



Field Education Theological Reflection Using Appreciative Inquiry

Reflection papers will be written in two parts: Part I invites you to explore your ministry setting through the lens of Appreciative Inquiry. Part II provides an opportunity to create a collect to share in response. Your written reflection should be submitted to both your group leader and in Sakai no later than Wednesday, June 7th at 5pm.

PART I. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is about the search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructive. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that enable an articulation of an organization’s strengths and potential for positive change.

Theologically, AI helps us to recognize and name the goodness of God’s created order and of God’s continuous good work in our midst. This inquiry enables us to call attention to “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure” and those things that are “worthy of praise” (Phil. 4:8-9). AI can refocus the temptation to diagnose problems and criticize into an opportunity to discover, dream and design. This does not mean we embrace being naïve, complacent, or oblivious to injustice, apathy, and sin. Rather it recognizes that it is only out of a true vision for what *is* good that we can rightly name what *is not*.

The practice of AI can help us as theologians to exegete our congregation because it forces us to listen and reflect on the lived experience of Christian community. It builds within us a missional imagination that enables us to identify what God is doing, pay close attention, and join in.

Spend time in prayer over the community you are serving. Then, work through the following questions with at least 3 members of your congregation/organization. Give careful attention to select a diverse group of people. Record their answers as part of your written work. Feel free to change names or identifying information.

Questions to ask of at least 3 members of your congregation/organization and one person outside the congregation/organization (either individually or as a group):

1. **What first attracted you to this church/non-profit? What keeps you here?**
2. **What is the best experience you have ever had in this church/non-profit – a time you felt engaged, valued, effective or extremely passionate about your participation?**
3. **What does this church/non-profit value? How would you describe the “core” of your church/non-profit – what is the DNA that holds it together? Can you give an example?**
4. **What scriptural story or verse best describes this church/non-profit?**
5. **What is the common mission or purpose that unites this church/non-profit? What does it do best as a community of faith?**
6. **Where does God seem particularly active in and through your faith community right now?**
7. **What three dreams do you have for this church/non-profit?**

Review the stories shared. Drawing upon these stories, write a 750-word response addressing the following questions:

- What do you discern to be the charisms or spiritual gifts of this church/ministry?
- What are the “life giving forces” or the core of the community?

- From the interviews and what you have observed, describe ways in which God seems to be especially at work right now in and through this faith community?
- Drawing upon your growing pastoral identity; Imagine you are in a long-term leadership position within this community - how would you build upon the gifts of the community to form holistic disciples of Jesus?
- Identify 3 – 5 themes, phrases or words that you feel are most important to retain as you continue to learn and serve in this community. Articulate how these themes might guide your participation here through field education.

PART II. Prayer is always an appropriate response to an experience of God or reflecting on God’s work in our and other’s lives and in the world.

Write a prayer, to respond in a focused way, to an insight you gained through your theological reflection. If possible, write your prayer in the ancient form of the collect (pronounced with stress on the first syllable). The basic form looks like this:

Invocation: The Latin, *invocare*, means to call upon. Some examples are “Lord, God Almighty,” “Gracious Heavenly Father,” “Christ our friend,” “Spirit of wisdom,” or, “*God our refuge.*”

Declaration: After the invocation, the prayer names a quality of the One it has just invoked. For example, if your collect begins “God our refuge,” the declaration might be, “*you are a shelter in the storms of life.*”

Petition: This request should follow logically from the attribute(s) of God declared. If the collect, to this point is, “God our refuge, you are a shelter in the storms of life.” The petition might be, “*Protect and preserve _____ and her children as they seek more permanent shelter.*”

Anticipated result: This usually is a continuation of the petition, For example, “Protect and preserve _____ and her children as they seek more permanent shelter, *that they may experience your sheltering care and have courage to weather their current storm.*”

Doxological conclusion and affirmation: It might simply be “through Christ our Lord. Amen.” It may be with an outpouring of praise, “We ask this through your son, our savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.” Still others continue the collect’s theme. In the example above the doxology might be, “*We ask this through Jesus Christ, who endured all storms for our sake. Amen.*”

God our refuge,

You are a shelter in the storms of life.

Protect and preserve _____ and her children as they seek more permanent shelter,

that they may experience your sheltering care and have courage to weather their current storm.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, who endured all storms for our sake. Amen.