what an experience in ministry is about, the terrain might shift. Students may discover that a story is no longer “about” what they initially thought it was about. At the same time, of course, field education strives for theological integrity in its pursuit of meaning.<sup>14</sup> Not all theological interpretations are affirmed as equally valid. But ministerial reflection is especially open to multi-layered, richly textured ways of sense-making.

*To Form Reflectors in Habits for Competent Ministry*

Field educators often like to reserve the question of ‘What should we do?’ until students have sufficiently pondered the meaning of their experience. We should reduce any temptation to see the “point” of ministerial reflection as arriving at the correct steps a student should take next in their internship. But ministerial reflection is ultimately a practical enterprise, and its fruits are borne out in students’ further practice of ministry. An action-reflection-action model does, after all, call for reflection to produce action. The point of ministerial reflection really emerges over time, as it disciplines students in ways of thinking about, being in, and practicing ministry. Field educators sometimes describe the formation process of ministerial reflection in particular and field education in general as triadic: it equally shapes thinking, doing, and being.

Ministerial reflection shapes students’ thinking in all the ways described above: by slowing down the interpretive process, letting the affective dimensions of experience become informative, and resisting premature conclusions. It integrates the knowledge gained from the classic disciplines of theological study with whole-person knowledge. It lets insights emerge and wisdom to accumulate. Some might say that by doing ministerial reflection over time, a student of ministry learns to think like a minister.

Ministerial reflection shapes the way students do ministry by forming them in habits. In sifting through the multiple ways to view a given event in ministry, more or less authentic ways of acting as a minister emerge. Simply put, some actions more appropriately follow reflection than others. If the church at Pentecost had responded to the new covenant by drawing ever closer boundaries around who needed to repent, for example, they would

have missed the mark! As Peter reminded them, the fitting response to the promise of the Spirit was for all to repent and demonstrate their repentance in baptism. Recognizing a covenant calls forth openness to new commitment, after all, not closure. As a result of doing ministerial reflection over time, habits of responding in fitting manners are developed and become second-nature; a student of ministry is aided thereby in doing ministerial practices authentically.

In the end, ministerial reflection also shapes students' sense of identity, their very being as ministers. Pastoral imagination becomes stretched and invigorated by the discipline of ministerial reflection. Practicing ministerial reflection over time enables students to listen more attentively to their own lives. They learn in the reflection group how to live reflective lives more generally. As Craig Dykstra notes, "What we see depends not only what is in front of our eyes, but also on what lies within our hearts and minds."<sup>15</sup> By continually seeing how actions in ministry reflect the values of Scripture, tradition, and experience, they learn to align their own habits and actions with their deepest values. Ultimately ministerial reflection becomes a spiritual practice as well as an intellectual one that students of ministry will carry with them throughout their ministry careers.

#### THE USE OF CASES FOR MINISTERIAL REFLECTION

Theological field educators use a variety of teaching tools from which to launch a practice of ministerial reflection, including verbatims, critical incidents, and journals. But cases have long been a favorite tool for generating ministerial reflection. Cases allow for an experience to be reflected upon by a wider circle of reflectors than the student alone. Like a pebble cast into a pond that forms concentric rings on the surface of the water as its impact is felt, a case allows a student to "drop" a piece of her experience into a space for reflection. What starts as her own individual experience and reflection upon experience becomes absorbed by a group, and they make it at least in part their own.<sup>16</sup>

Since ministerial reflection uses as its starting point the lived, embodied, ongoing experience of students in ministry, it would ideally start to happen in the same spot where the ministry is happening. That is, members of the community helping the student make sense of an event in ministry would ideally become "flies on the wall," watching and even participating with her as it unfolds. When it comes to reflection, there is no substitute for

being there. Being present in a student's world allows the others to hold up a metaphorical mirror to her afterward, telling her what they actually saw happening. Direct observation allows them to correct incomplete, biased, or faulty memories that may color her reflection process. Beyond that, others can detect additional meanings embedded in an experience that the student herself might never think of.

In most field education settings, however, students in a ministerial reflection group cannot practically travel to each other's ministry locations and become flies on the wall. This is why cases are used. They allow the student to bring his experience to them. As best as he can, he brings a small slice of his reality into the room so that his group can share it with him. We should note, of course, that in most field education programs the student also has a supervisor or mentor with whom he engages in ministerial reflection. His peer reflection group is then a second resource. Following our metaphor, according to this model of field education the student is the pebble, his supervisor (along, perhaps, with others in the ministry site) become the first ring of reflection, and the group becomes the next.

