



Master of Divinity (MDiv) and Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry (MAPM) Comprehensive Theological Reflection Paper (CTRP) Guidelines

Toward the end of their program, candidates for the Master of Divinity (MDiv) and Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry (MAPM) degrees are required to submit a Comprehensive Theological Reflection Paper (hereafter CTRP). The paper is to be at least 40 pages long. The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate that the student is able to respond to the pastoral issues in a ministerial situation by bringing pastoral principles and skills, along with pertinent Christian doctrine and theology, to bear upon the situation. In addition, the paper is to demonstrate that the student is developing a ministerial spirituality and that he/she can describe the influence that his/her spirituality has upon the particular pastoral practice under consideration.

The CTRP is to include three components: the spiritual, the theological, and the specifically ministerial. The conclusion is a pastorally-acceptable way to deal with a ministerial situation. Any human situation that can be addressed by bona fide Christian ministry is a matter for the paper. By Christian ministry is meant any service, individual or corporate, that is specifically informed by Christian meaning: Its source is from faith in the Lord Jesus, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and ecclesial consciousness, while its objective is to build up the church from within or to bring the Gospel to bear upon secular situations.

Thus, the student examines the relevance of the Christian doctrinal and theological tradition to the issues at hand and to the way in which he/she has ministered or is ministering to address the issues (the theological dimension). Moreover, the student reflects upon his/her own self-consciousness as a Christian and the peculiar bearing this spirituality has upon the situation at hand (the spiritual dimension). Finally, on the basis of the theology and spirituality that have been articulated in the paper, the student explains how the decisions for action in the case, and their implementation, are ministerial, i.e. genuinely communicative of Christian meaning, truth, and value.

The following process is to be adhered to for embarking upon, writing, and submitting the CTRP:

- a. The student speaks to the Academic Dean when ready to write the paper. Normally, the paper is written after the four semesters of Theological Field Education are completed (for the MDiv degree) or two semesters (for the MAPM), as well as the major portion of the course work. The Dean will give the student the appropriate forms to complete.
- b. The student approaches a resident faculty member to serve as director of the paper and to set a due date.
- c. After obtaining the signature of the director, the student registers for the paper.

- d. The paper is to be prepared in acceptable academic form with critical apparatus, according to the directives of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed., (2010).
- e. When the paper is completed and approved by the director, student will submit one bound copy of paper to the director, which is then forwarded to the Academic Dean who in turn forwards it to the library to be kept on record.

It is important to note that a 3-credit elective course, PS 843 (Christian Ministry: Integrating Spirituality, Theology and Ministry) offers guidance in the preparation of their paper to enrolled students preparing the CTRP.

The CTRP is graded PASS/FAIL. Students who write the paper in conjunction with PS 843 also receive a letter grade for the course.

A generalized outline of the CTRP follows. It is to be adapted creatively by students in the preparation of their papers.

1. **The case.** The type and elements of the ministerial situation that has been chosen for reflection are described, including the area of ministry (i.e. parish, prison, educational setting, personal situation) and the student's ministerial role (i.e. chaplain's assistant, catechist, family member, personal acquaintance).

Make note of any personal, social, or cultural factors on the part of the recipients of this ministry that have a bearing upon your study of this case (thus age, gender, health, ethnicity, profession, domestic environment, income level, religious affiliation, degree of religious fervor, political attitudes).

Most especially, this ministry is described in all its particularities. Some questions are to be answered. What exactly is the ministerial focus of this study? What are the issues for ministry that arise for you with regard to this ministry? How is this ministry of God, i.e., as distinct from psychological analysis/action or social work (which is not to say that these may not be pertinent)?

2. **The spiritual component.** How do you, as a follower of Jesus, bring your particularity and individuality to this ministry? How does your specific church denomination inform your Christian consciousness? How does your spirituality shape your ministry in this situation (i.e. do you live an apostolic/ministerial spirituality)?

Even persons thoroughly knowledgeable and understanding of the Christian doctrine that underlies particular ministries enter into ministry as concrete Christian subjects. They are more or less converted religiously, intellectually, morally, psychically. Their personality, with all its environmental and self-determined factors, plays its part. The minister's personal relationship with God, including his/her images of God, styles and quality of prayer, vision of church and sacraments, all influence the way he or she performs this ministry. So, too, does the degree and way in which a minister's attitudes, convictions, decisions are informed by the Word of God (for example, are there biblical texts, images, titles that are especially significant for you personally?).

3. **The theological component.** Which themes and doctrines of Christian tradition underlie your ministry in the present situation? Questions to be pursued in this regard include: What is the biblical theology that underlies the church's tradition as it has developed with regard to the ministry at hand? How has the church tradition developed historically to bear upon the present situation? Has church doctrine developed to the point of definition with regard to the theological issues pertinent to your case? How have theologians brought systematic understanding to the church's doctrinal position?

4. **The ministerial component.** Theology and spirituality both have their influences. But ministry is not theology or spirituality. It is action. What is the policy that you are implementing or that you have implemented in the present situation, i.e. what do/did you intend to achieve by your ministry? Is your policy consistent with your Christian spirituality and with your appreciation of the Christian tradition, as you have discovered them in the course of this project? Or should your theology and/or spirituality be further developed to measure up to the high achievement of your policies?

What about the plan you have chosen to implement your policy: Is it adequate? Does it really bring the Gospel to bear upon the present situation? Is it consistent with the theological tradition and the state of your spirituality?

In the assessment of your ministry, don't ignore the ecclesial dimensions of ministry, i.e. How does your ministry in the present situation relate to the ministry of other persons and to other kinds of ministry? Are you involved in a collaborative effort with others? Does your ministry contribute to building up the Body of Christ?

5. Review the whole paper to ascertain that it represents an instance of genuine integration of yourself as a human subject who is an ecclesially conscious Christian minister.

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