

INTEGRATION CLUSTER

THEO 703/THEO 704 Supervised Practice of Ministry

Theological Studies, School of Religion at Queen's

Day and Time: (1.5 - 3 hours per meeting as scheduled by group)

Location: TBA

FACULTY INSTRUCTOR: **Pamela Holmes**
 holmesp@queensu.ca
 Phone: 613-533-6000, 74313
 Room 230, Theological Hall
 Office Hours: TBA

CLUSTER SUPERVISORS: **TBA**

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GOALS OF THE INTEGRATION CLUSTER

The integration cluster aims to provide participants with the opportunity to learn from their placement experiences in order to act with new insight in ministry. Learning is different from problem solving. Problem solving asks, "What do I do in this situation?" Learning asks, "What ministry can occur in this situation? How do I think theologically within this situation? How will what I learn in this situation transfer to other context for ministry?" The integration cluster is an opportunity to practice an action-reflection method in ministry and to deepen appreciation for the ways ministry is a life-long learning adventure.

Students will be assigned to a peer cluster with a supervisor who will facilitate the cluster.

Through presenting case studies (drawn from ministry issues that arise in placement activities), students will explore a method of theological reflection on ministry and develop skills for thinking and acting with theological integrity. Students will relate understandings of their Christian faith to particular situations and learn to be faithful to their tradition while incorporating new insight and understanding. Through telling one's personal story in the cluster, students may discover how one's personal experiences and embedded theological convictions can be resources or obstacles to the ministry of developing meaningful pastoral relationships.

Students and supervisors also may gain appreciation for the role of a peer group in ministry practice. The group character of reflection will enable participants to learn from each other and

about the diverse contexts in which we minister. This practice of peer consultation is meant to serve as a model for future ministry after-graduation; we are not meant to be lone rangers but, rather, communal and relational people.

INTEGRATION CLUSTER REQUIREMENTS

1. Consistent attendance at and participation in the cluster sessions.
2. Telling your story (maximum 20 minutes, within the cluster) using the storytelling guide provided.
3. One Page Book Description AND 5-6 page summary of a recent adult experience you have had with an analysis of the theological conviction(s) that were embedded in your thought and action regarding your experience. By what means were these theological convictions embedded? Discuss how your embedded theology may be carried forward to a deliberative theology. Integrate your readings, if possible.

Length: 5-7 double-spaced typewritten pages (5-6 pages experience and embedded theology; 1 page description of book as below). June 12th. Provide two copies of your paper - one for your clustersupervisor and one for the faculty instructor (unless they are the same). Each will provide comments on your paper.

THEO 704 Students: Provide a one-page description of Stone and Dukes' understanding of embedded and deliberative theologies.

THEO 703 Students: Provide a one-page description of de Bary's understanding of theological reflection.

4. Theological Reflection. A One Page Book Description and a 5-6 page Theological Reflection using one of the suggested formats in the book Killen, Patricia O'Connell and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad), 1994. Please point out in the one page Book Description your move from a position of certitude to where you now are at theologically.
4. Preparation in written form of a case study based on **an experience in ministry at the placement**. (The case is not to be based on a general life experience or relational experiences within the cluster itself). The case study will follow the outline provided – "Theological Reflection on Ministry". The case will be presented for discussion in your cluster. Copies will be required for each person in the cluster, the cluster supervisor and the faculty instructor. Your cluster supervisor and the faculty instructor will provide written feedback on your cases after their discussion within the cluster. **Submit a copy of your case to the faculty instructor immediately following the cluster presentation.**

REQUIRED TEXTS:

All Students: Killen, Patricia O'Connell and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad), 1994.

THEO 704 Students (THEO 704 students may find it profitable to review):

Stone, Howard W. and Duke, James O. *How to Think Theologically: Second Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2006).

THEO 703 Students: de Bary, Edward O. *Theological Reflection: The*

Creation of Spiritual Power in the Information Age (Collegeville, Minnesota: A Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press, 2003). (available in the Queen's University Book Store).

