Instructor’s Notes

The short reading from Garrido this week is meant to reemphasize the importance of TR for pastoral ministers, as well as the various goals that one may have in pursuing it. Given that this course is part of the initiative for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), we will want to keep our work for JPIC as a central goal in our use of the TR method.

Many writers use the metaphor of “conversation” to describe this method. It is not a debate, nor is it simply a sharing of opinions. It is a disciplined yet flexible process that brings people together with a mutual intent to listen and to speak. The listening and speaking are directed toward one another, but also to each element in the process—Experience and Situations, Social Analysis, Christian Tradition and New Actions—and, most fundamentally, toward God. Thus it is conversation that is both formative and potentially transformative.

In Units 7 and 8 you will be using outside examples to work through this process with a coordinator (when one is available). In Unit 9 you will be writing your own example, and in Unit 10, you will be sharing your examples with one another so that each member has a turn at becoming a presenter. Further instructions about this process can be found in Unit 7’s Instructor’s Notes: “Individual Preparation to Discuss the TR Example.”

Let’s look now at the elements of TR and the movement from one to the next in our method. I’ll propose some key questions to guide our engagement in each element.

A Method for the TR Process

Following are the elements of TR in order. Directions for group use by the coordinator, a presenter from the group, and other group members are placed in boxes, with short explanations following each.

- **Prayer**: The coordinator or another group member invites the group into prayer. This can be very simple, such as a moment or two of silence, perhaps concluded with a short spoken prayer.

Unit 6: Method and Flow
We always begin the method with prayer in order to place ourselves in God’s presence and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in discerning divine activity on the “holy ground” of the experience or situation we will consider.

**Describing Experiences and Situations**

- Having chosen and written an experience or situation (see directions in Unit 9), the presenter is invited by the coordinator to describe:
  - **Who** are the key participants?
  - **What** are the key events?
  - **When** do the events occur?
  - **Where** do the events occur?
  - **Why** is this experience or situation important for JPIC ministry?

- Group members (who should have read the presenter’s example in advance if possible) listen attentively and nonjudgmentally. They may ask only clarifying questions during this phase, that is, questions to obtain additional information to help them get a fuller picture.

- The coordinator guides the presenter and group members in keeping their responses and questions descriptive and nonjudgmental.
We “enter” TR by surfacing and describing a specific experience or situation. Here we attempt to describe the “who, what, when and where,” along with a statement of “why” we chose this experience or situation. The choice of experience or situation is guided by both personal and group factors, with emphasis on those pressing issues that we face as ministers to and with the People of God, all the baptized faithful.

It is crucial in this phase that we describe as fully and nonjudgmentally as possible. Too often we may miss important insights later because we rushed to interpret and judge the experience prematurely.

Reflection/Transition: The group takes a moment or two of silence to take additional notes, reflect and prepare for the next phase.
2. Conducting Social Analysis

- The presenter is invited by the coordinator to relate his/her responses to questions such as: Why might the events have unfolded as they did, given the cultural context and other circumstances?
  - What assumptions may have been at work regarding, for example, the participants’ gender roles, family expectations, interactions and relationships in church and society, economic, and political factors, etc.?
  - How have the histories and memories of the participants in the experience or situation affected the choices they have made?
  - What prominent images, stories and metaphors seem to illuminate the experience or situation?
  - What aspects of the experience or situation are most relevant to the goals of JPIC?
  - What knowledge and experience do I bring from my background in ministry that gives me insights for social analysis in this example?

- Group members listen as the presenter gives his/her responses, then are invited by the coordinator to discuss their own interpretations. In particular, they should note key similarities and/or differences in their interpretations and consider reasons for these.

- The coordinator helps to guide the discussion and include everyone who wishes to participate, recording key responses as warranted for the group’s reference (perhaps on a markerboard or flip chart).
Social analysis will be the major focus for the next course in our JPIC series. It involves the entire group in interpreting the impact of political, economic, social, and cultural factors on the experience or situation under study. In this phase it is crucial that group members engage in respectful conversation that honors the “sacred ground” of the presenter, yet offers and considers multiple viewpoints in interpreting its meaning.

In the reading for Unit 5, Evelyn and James Whitehead spoke of the important interpersonal qualities and skills needed for this phase—and for all TR—including self-awareness, self-disclosure, a sense of self-worth, the ability to tolerate ambiguity when differing viewpoints surface, and the capacity for “assertive” speech that is neither aggressive nor passive. TR is meant to allow us to claim our own theological voice while honoring the voices of others.

