

Theological Reflection Paper
Seminar Leader Rated Low Performance Level

Worship service for me on Sunday was a different event for me. While praising God for helping others and me through our illnesses, I began to pray to God for our church and the community surrounding our church. Then I began to weep and the choir began to sing *O Thou, in Whose Presence My Soul Takes Delight*. This hymn soothed my soul as it was sung, especially when the words, "my comfort by day and my song in the night, my hope, my salvation, my all!" It felt like God was providing a comfort that I had never experienced before. It was as though my inner being experienced a presence of God that is difficult to explain. The congregation seemed to be quiet and just listened to the words including the children that were present.

After God had our worship with the presence of God, the children presented their Black History program. My heart was overwhelmed again because there was a young person about the age of twelve or thirteen who had recently returned to Sunday school was participating in the program. She seemed to be so enthusiastic about participating that it made my spirit leap with joy. Prior to her coming back, I was told that she said she was not coming back because she did not want participate. As she finished her speech, she turned and smiled at me. When it came time for me to make my remarks and give a history of our church, I was filled with the Holy Spirit that had me speak to the children. I encouraged them always do the best that they can in everything that they do and that there is a somebody inside of them that wants to be used by God. Jesus is also their

Savior. Jesus can save them as well as Jesus saved us. I called them to the altar along with their parents, grandparents, aunt whoever was with them so that we could pray together.

After prayer, as the children went back to their seats, God placed MarQuan, the young person who smiled at me after her speech. I spoke with her and told her that I knew when I first met her that she has a special talent that God wants her to use. I did not know quite what it is but I know that God thinks she is special. As she began crying and her aunt was comforting her, She looked at me and smiled. I told her that I wanted her to work harder in school and surprise me with a new attitude. I told her how she may stray or be tempted not to serve God but we are going to continue to pray for her that she will be that special person working in the community and be a role model for other young ladies in the church.

I believe that she was receptive to what I told her. I believe that she will return to our church as a motivational speaker. I believe that God has touched her while we were praying together in a special way.

After service today, I later read 2 Kings 22:1-2, where Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign. For eighteen years, he reigned obediently; then when he was twenty-six, he began the reforms based on God's law. This scripture reminded me that the children are the future leaders of our churches and our world. Although a person's work for God may have to wait until he or she is an adult, he or she is never too young to take God seriously and obey Him. It can be that these children's early years are laying the base for future tasks for God.

We, as a church, and me as their pastor must also lay a solid foundation of encouragement, commitment, dedication, support and prayer for these future leaders. We have to teach them that Jesus loves them and teach them to follow God. We have to develop programs that interest them to want to belong and be in the church. We have to teach them to make the right choices. Above we have to show them we love them just like Jesus and that they are important to God.

I am praying that God will send us a youth minister or somebody that can help choreograph these children into music, singing, and praise dancing. I am praying that we will be able to send these children to youth camps during the summer that will also spark an interest in doing more with the church. However, my greatest prayer is that they will be saved.

Jesus taught the disciples to welcome children. The church has to be taught the same thing. Jesus does not want us to treat our children as second-class citizens. In Mark 9:36-37, we can find where Jesus took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." It is important not only to treat children well, but also to teach them about Jesus. We as a church should never regard children's ministries less important than those for adults. I feel in my heart that God felt welcome in the service this past Sunday and I pray that we all will continue to teach our children that are favorable in God's eyes.

Today I also witnessed how grandmothers and the mother of our church provided history of their families and telling the children the important lessons they have learned. I hope

that and prayerfully, the children will listen to their peers, repeat successes, and avoid their mistakes. Sunday was blessed day with our children and with God.

Theological Reflection Paper
Seminar Leader Rated Moderate Performance Level

There is a young woman that has been a long term member of my church, and her name is Pam. She is currently the church clerk and is an intricate part of this congregation. Pam came to me a short time ago and informed me that her mother passed away in Florida and she was very upset about her loss. Due to this unexpected situation, she was hurt and confused of her mother passing away. For weeks she did not come to church and when I spoke with her she stated she was just going through some hard times.