RECOMMENDED READING (Available at Stauffer Library)

Pyle, William T. and Mary Alice Seals, eds. *Experiencing Ministry Supervision: A Field-Based Approach* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers), 1995. [Note especially Chapter 8, A Theological Reflection, 109-24)

Johnson, Abigail, "A Task for all God's People", PMC, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March, 1993), 14-15.

Whitehead, James D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, revised edition (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward), 1995.

THE CLUSTER

1. Clusters will be comprised of students from a variety of ministry placements and backgrounds. Groups will be composed by the instructor based on diversity needs.
2. The primary purpose of the cluster is to encourage personal learning, growth in ministry and the development of capacities for church leadership. The source for this learning is our experience as it pertains to our current experiences in the placement. We act in ministry and then reflect on our actions in order to engage in further ministry.
3. Our learning will be enhanced by a spirit of openness that is demonstrated by our capacity to receive, hear and act on the feedback given by our peers. The cluster is a place to receive a sense of how one is perceived by others and to develop self-understanding and self-awareness. Our learning is also enriched by our willingness to share with one another about the formative influences in our lives that have led to the development of our call to ministry and our current theological convictions and views of ministry.
4. The process of the group is intended to be mutual and integrative (respecting the whole person, honouring differences, etc.). Our reflections and our learning will attend to the individuals within the group as well as to the group as a whole.
5. While students will be encouraged to make connections between their faith, daily life and ministry, and to support and encourage one another in their lives, the cluster is not primarily to be viewed as a source for personal counseling or spiritual direction. Nor ought it to become a time for sharing general academic criticism or institutional frustrations. There are other mechanisms for addressing these kinds of concerns. First and foremost, the cluster is a classroom learning experience that focuses upon our current practice of ministry.
6. Each group is free to determine its own norms for functioning, while acknowledging that regular attendance and individual participation is essential. Group norms will include procedures for handling conflict and confidentiality. In most groups, the information and feelings shared are considered of a privileged nature and are not disseminated outside the group itself.
7. It is important to remember that each group is unique and that the experience of one group will differ from that of another.
8. Learning to be in relationship with one another in a defined group over an four month period of time can be seen as an opportunity to understand the dynamics of forming and sustaining pastoral relationships with all sorts and conditions of people. Thus, the group's membership remains constant throughout the term.

9. Assessment of the group and each participant's learning shall be a regular and ongoing part of the process. At the end of the term, the group will evaluate the group's experience and assess one another's growth and contribution to the group.
10. Each cluster will strive to honour the College's commitment to inclusiveness and openness to diversity (gender, race, class, and tradition).

THE ROLE OF THE CLUSTER SUPERVISOR

1. **The supervisor** is the group's primary facilitator. However, all cluster participants are responsible for sharing leadership, group management and the general direction of the group's life. The supervisor is also a learner in the cluster and, as such, participates in the learning experience.
2. Supervisors bring differing gifts, backgrounds, experiences and ministry contexts to the clusters. So, too, a variety of approaches and styles of supervision will be evident. This will provide groups with an opportunity to learn about intentionality and diversity in ministry.
3. Each supervisor has significant experience in ministry within the church and the world and is a valuable resource for learning. When and where appropriate, supervisors will share from their own lives and the reality of their ministry contexts.
4. Supervisors will meet together with the faculty instructor at least twice each term for mutual learning and reflection on their role and experiences as facilitators of clusters. In doing this, supervisors maintain regard for the confidentiality of the clusters.
5. If a supervisor has a particular concern about a cluster member's commitment to the learning process, and concerns remain unresolved after attempts have been made to discuss concerns with the student, the supervisor will approach the faculty instructor in order to determine the next course of action.
6. Supervisors have the responsibility to inform the faculty instructor if a student is failing to **meet the requirements** of the integration cluster.
7. The supervisor as well as the faculty instructor will read the written assignment and the case studies. The supervisor will provide written comments to provide the student with additional feedback.

