PT698 – Ministry Position Paper

PURPOSE
The purpose of the Position Paper on Public and Pastoral Ministry is to assist VST in assessing the ability of Master of Divinity students to integrate both their academic and experiential learning into a cohesive theological position on ministry. The paper might also be used by some denominational bodies in their assessment of candidates for ordered ministry. The paper should reflect the learning outcomes and competencies articulated by the school for the M.Div. degree. [Variations in the Guidelines for Unitarian Universalist students are placed in brackets.]

Successful completion of the position paper on ministry will indicate the student’s proven capacity as a reflective practitioner capable of allowing theory and action to mutually inform one another in the exercise of faithful and effective leadership in ministry.

PAPER GUIDELINES
The Position Paper on Public and Pastoral Ministry is an integrative paper of 3,500–5,000 words, normally completed in the first term of the M.Div. student’s final year. In writing the paper, students may want to make some use of case studies, art, poetry or other forms of expression that might assist them in articulating theologically, biblically and practically the integration of their experience of a VST education. The paper is required to include a bibliography of sources and follow the guidelines for academic papers outlined in the Student Handbook.

It is anticipated that the approach to the paper will follow the method of the “pastoral cycle” wherein the student will integrate the following steps in presenting their position on ministry, with the majority of the paper dedicated to point 3:

1. An identification or description of the context in which the student will engage in ministry and the location of self in that context. This may include the identification of a particular issue, claim, or problematic (theological, ethical, political, ecclesial) or leadership opportunity (church planting, specialization in ministry, administration, transition, innovation).

2. An analysis of the context drawn from various bodies of knowledge—cultural, political, economic, and social theory, including naming one’s own interpretative principles, recognizing one’s location vis à vis that of others, and drawing on critical self-assessment as a pastoral leader.

3. A reflection on the context based on knowledge, understanding, and critical interpretation of theologies, Scriptures, traditions and experiences, demonstrating a capacity for illumination, guidance and critique. This section will include discussion of the nature or agency of God, Christology, and ecclesiology (particularly as or if these pertain to the theological and practical norms within the student’s denomination or tradition).

4. A response in which the student articulates a posture, position, or commitment which situates or identifies their own contribution to the ministry of the church or “great work” of our time. This section will demonstrate the student’s realistic self-knowledge as well as their ability to name faithful and effective personal and corporate responses to identified challenges and opportunities.

Student’s paper is expected to demonstrate the following competencies:

1. the ability to critically engage issues/topics related to religious and public life
2. the ability to critically analyse the impact of globalization on the ways in which human dilemmas are diversely experienced in a particular context
3. Knowledge of biblical themes and their contexts, the ability to articulate one’s interpretive principles, and the willingness and ability to integrate biblical themes and theology with contemporary contexts.

4. Knowledge of central themes (e.g., Christology, sacraments, worship, prayer, ecclesiology, orders of ministry, “subordinate standards,” [7 principles]) of student’s faith critical to the history and ethos of the student’s denomination or tradition.

5. The ability to reflect theologically on challenges and opportunities facing contemporary society and the practice of ministry.

6. Self-awareness, knowledge of one’s gifts and limitations, and discernment of one’s readiness to offer effective leadership in public and pastoral ministry.