

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A CASE STUDY

A. DEFINITION

A case study describes a real-life ministry situation in which **you** have played a key role *during your internship*. It focuses on a critical incident posing a dilemma for which there is no easy solution and which requires some action to be taken. Possible case study situations:

- interpersonal communication
- administrative issues
- leadership issues
- church discipline problems
- worship concerns
- counseling issues
- other situations which constitute a learning situation for you

If you are uncertain about the appropriateness of a topic, feel free to check with the Field Education staff.

B. WRITING THE CASE

You are to write a brief, three-part case report (one to two single-spaced, typewritten pages).

1. Guidelines for Writing

- a. It should be a situation that has run its course. If it is still in the process of playing out, it is often hard to reflect without being **defensive**.
 - i. NOTE: You may focus on a current situation, but you need to be careful about this.
- b. The best cases describe one meeting or one event – and then describe as background any details that are necessary to understand the nuances of the situation. Focusing on one particular scene allows you to focus your reflection.
- c. **Pick a situation that you do not yet understand**. If you have already figured a situation out, then it is harder to make it an opportunity to learn.
- d. The best cases **do not focus on success**. Indeed, people learn more from failure.
- e. **Make yourself the central character** in the story.
- f. Tell the story of what happened in the situation from **your point of view**.
- g. Although it does need to be about yourself, you do not have to write in the first person. That is, you can tell the story of a pastor (from the pastor's perspective). For example, "Robin Jones, an intern at Grace Church, convened a meeting..."
- h. Sometimes it helps to **start out by writing a draft of the story as if you need no background** to tell it. Pretend your audience knows all the people and all their backgrounds.
- i. Then go back and **add the necessary details**.
- j. Try to **separate facts from the interpretations** you inferred from the facts. For example, don't just say that "Jerry was angry." Instead, say "As Jerry sat with his arms folded and a scowl on his face, I could tell he was angry."

2. Essential Information

a. Background of Church

Give brief information about the church you are interning at, including:

- i. Size and location (e.g., inner city, suburbia, etc.)
- ii. Ethnic/cultural background (e.g., Multi-ethnic, Korean, African)

- American, etc.)
- iii. Primary language spoken (e.g., Korean, Spanish, English, bi-lingual, etc.)
- iv. A description of any church background issues helpful to understanding your particular case study.

b. Background/History of Case

Give enough information to set the situation in context including:

- i. Who is involved? (use pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality)
- ii. When and how did you become aware of or involved in the event?
- iii. What precipitated and shaped the event?
- iv. What was in your mind, and what did you hope/fear would happen?

c. Description/Facts of Case

Report as much detail as necessary to give the significant facts including:

- i. What happened in the event?
- ii. What did you and others say?
- iii. What did you do?

C. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions will serve as discussion questions. You need not write answers to these, but be prepared to respond to them:

- a. What can we learn from Scripture about this event?
- b. What connections can you make between this critical incident and your study of systematic theology, church history, Bible courses, ministry courses, and counseling?
- c. How would you develop a pastoral strategy of your own based upon the connections you have identified in the question above?
- d. What do you learn about God? What image(s) of God come to your mind?
- e. What do you learn about yourself in the context of ministry? What are the key issues raised for you as a person?

SAMPLE CASE STUDY

THE TREASURER WHO ROARED Scott Cormode

Rev. Clare Morgan was at the February board meeting. In her third year as the pastor of Grace Church, she was increasingly optimistic about the direction of the congregation. Although the first year had been difficult, she saw real signs of growth in the past year. Joining with other congregations in founding an ecumenical soup kitchen had re-kindled interest in mission. The new worship format had begun to draw a cadre of young families to the graying parish. Even the church board was feeling the effects of new life, with two recent additions who (like Clare) were not quite old enough to remember the 1950s, when everyone went to church on Sunday mornings. Clare had even recruited a new Sunday School Superintendent, Angela Michaels. Angela had been a branch-manager for a bank in Atlanta until her family re-located two years ago. She did not expect to return to banking, however, until her infant daughter went off to kindergarten.

As Angela made her first report to the Church Board, she positively beamed, especially as she rattled off the names of newly recruited teachers and recently located musicians. The board members were obviously pleased, although few of them recognized the names she read. Angela was especially enthusiastic about the new curriculum that the teachers would be introducing during Lent. "It's so much more Christ-centered than the material we used to get from the denominational publisher," she concluded. Basking in the approval of the board, she waited for someone to make the perfunctory motion to receive her report. That's when it happened.

"You did what?" roared Gilbert Gaddis, the church treasurer. "Exactly which 'new curriculum' did you purchase? We never approved such a change. And I know I never would have authorized the purchase. We buy denominational material for a reason. Its theology and priorities represent who we are and what is important to us. It speaks our language."

"Oh, stop that Gil," interrupted Hattie Berger, "You're going to frighten the girl." Hattie had been teaching Sunday School at Grace Church for so long that she could scold anyone like she was their mother. "Don't worry Angela," Hattie said soothingly. "Gil goes off like that about every other meeting." The nervous laughter around the table suggested that folks had come to expect Gil's little tirades. "Now tell us about this new curriculum."

"Well, as you know Hattie," Angela began tentatively, "a lot of the Sunday School teachers have been complaining that we aren't teaching our children about the Bible, especially the newer members. We spent so much time during Advent reading about Christmas around the world that we did not have much time for the Baby Jesus. I bet we talked more about hunger than angels and shepherds." Angela gained confidence as she spoke. "So we decided at the Teachers' Meeting - you were there Hattie - to look for something else for Lent, something that would talk about salvation. So I took Carol Jones - the loudest complainer - and we went to the Christian bookstore and found something more appropriate. I couldn't find any kind of reimbursement forms, Gil, so I put the receipts in your box this morning."

"It's worse than I thought," Gil said slowly shaking his head. "We have an account with the denominational publishing house," he explained with a pained patience, "so this kind of thing won't happen. You see we don't like to issue reimbursement checks, and especially not for Fundamentalist propaganda." He shifted in his chair and his face softened. "But don't worry," he said comfortingly, "I think we can fix the problem. I'll give you back the receipts and you can return the materials to your bookstore - I assume you haven't opened them - and we'll place a rush order with the denomination. I'll pull a few strings and we'll have your curriculum by this time next week." He was suddenly in a good mood. "No real harm done," he concluded.

As Rev. Morgan looked around the room, she saw the tension ease. Everyone but Angela nodded in agreement. Even Hattie seemed to like the idea. Angela's face was hard to read. She was either shocked, hurt or angry. Clare was not sure what to do next.

Clare Morgan did not do much to prevent the crisis from erupting. But how would the story have been different if she had been looking ahead? Find out at www.christianleaders.org/MS360/treasurer_alternate.htm.