PROCESS IF BREAKDOWN OR CONFLICT OCCURS

Normally the process recommended in the *Supervised Practice of Ministry Handbook* will be followed if a conflict develops between student and supervisor. The student shall share concerns with the supervisor and seek to resolve the concerns. The supervisor should do the same. If this is insufficient, the student or supervisor shall discuss the matter with the faculty instructor to seek a solution. If the group itself becomes severely conflicted, the faculty instructor shall be consulted and will serve to facilitate a satisfactory resolution. If the conflict is with the faculty instructor, another member of faculty, to be agreed upon by those involved, will be asked to serve as a facilitator for the parties.

CLUSTER SCHEDULE

May 15 Orientation to Supervised Practice of Ministry

May 22 Orientation to Integration Clusters in Room 209
Clusters meet in designated rooms for 45 minutes after Orientation.
Review of Integration Cluster Course Outline, Group Norms, Sharing Preliminary Learning Goals and Placements, Cluster Scheduling

10 More Cluster Sessions.

(dates to be determined)

The cluster will determine these dates. August 3 will be the last day for classes in the Summer term.

The following items will be addressed in the first half of the cluster sessions (before May 22):

First Five Clusters (1-5) will include:

Storytelling
Attending to the context of the placement
Reviewing Preparation and Presentation of a Case Study.

Clusters Six through Ten (6-10) will include:

Case Study Presentations
Evaluating the Cluster Experience and the Course

Dates and Agenda Planning (complete during first gathering after Orientation to Integration Cluster):

<u>Date</u>	<u>Agenda</u>
Cluster 1:	Storyteller: Storyteller (if necessary):
Cluster 2:	Storyteller: Storyteller (if necessary):
Cluster 3:	Storyteller: Storyteller (if necessary):
Cluster 4:	Storyteller: Storyteller (if necessary):
Cluster 5:	Storyteller (if necessary): Reviewing Preparation and Presentation of a Case Study
Cluster 6:	Case Study Presenter: Case Study Presenter (if necessary):
Cluster 7:	Case Study Presenter: Case Study Presenter (if necessary):
Cluster 8:	Case Study Presenter: Case Study Presenter (if necessary):
Cluster 9:	Case Study Presenter: Case Study Presenter (if necessary):
Cluster 10:	Evaluation and Wrap UP

STORYTELLING GUIDE

Sam Keen and Ann Fox assert that everyone has a story to tell, but we cannot tell our story unless someone is listening. In ministry, listening is the most important faculty we have as a route to discovering God revealed in one another. There will be many occasions when we are given the privilege of hearing another into speech or invited to tell our own story so that others may know us in authentic and holistic ways.

The following questions are meant to prompt the telling of your personal life story through the lens of ministry. Your story need not be told chronologically or in a linear fashion. Try to weave in threads from all of the questions as the pattern of your story takes shape. It may be told through significant events or turning points in life. Feel free to tell your story in ways that may draw upon visual or creative resources (photographs, art, etc.).

Consider the following:

1. What events and persons have influenced my life?
2. What values in life are important to me? Who is important to me?
3. How have I experienced God calling me to ministry?
4. What is my current image, understanding and method of ministry?
5. What faith convictions are precious to me?
6. What challenges me these days in ministry?
7. What sustains me in ministry and gives me hope?

GUIDE FOR PREPARING A CASE STUDY

An exercise in “Theological Reflection on Ministry.”

[Note: This case study method is for use primarily in the integration cluster. However, you may also wish to use it as a tool for theological reflection in supervisory sessions at the placement.]

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

Be brief. Think in terms of a paragraph for each of the five parts below (about 2 pages in total, single-spaced). Provide a copy for each member of the cluster, (cluster members will return their copies to the presenter following the cluster session), the supervisor (who will provide additional written reflection and feedback) and **the faculty instructor** (who will provide written assessment). The case study is to be submitted immediately following the cluster presentation.

At the top of the page print your name and the date of both the experience in ministry and the cluster presentation.