**Reflection/Transition:** The group takes a moment or two of silence to take additional notes, reflect and prepare for the next phase.
3. Encountering Christian Tradition

- The presenter is invited by the coordinator to present his/her responses to questions such as:
  - What images, stories, rituals, official teachings, prayers, etc., from Christian tradition—especially those most relevant to JPIC—can be brought into conversation with this experience or situation in its cultural context?
  - How do these aspects of Christian tradition illuminate and challenge the assumptions and values uncovered during social analysis?
  - How does social analysis illuminate and challenge these aspects of tradition?
  - What knowledge and experience do I bring from my background in ministry that gives me insights for social analysis in this example?
- Group members listen as the presenter gives his/her responses, then are invited by the coordinator to discuss their own key insights from Christian tradition. In particular, they should note key similarities and/or differences in their choices and consider reasons for these.
- The coordinator helps to guide the discussion and include everyone who wishes to participate, recording key responses as warranted for the group’s reference (perhaps on a markerboard or flip chart).
As Christians, we consider the tradition to have a privileged and normative place in our TR. However, as we’ve seen, that tradition is encountered in specific cultural contexts within particular experiences and situations. Having sought to describe and interpret, we now turn to the rich storehouse of tradition and draw upon it for illumination.

As we’ve seen in our earlier definition of Christian tradition, it includes Scripture and Church teaching, but much more as well. Within particular cultural contexts, certain aspects of tradition become especially important for the ways that they speak to real people amid their real-life experiences. As ministers and practical/pastoral theologians, we have a special responsibility to continue our own study and to bring accurate information from the tradition to our people. And through TR, we’ll often find that tradition brings new insight to our inculturated social analysis. Conversely, that analysis will sometimes require that the tradition be expressed in new and more appropriate ways.

As in preceding phases, mutual respect is called for, and especially the openness to how God is speaking to us through our encounter with sacred tradition in potentially transformative ways.

Reflection/Transition: The group takes a moment or two of silence to take additional notes, reflect and prepare for the next phase.
4. Determining New Actions

- The presenter is invited by the coordinator to share his/her responses to the following questions:
  
  - What are two or three new possibilities that we see for action in relation to the experience or situation, drawing from our social analysis and encounter with Christian tradition?
  - What is to be done?
  - Who will do it?
  - Where and when will it be accomplished?
  - How will we evaluate the outcome?
  - What knowledge and experience do I bring from my background in ministry that gives me insights for new actions in this example?

- Group members listen as the presenter gives his/her responses, then are invited by the coordinator to discuss their own primary strategies for new actions. In particular, they should note key similarities and/or differences in their proposed strategies and consider reasons for these.

- The coordinator helps to guide the discussion and include everyone who wishes to participate, recording key responses as warranted for the group’s reference (perhaps on a markerboard or flip chart).
Having gathered the results of the previous phases, the group now turns to the difficult work of strategizing new responses. For you as students taking this course, the group in which you do TR may be quite limited in its ability to implement new actions collectively, especially if the presenting student’s issue comes from a ministerial setting that is outside your formational context. However, in your ongoing ministry, especially as oriented toward Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, TR should become a mutual endeavor that helps a community to bring what they have learned into creative envisioning of new possibilities for action.

Please be aware that many times, where a friend or colleague or church member comes to us with a problem, we try to leap quickly toward a solution. Thus we may give advice based on our own experience rather than on true TR. In TR, however, we work to focus on each element and allow it to have its own integrity, so that the outcome is richer and presents innovative possibilities for faithful and effective ministry.

Conclusion: The presenting student decides on one or two new actions to attempt, based on the group’s discussion. The group may help him/her to make specific plans if appropriate. The session concludes with a brief prayer.

Implementation of new actions will, of course, lead to new experiences and situations, so that the cycle of TR goes on and on!
**Glossary**

- **Method**: the sequence and manner by which the elements of TR (Experiences and Situations, Social Analysis, Christian Tradition, and New Actions) are engaged with one another as phases in a process
  - Go back

- **Christian Tradition**: what Christians receive and pass on in their faith communities through teaching, preaching, worshipping, and other central activities. Tradition is drawn from “Scriptures, symbols, myths, rituals, liturgies, creeds, dogmas, doctrines, theologies, practices, spiritualities, expected life-styles, values, art, artifacts, structures, and so on.”
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