She was not available to do her duties at the church, because of her lack of interest; her duties consisted of Sunday bulletins, announcements and other duties. I had a conversation with her and I stated that it was ok for her to grieve and to mourn her mother's death. I advised her that it was healthy and expected as a human being that when we lose someone we love we do cry and feel depressed because of the loss. What made this ministry was the fact that it was a teaching moment. I had to let her know that her faith will bring her through and to inform her of her responsibilities as a Christian. I let her know that it was God's decision to take her mother home, and since God allowed this to happen, she is well in the arms of Christ. She was a born again believer in Jesus Christ, I let her know to be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord.

My feeling in this situation was sympathy. I felt sorry for Pam because prior to the death of her mother, she never missed a service in seven months that I was at this church. I could feel her pain and I really understood because I did lose my mother years ago and I

understood her plight. What was confusing to me was that she waited so long to discuss this situation with me. I found this ministry life giving because this type of experience can pull a person away from God and from the church. Sometimes we are confused and distraught when God allows tragedy to come our way, but God is a good God. He don't make mistakes and he is in total control of everything that is happening in this world. All I could think about when I was experiencing this situation was when David meditated on God's greatness. In the book of Psalm there is a portion of scripture in chapter 139, he speaks about God's omniscience, His omnipresence and His omnipotence. Knowing this about the awesome power of God, I could relate this to Pam to let her know that God loves her more than we could, and she is in a safe place, in the arms of our ever loving Father.

The culture of the ministry setting was in the confound of the physical church. She fully understood that her spiritual growth and her position in the church were questioned because of her failure to continue to worship God in the midst of her tragedy. I was the pastor in this event and she respected me very much. I believed I also became a friend over the months that we had to fellowship and work together for the Lord. Others related to me very well because I inquired where Pam was when I noticed she missed a couple of weeks from church. The issue of power was with her. She was in total control of how she wanted to handle this experience and we allowed her to deal with it in her own way.

My theological perspective of this experience was that God was trying to tell us something. Death can let us know that we all have a time to die. It also let's us know that we are mortal beings and when our time has come we all will meet our Maker. I saw God testing Pam's faith in Him. This was a time when Pam can get closer to God and to let

God work through her to sooth the pain and the agony of losing a love one. Yes, God is always testing us on our faith in Him. Look at Job, he loved him but He still wanted to see that awesome faith that His children have for Him. My understanding of the power of God did not waiver, and the scripture that I can also see in my mind also came from David in the book of Psalms when David's enemies were out to kill him and all he could say was that He wanted revenge, and he wanted God to take care of his enemies.

I have learned in my own pastoral identity in this experience when I had to take the time to try to understand her pain. Not just she was going through the death of her mother, but I found out that she was also dealing with the pregnancy of her unmarried daughter for the third time. I would not do anything different after reflecting on this experience. It's good that I took the time to listen to her and to wait on the Lord until she was willing to open up and discuss her issues with me.

The sacred in this experience is that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and He don't make mistakes. God allows us to grow in many ways and when we lest expect it, we go through again. The bible says that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning". Trouble don't last long, joy will follow. God is calling me to stretch and to grow in my love for the congregation. I see myself every week loving my members more and more, and I believe God is walking me right through it. I need to pray for my congregation that they can understand the grace of God to allow us to stay her on earth and by His mercy; we have another opportunity to make it right. I must remember that the bible says "I will never leave you of forsake you", God will always be in my presence and He will protect me from all evil. Stay close to God and get a new understanding of Him and we can experience the great love that He has for His children.

Theological Reflection Paper
Seminar Leader Rated High Performance Level

Experience – The experience I would like to reflect on for this paper is that of co-officiating at a funeral for a member of the church where I am serving as an intern. I was given the task of doing all the liturgy at the funeral. In the middle of the service the pastor passed me a note and asked if I wanted to go to the grave site. I hadn't planned on that extra time, but I thought this was a good learning opportunity with someone more experienced at my side, so I did go to the grave side. The service there was short as it was raining, and my part there was to read scripture – Psalm 139 in particular. This was ministry in that there were many grieving friends and family members, and this was an opportunity to share the hope we have in Christ. It was an opportunity to witness to the resurrection and share in the celebration of the life of the deceased church member.