The situation in ministry should respect confidentiality. Use fictitious names or initials. Present identifiable facts in generic style (i.e. instead of “Susie was 42 and an elder in the church” write “In mid-life this woman holds a position of leadership within the church”). Remember that the focus of the reflection is you and your ministry. If you have questions about how to write the case in a way that respects confidentiality, please discuss your concerns with your cluster supervisor and/or the faculty instructor. In some instances, you may need to seek an individual’s permission to represent an incident in writing for educational purposes.

Choosing an Incident or Situation in Ministry

Think of situations at your placement that are having a significant impact on you. From these, select an incident, situation or problem that has occurred, is in process or that you continue to think about. Choose an incident in which you have a strong investment and from which you want to learn. Both high and low experiences in ministry are good opportunities for reflection. Pick an incident that poses a leadership, pastoral or theological question for you. It may be a situation that carries lingering concerns or questions for you.

Preparing for Reflection

In your mind, review the event as fully as possible. Recall as much of the detail as you can. Make some notes to make sure you have the details clearly in mind.

Prepare to write the case so as to help the group enter into your perspective of the case. The perspective includes both the reality of the contemporary story you will tell the group and **the theological thinking you have done about the case.**

WRITING THE CASE

1. Prayer of Approach

Begin by writing a brief prayer which expresses thanksgiving for the incident and the concerns evident in it. How would you like to invite God into the situation? This might include your image of who God is in this setting and/or what your faith tells you to hope for in this setting. Include your petitions for the cluster's time of reflection on the incident.

2. Facts (Tell the story briefly.)

Provide a mental picture of the event you are describing. What was the setting or context? When did it happen? What happened? Who was involved? What was your role? What were your actions? How did others respond? If important, include verbal and non-verbal examples of communications. Include both your own feelings and your perception of those of the person(s) involved. Remember, all the facts are not helpful. You need only provide the essential elements of the story which illuminate your case.

3. Analysis (Focusing the question or concern.)

Sketch your interpretation of the incident. What was going on here? What issues/themes can you identify? What questions does it raise for you? What was at stake for you and others who were involved? What forces or factors were at work in the situation? What cultural factors are involved? What personal knowledge or life experience does it challenge?

4. Theological Meaning (Make the connection to your faith heritage.)

Reflect on the theological basis that you had at the time for doing what you did and saying what you said. What are the theological concepts that are discernible in the experience (i.e. belief about God, creation, salvation, the church, ministry, mission, poverty, sin, grace, death, resurrection, etc.)? Where is God and what kind of God is operative in this situation for you and others who were involved?

Make the connection to your faith tradition. What scriptural passages or biblical stories are evoked in you by the incident? Or, you might think about how the congregation of the faithful has handled a situation such as the current one. It is also possible that the faith heritage resource here might be a hymn, an incident in church history, a creed, doctrine, or a poem. Often, if no scriptural passage suggests itself to you, it can be helpful to reflect on the lections prescribed for the week.

Describe how your personal beliefs or convictions were evident, tested, and/or challenged in the situation.

5. Assessing Your Ministry (Affirming, setting boundaries, moving forward.)

What ministry occurred? What helped and what hindered? How has this affected your understanding of ministry and your role as minister? What further ministry response is required here? What will you want to remember to do or to avoid doing? What limitations do you need to be aware of?

6. Prayer of Blessing

What do you need to pray about in relation to this case? Write a brief prayer capturing the hope, challenge and grace emerging from the situation.

PRESENTATION OF THE CASE IN THE CLUSTER

Approximately 80 minutes

1. Prayer of Approach (2-3 minutes)

The presenter or a member of the group offers the prayer of approach written for the case.

2. Reading the Case (5-7 minutes)

The case may be read in silence, aloud, or by enacting parts of the case. As you read, ask yourself “What is going on here”? What is believed or assumed? How does the reflection challenge me? What theological themes, heritage stories or biblical witness is evoked?”

3. (5 minutes)

Allow the presenter to offer any further comments. Ask questions about parts of the case presentation that are not clear to you. (Discriminate between information that is critical to understanding and information that is based on curiosity.)