The first task facing the student is usually deciding what to write up for her reflection group. As we said above with regard to ministerial reflection, the best cases do not necessarily represent the most sensational, dramatic incidents, nor the most unusual or difficult. The best cases are the ones that capture a disruptive event that carries at least enough complexity as to prevent a single, obvious resolution to the disruption. Good cases are ones where different actors might respond differently to the unfolding situation and would offer different reasons for their actions. For learning to happen, furthermore, cases should tell about experiences to which the rest of the group can in some way relate. If a case were so inaccessible to the group as to hinder or dampen any meaningful response on their part, then it would not be a good case for ministerial reflection.

The second task is the act of writing. Writing about experience is itself ministerial reflection. That is, in selecting which details to include, deciding how to sequence events, and assuming a particular perspective or voice, a student has already interpreted her experience. Students often find that writing lends clarity to what happened and sometimes also provides insight into the meaning of it. Cases do not have to be written. An argument can be made for oral cases. Telling a group about one's experience can be an effective medium. We presume here that cases will be written because of the value we place on the writing process itself.

Field educators differ in what constitutes a case. Some instruct their students simply to tell a story. They define a case as the narrative of a significant event or incident that carries ministerial import, leaving aside content such as feelings, beliefs, and interpretations. Others encourage students to include the latter as part of a case. Some suggest that case content be divided into sections such as "background," "event," and "analysis." Some recommend that cases be written in the third person so as to reduce bias while others recommend first-person writing, arguing that cases inevitably represent the perspective of the person who originally experienced the event. Finally, with respect to past events, sometimes students are instructed to stop the narrative before revealing how the case was resolved; others are encouraged to share what eventually happened. While undoubtedly different sorts of ministerial reflection result from different sorts of cases, we contend that these stylistic decisions are less important than decisions about how to proceed with ministerial reflection upon a case.

The student presents her case to her peers for reflection. Some groups find it advantageous to have the case read aloud, either by the one who brought it or by someone else in the group. Typically, the group asks the student to clarify salient details but refrains from engaging in too much discussion with her before beginning ministerial reflection. After questions about the narrative have been clarified, field educators often require that the student bringing the case remain silent for the duration of the discussion.

Once the group has received and read the case, it becomes their own. As one field educator put it, the group now "owns" the experience, or at least the experience as manifested in the case. Cases become artifacts that allow the group to impart meaning to them. In a sense they take on a life of their own during ministerial reflection. Some might argue that ministerial reflection moves away from "what really happened," but that is part of the point of ministerial reflection. "What really happened" is never known with certainty, anyway. As the pebble sinks to the bottom of the pond, so too the original event or experience disappears from view, leaving its impressions behind for reflection. Group ownership of the case means that the group now constructs meaning along with the one who brought the case, widening the circle of interpretation. If the meaning they assign to the case seems "wrong" or ill-fitting to the case bringer, the truth will reassert itself in further action upon reflection.

## PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

In the classroom, the practice of ministerial reflection is carried out in a wide variety of ways, as we have suggested, above. Some field educators use the specific procedures outlined by the authors we have mentioned. Some employ a version of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, inviting reflectors to enter into reflection via Scripture, theology, reason, and/or ministerial experience. Others ask the group to dramatize the case using movement or theater techniques. Some approach cases non-verbally, asking students to draw or act out their interpretations. Role-play is a common approach, assigning students in the group to be characters in the case. Sometimes cases are diagrammed by use of a time line or a social network analysis that makes visible the relationships among characters. At still other times students are asked to imagine different ways a case might turn out or even invited to imagine a "prequel" to it.

We argue that ministerial reflection is practiced in different ways for reasons more profound than merely striving for variety in the classroom. Like any mode of interpretation, when ministerial reflection is done in different 'languages' different meanings emerge. Different habits are formed. Students, for example, who consistently do bible study as part or all of ministerial reflection come to experience their ministry as witness to Scripture. Students who are engaged in some form of play learn to take special notice of how the meaning of ministry sometimes follows expected rules and sometimes breaks them. Students who use literary approaches may increasingly come to see ministry as story.

The group may return to the case again at a later date. After all, since reflection leads to action, and action yields fodder for further reflection, a single case can support multiple rounds of ministerial reflection. The case thus continues its rippling effect as it informs and forms the student who wrote it in the first place and, indeed, the other students in the reflection group.