Personal – My feelings about this ministry task were all over the place. I was excited about having this opportunity to officiate at the funeral, and feeling weird that I was excited. One is supposed to be sad at the prospect of a funeral. But I resolved this weird feeling by realizing that the deceased was in a far better place, her suffering was over, and the funeral could be a celebration of life. And I was very thankful for the opportunity to participate, to go through all the required liturgy and protocol of a funeral and grave side service with someone right there with me. I was also a little worried that I might get all choked up or something, particularly when they decided to leave the casket open for the funeral. Presbyterian polity dictates that the casket be closed for the funeral, as the funeral is a worship service where God is to be glorified, not the deceased. But I quickly realized that the funeral service is for the family and friends, and if it was comforting to them to have the casket open, well, whatever was best, was how I felt. In

my own ministry as a pastor I'm not sure I'd give the family the opportunity to have the casket open the whole time, but I got valuable insight into how to handle a situation like that and allow the family to grieve as was best for them. The grave side service was much the same. The family had a few things they wished to do (say a few words, sing a hymn impromptu), and I realized you had to be ready to accommodate the wishes of those that are grieving as much as is reasonably possible. As an aside, the pastor was edging closer and closer to the open grave, and I whispered that she better be careful or she'd fall in, and she laughed and answered that she had already done that once in her first year or so of ministry. So I relaxed a lot after that. I figured anything I would do couldn't be nearly as disruptive as actually falling in the grave!

Cultural/Sociological – As I almost always say, there really weren't any particular cultural/sociological issues present in this situation. There were no issues of race, gender, age or culture in this situation. In this event I was definitely a seminary intern. I wasn't in charge of anything, and I was just there to do as I was told (and I was glad other people were in charge!). The pastor was in charge, but was allowing the family to make decisions as events unfolded, which I think was very good. The funeral director was also in charge, and that was very good as well. He directed both the pastor and I in the proper protocol of everything – where we should stand and where and when to walk, etc. – and that was a real help, especially to me. I was respected as a seminary intern, as part of the service, as part of the ceremony of the whole funeral and grave side service. I was included in conversations with the family, the music director, the pastor and the funeral director. I felt comfortable and affirmed in my role.

Theological – I saw God at work in this funeral. I've been to funerals before, but never really paying all that much attention to the mood and worship. But this time as I was here in a leadership capacity, I could sense how the mood was changing the further into the service we

got. People were grieving, they were sad and silent as the funeral started, but focusing on God helped people to worship, helped them to see this really was a celebration of life. Death is an inevitable part of life, and the funeral helps to bring closure and hope to the family and friends left behind. I think God was inviting me to learn that grieving is necessary, but seeing death from God's perspective is necessary too. The hope lies in knowing God has the last word in death, and as pastors it is our job to state that hope, to let people know God is still God.

Pastoral Identity – Through this experience I learned that pastors are in a unique role to represent God - how God uses his people to comfort those who are grieving. I learned that worship is so necessary to getting our eyes back on God. I learned how important it is as pastor to acquiesce to the family members to help them do whatever is necessary to bring comfort to them. I learned to let the funeral director lead. He/she knows what they are doing, and they are there to help. It is necessary to be in charge, but part of that is knowing when to let others make decisions or lead.

Spiritual Disciplines – The sacred in this experience is in the very hands-on confrontation with death. We all strive to be as young as possible, to live as long as we can. I think we still struggle with feeling invincible. Funerals bring us back starkly to the reality of life – death comes to all of us. Funerals are a challenge to celebrate the life of the deceased, to find comfort that God and his people can bring, but also to confront our own lives – where do we stand before God? Really, what would happen if we were to die today? Yes, even me, a seminary intern. Facing death challenges me to live my life to its fullest, to celebrate life now, not just have people celebrate my life at my funeral.