

Student's Report of a Critical Incident

(adapted from Boston University School of Theology, as cited in *Theological Field Education*, The Rev. Dr. George I. Hunter)

Describe the most critical incident in your ministry during the past two to four weeks. The assignment presumes no a priori for what is critical; rather it encourages students to allow themselves the fullest latitude in recalling the event which, in whatever way it is important, seems to typify their experiences. A critical incident can be a personal involvement that may have caused anxiety; on the other hand it may be an event that was exceptionally gratifying. In any case, it should be some experience that can be marked as the "high point" or the "low point" of the two to four week period. Attempt to cover as many of the following areas as possible:

1. Describe the event including critical verbal and non-verbal communication involved, and your responses.
2. Describe any emotions you perceived in others.
3. Describe your personal feelings about the situation.
4. If it is a "low point" state the problem as you see it; if a "high point" state why it is so.
5. If a "low point" list some other ways you might have responded or handled it; if a "high point" state any new insights or growth you perceive in the situation.
6. Deal with the question, "How do I understand or make sense of this incident theologically?"

Student's Verbatim Report

(Adapted for the First - B.T.I. - Notre Dame Field Education Institute, 1970 by Dr. Robert Treese, Assoc. Director, Field Education, Boston University and the Rev. Donald McNeill, CSC, Asst. Professor of Pastoral Theology, University of Notre Dame, as cited in *Theological Field Education*, The Rev. Dr. George I. Hunter)

NOTE: Use only 2/3 of the width of your paper for a verbatim report. The right column is for supervisory comments.

I. Important Elements in a Verbatim Report

A. Introduction: (1) Time (2) Place (3) Brief description of the person (maintain confidentiality) (4) Your relationship to the person (how you got to talk with the person; how long you have known him/her; in what capacity) (5) The context of the conversation (what you thought of and felt about the person and this situation before the conversation) (6) Other details or circumstances that are relevant.

B. Verbatim Record of Conversation: An exact (as possible - e.g. make notes as soon as possible after meeting) record of the conversation including pauses, non-verbal communications, facial expressions, etc., insofar as they help to catch the "tone" of the experience. If the conversation is longer than can be conveniently reported, give highlights, being sure to indicate where breaks occur, and summarizing missing parts. The effort in this part is to be purely descriptive -- omitting explanation of why you did what you did. This effort calls for candor that will be, at times, difficult to achieve.

Number the responses ... using fictitious names

S1: How are you today, Mrs. Doe? (student)

D1: Fine, how are you? (Mrs. Doe)

S2: We missed you in church Sunday.

D2: I missed being there (blushing) . . . etc.

Don't try to "doctor" your report to make it look better.
Rather indicate changes you would make in your analysis.

C. Analysis and Evaluation:

1. What took place (where do you and the person now stand in your relationship?)
2. Intention at beginning (discrepancy between intention and performance; shift in expectations, etc.)
3. An evaluation of your responses, trying to identify your dominant feelings during the conversation. This is not an invitation to probe the depths of your unconscious, but a simple effort to catch the feelings on or near the surface (i.e., is this a person who makes you feel angry, happy, frustrated, etc.) What did you see as the person's needs? Are there any points that strike you as particularly significant now; any responses you would certainly want to omit or do differently (indicate by number -- D2, etc.)?
4. What does this interview reveal about the person and about yourself? What kind of person are you in this interview?
5. What effect did this interview have on the person? How did that person feel when it was over, and why?

D. Goals, Learning, and Future Involvement:

1. What goals and plans will you have for your next meeting with this person?
2. What did you learn by studying this relationship and reporting on it (other person; yourself; own attitude to the other person or persons, etc.)?

E. Theological Analysis and Evaluation:

1. What theological doctrine, problem, question, principle, etc. is demonstrated, suggested, or illuminated in this case?
2. Does your normative understanding of the issue, etc. shed any light on the situation and future possibilities?
3. Does this help in your fundamental appraisal of the situation (me, others, Church, etc.)?
4. What are the theological dynamics of the actual situation (grace, redemption, forgiveness, salvation, hope, etc.)?
5. How has this report helped you integrate your experience and theological understanding?

II Reflections on the Advantages of the Verbatim

- A. Ministerial Role and Pastoral Style: As a tool for the discovery of one's pastoral style, strengths and weaknesses, the verbatim focuses on one, specific, concrete example of pastoral experience. It indicates to the student and to the supervisor what the student did in fact, not what he/she would like to have done. It is a powerful weapon against wishful thinking and fuzzy attitudes about pastoral work.
- B. Reflecting within a Supervisory Relationship including Self-Supervision: The verbatim allows the student and the supervisor to reflect together on a sample of the student's work.
1. CLARIFICATION OF THE EXPERIENCE: (just what did happen in this meeting?)
 2. IDENTIFICATION OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS: (critical moments, etc.)
 3. PRESENTATION OF ALTERNATIVES: (What other ways of responding were available? Was the student determined to this one way of responding?)
 4. INTEGRATION OF REFLECTION PROCESS: (How does this personal experience relate to theological, psychological, spiritual, etc. perspectives related to ministry?)
- C. Disciplined theological reflection: It permits the student to discover the meanings of theological terms and categories in the lives of persons (living human documents) with whom he/she is working. The verbatim helps the student to anchor reflections in concrete experience.