4. Heritage Insights (10-12 minutes)

Here the group will share with the presenter other parts of the heritage and theological themes that the case brought to their minds.

5. Issue Identification (10 minutes)

The group will identify additional issues within the case which they see but which the presenter has not perceived.

6. Focusing the Discussion (30 minutes)

Identify the point of need for the presenter based on the themes that have been identified. Participate in a full discussion of the various aspects of the case around the learning that is desired. This is a time of shared exploration and vulnerability.

7. Past, Present and Future Ministry (5-7 minutes)

Consider the ministry that has occurred in the situation and in the presentation. Identify future responses or follow-up actions that can be considered.

8. Assessing Learning (5-7 minutes)

Each member of the group offers final feedback and responds to the question: What have I learned about myself and my ministry today? Discuss what helped or hindered learning. What face of God was revealed in the discussion?

9. Prayer of Blessing (2-3 minutes)

Either the presenter or a member of the group is asked to offer the prayer of blessing found in the case. This prayer is a time of sending forth with the recognition that no situation will ever be fully discussed or finished.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING CASE STUDIES

For the consideration of peers, cluster supervisors and the faculty instructor, a satisfactory case presentation will include the following:

- * evidence in written presentation and during cluster discussion that the case chosen reflects a willingness to learn;
- * selection of a situation in ministry from the field placement that is current, open-ended and reveals personal and professional action in the ministry situation;
- * written presentation that clearly synthesizes and organizes the ministry incident so that peers can engage the experience at a significant level;
- * written case presentation demonstrates capacity to interpret the event theologically and pastorally;
- * prayers of approach and blessing are presented as religious resources which address the spiritual, pastoral and theological themes identified in the ministry event;
- * capacity to place the case in the hands of the group for everyone's learning in the cluster;

* capacity to receive, hear, engage and act on feedback shared by members of the cluster, written case study demonstrates principles of confidentiality and attention to grammatical form.

SAMPLE CASE STUDY #1

Name: D. Anybody
Date of Experience: January 12, 200-
Date of Presentation: January 19, 200-

1. Prayer of Approach

God of life, God of freedom, you have created us to be fully alive - sons and daughters of joy. But you know far better than we how many of your children live in despair and with unresolved feelings. You understand our fears and you lovingly hold our tarnished and bruised hearts in your hands. Hold us close now, as we share the wisdom of our minds, our hearts, and our bodies. Amen.

2. Facts

Mrs. T is a 49 year old white woman admitted to a general hospital where I am a student chaplain; she entered with suspected cancer, although this was ruled out. She has developed a lot of anxiety and depression again. She identified herself as a Alapsed Catholic in my first visit with her. In prior visits (5), she had pursued the topic of confession and her fear of dying. She believes she has lived a sinful life (abortion, adultery, smoking) and that God, therefore, could not forgive her. Even if God could forgive her, she is not sure she can accept God's forgiveness.

Mrs. T also has a history of alcoholism and the hospital report described her as a psychotic depressive.

I enter the room. There is very little there. She has no roommate. She is watching TV, sitting on the side of her bed. When I enter, she turns the TV off. We talk briefly about her tests. She is now concerned about her eyesight. The following conversation ensues:

(T=Mrs. T, C-Student Chaplain)

- T1 My field of vision is really narrowed. The doctor said that I really need new lenses badly. He could tell just by looking. It's my own fault. It's because I took that drunk home.
- C1 What happened with the drunk?
- T2 He gouged me in the eye (indicating left eye) and hit me in the back of the head so that now I can't see out of the right eye. I see specks in front of the right eye. That was the worst decision I ever made.

