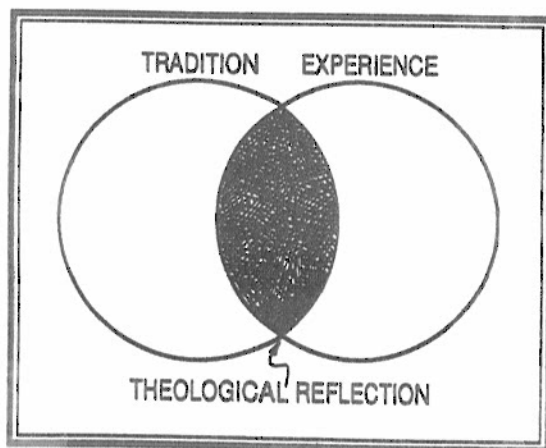


**Theological Reflection** is the discipline of exploring individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions, and perspectives, as well as those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection therefore may confirm, challenge, clarify, and expand how we understand our own experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living.



### FRAMEWORK FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

1. Focusing on some aspect of experience (sources are aspects of experience)
2. Describing that experience to identify the heart of the matter.
3. Exploring the Heart of the Matter in conversation with the wisdom of the Christian Heritage (includes some questions from Christian Themes and material from the tradition source).
4. Identifying from this conversation new truths and meanings for living.

## REFLECTING WITH GOD

**1. Naming the Experience: Choosing an Event on Which to Reflect**

Choose an event, a moment, a conversation, or a situation. As you recall the event, ask yourself:

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- What did you do or say?

**2. Exploring the Experience: Finding Another Layer to the Event**

To explore another layer in this event, ask yourself:

- How did you feel?
- What challenged, stimulated, or disturbed you?
- What was happening for others in the situation?

**3. Digging Deeper: Expanding Your Thinking**

To discover another layer of reflection, ask yourself:

- What do you think about the situation?
- What core values emerge as you think about this event?
- What values are different from yours?
- What social issues, power issues, or economic issues are at work?

**4. Making Faith Connections: Finding God at Work in This Event**

To make faith connections, ask yourself:

- Where is God present for you in this situation?
- Where is God present for others?
- Does this event remind you of a Scripture passage, a hymn, or other resources from your faith tradition?
- What theological issues or themes are present?
- What traditions of our church speak to this situation?
- Are you affirmed or challenged in your present actions or beliefs?

**5. Learning: Naming Your Discoveries**

To draw out what you learned, ask yourself:

- What questions still linger?
- Were you challenged to change present actions or beliefs?
- What have you learned about yourself?
- What have you learned about God?
- What do you need?
- What will you do now?

**6. Praying: Taking Time with God**

To conclude your reflection, write a prayer emerging from this event.

**7. Presenting to the Group: Preparing for Group Discussion**

Present your written reflection to the group by reading it aloud. This reading will be followed by group discussion. As you think about the discussion time, how would you like the group to focus? Discussion is not a problem-solving exercise but a way to extend your personal reflection. Here are some suggestions to focus the group discussion:

- Is there a question still lingering for which you would like group wisdom?
- Do you want group members to share their experiences with a similar situation?
- Do you want to hear group members' thoughts about further theological or biblical connections?
- Do you want to know where others see God at work?

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

### Practical Suggestions for Reflecting on the Practice in Ministry and Mission

The following guidelines are taken/adapted from Appendix Two of *Shared Wisdom: A Guide to Case Study Reflection in Ministry* by Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen (Nashville: Abingdon; 1993).

Below are possible questions that focus the theological reflection process:

- How have God's people responded to similar situations in other times and places? What do those responses suggest about the nature of ministry?
- How does your course work and reading speaking to this situation?
- What biblical story, image, or symbol comes to mind that illuminates or is evoked by this situation?
- What doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) is portrayed?
- A Wesleyan approach would test whether our theological reflection is:
  - revealed in Scripture
  - illumined by tradition
  - brought alive in personal experience
  - confirmed by reason
- What image or images of God and humanity are expressed in the case? What is the nature, power and limit of each? Where are these images of God and persons supported or confronted or challenged by scripture or church tradition? Where is (or what kind of) God (is) at work?
- Where (how) is the Holy Spirit at work?
- What is the relationship of God, Christ, and/or Spirit to culture? How do your assumptions about these relationships shape your expectations about what constitutes appropriate ministry in this situation?
- What is the "lived theology" of the situation? What story or stories are being lived out? What assumptions about God and humanity, good and evil, are reflected here?

- Identify the theological concepts operative in the situation, such as:

New Jerusalem/Kingdom	Indwelling	Creation
Conscience	Honesty	Sacrifice
Redemption	Sin	Grace
Faith	Peace	Servant/Service
Revelation	Church	Love
Justice	Covenant	Vocation
Ministry	Compassion	Freedom
Incarnation	Renewal	Discernment
Celebration	Prophecy	Obedience
Authority	Creator	Savior
Spirit		

Choose one of the concepts and pursue. What is it about this concept that energizes, confronts, criticizes, or confirms this situation?

- What does your theological reflection imply for your practice of ministry?