

## Discussing a Case Study

### APGST Field Education – Instructor Resource

Here is a basic structure and other ideas for discussing case studies in our Field Education program. By repeatedly using the same four categories for analysis (relational, structural, cultural, and theological), our students will learn a method for theological reflection that they can use long-term in ministry.

1. **Advance preparation** Each participant should read the case before class time and come prepared with questions and ideas. Using class time for students to read the case for the first time is a waste of everyone's time.
2. **Exploratory discussion** What do you see to be the key issues in each of these categories? As you ask participants to explore the key ideas and issues in the case, list them on the white board under these categories. The discussion may jump between categories – you don't necessarily have to exhaust the discussion on one category before moving to another. Often an idea or issue could be listed under more than one category – just make a choice and move on.
  - a. **Relational/emotional**
    - i. Where are relationships healthy or dysfunctional?
    - ii. Where are there tensions?
    - iii. What relational complications are there?
    - iv. Are there important relational alliances here?
  - b. **Structural/organizational/communal**
    - i. How is the church/organization structured?
    - ii. What are the lines or patterns of authority (formal/informal)?
    - iii. Where is there ambiguity related to structure and authority?
    - iv. What existing structures can be used to address the situation?
    - v. What communal resources might we bring to bear on this situation?
  - c. **Cultural**
    - i. Every church has a culture – what aspects of this church's culture are important in relation to this case?
    - ii. Are there important dynamics in play related to the ethnic culture(s) represented in this case?
    - iii. Are there important dynamics in play related to the local/regional/national culture?
  - d. **Theological/spiritual**
    - i. What theological doctrines or spiritual issues are relevant to this situation?
    - ii. What biblical stories or passages come to mind in relation to this case? The connection may or may not be obvious – don't set aside a story or passage too quickly. What about a story or passage do you hear speaking to this situation?

- iii. Where might God be present and working in this situation?
  - iv. How might Christian character and virtues guide a response to the situation?
  - v. What spiritual practices did/could prepare you to engage this situation?
3. **Inferences** Often it is helpful to make a list of inferences on the white board as the case discussion unfolds. This helps participants recognize what is *stated* as factual and what they *assume* is factual.
- a. Example: The case says that she had a worried look on her face, but the case doesn't make any factual statement about her emotions. Inference: she was nervous about the meeting. Possible other interpretations: she just got a call about her sick father; she's behind on sermon preparation and this meeting is taking away from prep time. It's ok to infer that she is nervous, but we need to hold this conclusion tentatively until we check it out further.
  - b. By naming our inferences, we can avoid jumping to wrong conclusions and we can identify areas where we might need to ask questions to get more accurate understanding of what's going on. This is a valuable skill to develop!
4. **Decision** What concrete actions do you think should be taken and why? Don't skip this part! All the good discussion up to this point needs to be connected to what comes next. Brainstorm options—even ridiculous ones!—before making a choice. Think about decisions related to these time frames:
- a. Short-term/immediate actions or plans (in the next week)
  - b. Mid-term actions or plans (in the next 3-6 months)
  - c. Long-term actions or plans (in the next 1-3 or more years)

Further resources for discussion:

- 1. What feelings come up in you as you reflect on this situation? (This moves away from the case discussion to focused personal work in the present.)
- 2. If you were one of the characters in the case, what would be your most natural ways of deflecting suggestions or criticism?
- 3. Are there specific things you want to learn from this situation?
- 4. What is *your* piece of this situation? Where might *you* need to grow, change, repent, or initiate?