- C2 And now you are really regretting it?
- T3 I sure am. I brought him home from an AA meeting. It's probably the only good thing I tried to do in my whole life. I mean I have really done wrong. I had the opportunity to do right. I came from a good Christian home.
- C3 In this case though you were trying to do a kindness.
- T4 Well, it wasn't kind to my mother and my children. How could I know that he has a reputation for being a wildman? I don't know why I took him home. (She excuses herself to go to the bathroom and returns angry at the staff for telling her to wear her glasses. We talked briefly about this and then returned to the previous conversation.)
- C4 You said that you cannot face blindness. What is it that you fear most about it? Is it the blindness itself?
- T5 I see blind people who seem very happy. They are smiling. But I just don't think that I can do it. It just seems so...so isolated. I'm living with my mother now. I'm working on disability benefits. I can't work if I can't see. My children are far away. I've had four husbands already.
- C5 Would you like to be married again?
- T6 I'd like to...but how would want a wreck like me? Blind and no looks. You won't believe it but I was very attractive when I was young. Too attractive for my own good. But that's all gone now.
- C6 (I didn't know what to say so there was silence for a while. I was feeling uncomfortable, (frustrated, inadequate, unsure.) Mrs. T, the other day, you said that you thought that everyone should have the experience of believing that they were about to die. How are you feeling about that now?
- T7 Well, I still think that's true. I was afraid to die. But now I am just not sure if I can face up to blindness. I don't know if I can stand it.
- C7 So you were afraid to die, but now it sounds as if you are afraid to live.

Our conversation continued for awhile longer during which Mrs. T expresses an inability to feel God's presence and forgiveness.

3. Analysis

Mrs. T seems to have low self-esteem and has difficulty accepting herself. Apparently this used to be manifested in alcoholism but this no longer seems to be a direct problem. I'm not sure what is meant by a psychotic depressive. She does not seem to be close to her family or to have many friends. I am not clear on what groups or institutions, if any, are important to Mrs. T. The Catholic Church has been part of her background, but she does not seem connected to a local parish at present. There does not seem to be a priest to whom she relates. Has she been involved with AA at all?

I feel both drawn toward and afraid of Mrs. T. My fear is based on feeling that my compassion is being hooked. I want to help her but I do not want to dismiss the depth of her illness or the alcoholism. I am aware also that Mrs. T reminds me of my mother. I wonder where her rage is

hiding.

As I look back on the visit, I see myself primarily in the role of a listener, provider of pastoral care and theological interpreter. At times, Mrs. T's apparent refusal to accept God's forgiveness/acceptance tempts me to take on the role of preacher. I have reservations about using this role very extensively. Also, I wonder if personal concerns are blocking my effectiveness.

I find myself asking how I minister with news of life to Mrs. T who is depressed and on the verge of blindness. How do I employ the possibility of love, freedom, hope?

4. Theological Meaning

The key words or themes in Mrs. T's theology seem to be abandonment, judgment and forgiveness/acceptance. If Mrs. T has experienced God at all in this experience, perhaps it is in her increased longing for acceptance. The fact that Mrs. T seems to be expressing a need for confession and penance raises certain theological questions for me. What is the Catholic understanding of this? What does it mean to me? Is my ignorance a block to effective pastoral care with her? I believe that God offers new life to each of us - the past is forgotten. I do not believe that we have to earn God's acceptance or approach God with less than our full humanity (which includes fear of blindness or death). What is Mrs. T's understanding of anger (does she feel this around her blindness?) And her faith? Is she angry at God? Is her God an angry God who can never be appeased?

Various verses from Romans 8 come to mind when I think of this visit:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death....For all who are led by the Spirit of **God** are children of God....When we cry, Abba! Father!, it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ - if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him....We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness....

5. Pastoral Action and Response

I genuinely like Mrs. T and have an authentic desire to be present to her. However, I feel that I am not very effective with her and often come away feeling puzzled by our interactions. Mrs. T seems to turn everything I say into a curse. I need to listen more carefully to her concerns and to deal with them as she sees them. I want to try to be less off balance and tangential in my responses in future conversations. I think it will be important to let Mrs. T tell her story more

fully, express normal human reactions and to find ways to help her hear the good news of God's grace for her life. Practically, I need to find out if the local Catholic priest visits those in the hospital who identify themselves as Catholic.