In conclusion, cases are used in field education because they allow for an outward, expanding movement to occur in ministerial reflection: a slice of ministry experience is identified, cut, set to words, and presented to the group. The group receives the case, absorbs it, lives with it, takes it apart, and invests it with all sorts of new meaning(s). The case has made an impact not only on the student whose own experience created it, but now upon an ever wider community circle. This is valuable because the whole circle is potentially transformed to live more faithful lives.

Ministerial reflection is a practice that can be learned. As with the cultivation of most practices, clear instruction, helpful models, and good coaching can accelerate growth. As field educators seek to form thoughtful and competent ministers, they must respond to a diversity of topics and situations in ministry. At any given time, peer reflection groups across the globe are helping students of ministry make meaning out of a complex array of experiences. Such flexibility and creativity mirrors the sort of engagement with their practice that we hope students will continue throughout their ministry careers. Our hope is that this article points students, supervisors, field educators, and even practical theologians in the academy toward how ministerial reflection might serve as an integral part of forming competent ministers.

#### NOTES

1. St. Anselm, *St. Anselm: Prologium, Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo*, Sidney Norton Deane, trans. (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1951), 178.
2. Eduard Lindeman, a parent of adult education theory at Columbia University in the 1920s, affirmed experience as “the resource of highest value for adult learners” in *The Meaning of Adult Education* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1961), 6.
3. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern, eds., *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 86.
4. Ironically, the question is at the same time unhelpfully vague. By referring generically to ‘God’ rather than a more specific theological theme, it also invites a jumbled series of mere stabs at meaning. (One field educator reported only half-jokingly that he elicited much more successful theological reflection when he began asking, “Where did you see evil this week?” Every student had an answer to that question!) Abigail Johnson offers a helpful rephrasing of the classic question when she suggests that “Where is God in this?” can also be asked as “What does God want me to learn from this?” thus directing the student back to the text of their life: Abigail Johnson, *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 32.
5. Patricia O’Connell Killen, “Midrange Reflection: The Underlying Practice of Wabash Center Worship, Colloquies, and Consultations,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 10, no. 3 (2007): 144.
6. Ed Foley explores the connection between orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathos or orthocardia in “Reflective Believing: Reimagining Theological Reflection in an Age of Diversity,” *Reflective Practice* 34 (2014): 60–75. Herbert Anderson has addressed the connection between theological reflection and character formation in his chapter “Authenticity and Character in Pastoral Ministry,” in *Together in Ministry: Essays to Honour John Paver*, Randall Prior, ed. (Parkville, Australia: Uniting Academic Press, 2009), 155–168.
7. This pattern might also call to mind Cardinal Joseph Cardijn’s “See, Judge, Act” which was adapted for use by numbers of communities throughout the world. Fr

Hugh O'Sullivan, chaplain to the Australian Young Christian Workers, developed nine questions to go with each: *See*, What exactly is happening? What is this doing to people? Why is this happening? *Judge*, What do you think about all this? What do you think should be happening? What does your faith say? *Act*, What exactly is it that you want to change? What action are you going to take now? Who can you involve in your action? Michael De La Bedoyere, *The Cardijn Story: A Study of the Life of Mgr. Joseph Cardijn and the Young Christian Workers' Movement* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1958).

8. Kinast, viii–ix. Italics in original.
9. Killen, 143.
10. Keeping both goals in mind is the reason that many field educators, including Emily Click, have begun referring to theological reflection as ministerial reflection. She provides a helpful description of the practice in “Ministerial Reflection” in Matthew Floding, ed., *Welcome to Theological Field Education!* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2011), 31–43.
11. Johnson, 25.
12. Killen, 144.
13. Herbert Anderson, personal communication.
14. See Herbert Anderson’s interaction with Amy Plantinga Pauw and Randy Maddox on integrity in the above cited chapter “Authenticity and Character in Pastoral Ministry,” 161–162.
15. Craig R. Dykstra, *Vision and Character: A Christian Educator’s Alternative to Kohlberg* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 50.
16. We are indebted to Abigail Johnson for this metaphor. In her chapter entitled “Outward Ripples,” Johnson argues that theological reflection makes an impact not only on reflectors themselves and their reflection groups, but also on congregations. “A stone tossed into a pond sinks to the bottom unseen, yet outward ripples on the surface of the water demonstrate the lingering effect of the stone’s impact. The lingering effect of small groups engaging in theological reflection makes an impact on the ongoing life of a congregation;” Johnson, *Reflecting with God*, 91.