

# THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION PAPERS

## Assignment Overview

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### Purpose and Pedagogy

The purpose of this assignment is to guide the Intern to develop a lifelong discipline of reflecting theologically on the practice of ministry. Our pedagogy invites Interns to reflect regularly on their practice of ministry by writing Theological Reflection Papers that are discussed with an experienced and theologically-educated mentor pastor.

This exercise is meant to help Interns approach ministry from a place of increased depth and clarity. The discipline of writing and discussing Theological Reflection Papers on a regular basis offers Interns the opportunity to develop the skills to become lifelong reflective practitioners that engages in the three-fold method of "reflection in action - reflection on action - reflection for action."<sup>1</sup>

### Learning Outcomes

1. The student reflected theologically on their choices for strategies and course of action during the Internship.
2. The student developed a Theology of Ministry that integrated their ministerial identity and coursework with their internship experiences.
3. The student critically reflected on how their worldview shapes their theological commitments.

### Supervisory Session

- The Intern and the mentor pastor should schedule 60–90-minute supervisory sessions to discuss Theological Reflection Papers. These sessions should take place approximately once a month.
- Students **should not** wait until the end of the semester to write these papers. Doing so does not fulfill the requirements of this assignment.
- The Intern should submit the Theological Reflection Paper in advance to the mentor pastor at a mutually agreed time, but no less than 48 hours before the scheduled session.
- The supervisory session should take place in a professional setting, preferably the mentor pastor's office. The mentor pastor should aim to keep interruptions to a minimum.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

- Interns should submit Theological Reflection Papers to the mentor pastor and the faculty supervisor. Please note that the lay teaching committee should not receive Theological Reflection Papers.

### **Required Assignments**

- Master of Divinity students are required to write a total of eight papers (four per semester).
- Master of Arts in Ministry students are required to write a total of six papers (three per semester).

\*Interns may substitute any of the following items for a Theological Reflection Paper if it is discussed with mentor pastor in a supervisor session (60-90 mins):

- i. Theology of Ministry (part of the Final Evaluation Paper)
- ii. Commissioning papers or theological essays required by the Board of Ordained Ministry or other ecclesial body for the purposes of ordination
- iii. Ministry Context Study Report (with Theological Analysis)
- iv. A theological assessment of a sermon preached during the Internship

### **Format and Length**

Theological Reflection Papers should be 7-10 pages in length, including the Header and the Questions from the template. Papers should be typed, double-spaced with one-inch margins and written in a standard 12-pt font (e.g., Garamond, Baskerville, or California FB). Refer to the Theological Reflection Paper Template (Appendix B) for further instructions.

### **Choosing an Incident**

1. Choose an “incident” from your internship experience that pertains directly to at least one Competency. An incident can fall under, but is not limited to, one of the following areas:
  - pastoral conversation
  - teaching moment
  - positive or negative exchange with a staff or lay member
  - discussion that emerged from a committee meeting or a similar setting
  - event (e.g., worship, public theology or social advocacy)
2. The incident should stimulate focused reflection on the challenges that emerge in ministry performance, interpersonal relationships, and/or personal awareness.
3. The paper should critically reflect on *your* actions, reactions, thoughts, feelings, and leadership within the incident. In other words, the paper should focus on the intern.