6. Prayer of Blessing

O God, we can feel overwhelmed by the painful circumstances and lives of those with whom we minister. And yet you surprise us with hope and grace as we discover the truth about our own lives and your presence at work within them. Grant us the ability to trust ourselves and to trust that your wisdom is being released into the world even as we pray. Amen.

SAMPLE CASE STUDY #2

1. Prayer of Approach

God who became flesh and dwells in the goodness and mess of our lives, you have created us to be fully alive and to be lovers and healers of all your sons and daughters. You know far better than us the ordinary and not so ordinary issues we face in life. Cause our feet to dance with joy and celebrate creation and bend our hearts close to those whose spirits are broken. Confirm our faith in your love which seeks to transform us, even now, as we gather. Amen.

2. Facts (names are fictitious)

I visited Pat in the hospital where she was recuperating from an intestinal surgery. Several times during the conversation she mentioned that it was her birthday. As I was leaving the hospital, I thought about that, stopped, went into the gift shop and bought a card. When I got back to her room, a nurse was there and her daughter had just arrived. No birthday should go by without a card, I said. No birthday should go by without singing. Then we all sang Happy Birthday.

Following lunch, I called Ann, an eight year old pillar of the church who had just returned from her sister's funeral. Would you like a visit? I asked. Sure, she said. I'll get some tea ready. I'll be over in a few minutes. We had a pleasant visit in which Ann described the funeral but did not really touch upon her feelings about her sister's death.

3. Analysis

I think that both Pat and Ann got a lot out of my visits. Pat seemed to enjoy my surprise return and Ann said she really appreciated my visit because she doesn't have the chance to entertain anymore. At the time, in both situations I felt that I had acted spontaneously. I was just being myself without worrying about whether that's what a minister should do. Afterwards, I wondered if, with Pat, my spontaneous return visit got in the way at all in terms of her daughter's role and arrival in the room. With Ann, I was surprised that her grief was not shared openly. Did

she need to leave it behind for awhile and function normally? I wondered what her relationship was like with her sister and what age her sister was. Does Ann think about her own death?

4. Theological Meaning

Spontaneity seems to be important to me. In terms of achieving a balance between intentionality in pastoral care and spontaneity, I fear I am more intense than at ordinary times. The crucial question for me seems to be what made (makes) either of these visits a ministry as opposed to just a nice visit from a friendly person? And, who has this ministry? Is it the vocation of all baptized Christians? What difference does it make that I will be ordained in the United Church of Canada to a ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care?

I believe that God works through human actions but surely not all of human life can be equated with ministry. Yet how do personal qualities of the minister enter into ministry? I guess I believe that the personal dimension is an important part of the nature of ministry but that every good work can not necessarily be described as ministry. I think I had opportunity with Ann to invite reflection on spiritual and theological concerns such as loss, resurrection, after-life.

In terms of a faith heritage connection, for some reason the words of this hymn are before me:
The church is wherever God's people are praising, singing God's goodness for joy on this day.
The church is wherever disciples of Jesus remember his story and walk in his way.

The church is wherever God's people are helping, caring for neighbours in sickness and need.
The church is whenever God's people are sharing the words of the Bible in gift and in deed.

(Voices United #579)

5. Assessing Your Ministry

I was present to both of these individuals, as a representative of the church, at critical times in their lives. The celebration of a birthday and the sharing of tea may have been ordinary grounding events in otherwise stressful days. Perhaps I need to study the UCC's official statements on ministry, including the most recent "Theology of Call" document. I'm not sure that perfect balance between spontaneity and intentionality in pastoral work can ever be achieved. Maybe I need to become more comfortable with the tension and to be less fearful of encouraging others to identify underlying theological or spiritual questions that may be present.

6. Prayer of Blessing

Ever present and steadfast God, keep us from being too timid in our pastoral care and give us grace to see your indwelling presence in others. Yet call us to a ministry that can seem inconsequential, interruptive or incidental. Surprise us with grace enough that we may live as ourselves while loving as you would love. Amen. (Cases prepared by Dr Jean Stairs, 1999).