A METHOD OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

A central event in supervised ministerial practice is theological reflection about what is happening in the student’s ministry. Unless we can reflect theologically about our encounters with people in ministry, we cannot adequately function as pastoral leaders.

We propose the following as a method which will facilitate helpful reflection of this kind. (We will be using this method in class each week. It also can be adapted for use in individual supervisory sessions.)

1. The student identifies for discussion a significant event, incident or happening which has occurred between herself or himself and persons at the ministry setting. The event may have happened while the student functioned as a pastor to someone, made a hospital or home visit, received feedback on a sermon or talk, functioned as an administrator, or performed some other act of ministry. NOTE: At this point evaluation of the student’s behavior is not discussed. “Significant’ refers to importance, weight, or meaningfulness that this event has for the student in her or his recollection of the event.

2. The student identifies thoughts and feelings which occurred at the time of the event.

3. The student identifies what she/he said or did as a pastor. How were the student’s words and actions in touch or out of touch with her/his feelings?

   NOTE: Until this point, the presenter alone has been talking with other group members asking only questions of clarification.

4. Other group members identify images or metaphors that describe the situation as detailed by the presenter. The presenter may respond to their offerings, particularly noting metaphors that seem most helpful to her/him. The presenter may offer her/his own metaphors.

Attention is now turned to the theological dimensions of the situation. What is the primary theological issue involved: trust, reconciliation, stewardship, crucifixion, resurrection, pride, racism, sexism, honesty, making order out of chaos, etc?

5. Referring now to the quadrilateral, the presenter looks at the following area to expand her/his understanding of what has transpired in the ministry described earlier:

   a. What scriptural references speak to the situation?
b. What part of the tradition of the church is reminiscent of your encounter? That is, where before in the history of the church has the issue raised in the encounter been addressed?

c. When in your experience have you had a similar situation? Of what does this situation remind you? When did you feel similar feelings, think similar thoughts, react in a similar fashion?

d. What does your reason tell you about what’s going on in the situation? What do you think was called for in terms of your response at the time? In the future?

e. What do you understand now to be the key theological issue or issues in the event?

6. The group leader and other students give critical evaluations of the student’s behavior at the time of the event. The presenter sits as an observer without need to justify her/his actions. The presenter then critiques his/her own behavior.

7. What has the student learned about herself/himself through this process? What does the student plan or intend to do about his/her behavior or style in the future?

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