Project Handbook
M Div and MA
What is a project? A project is an event, program, or new ministry that is undertaken for the sake of a clearly defined and understood group. As part of a Master’s program, the project should be clearly and explicitly related to the student’s own goals and objectives and to the goals and objectives of the degree program in which they are enrolled.

The heart of project centered learning is the development of organizational skills that involve these components: 1, finding and clarifying the group’s needs, 2. planning to meet that need, 3. carrying out the plan, and 4. evaluating the effectiveness of the plan. Projects down in the context of ministry involve a strong theological component in every stage.

What is the written document produced by a project? The written document produced by a project is a project report. In essence, a project report is a narrative summary of the project from the initial identification of the need, the planning to meet the need, the carrying out of the activity, and the evaluation of that activity. It should reflect the research and reflection that was involved in the design of the project, the consultants and other people who had input into the planning and execution of the project, and the theological foundations of both the project and its evaluation.

The final report for a Master’s degree should be around 25 pages plus any appendices that might be needed for evaluative purposes.

Do I need to be the principal actor in the project? The best projects involve developing leadership in other people as well as in the student. The ideal is that every project that is done well will leave a community or organization stronger than it was before the project was undertaken.

Do projects require research? Yes, a project involves all of the same research skills that one uses in any area of theological inquiry. One needs to use the library and the web to see what others have written on what you want to do and to get suggestions and ideas for your own word. And, of course, the theological and religious questions raised by your project, need to be examined. But project centered learning differs in one important respect from, for example, writing a thesis. Project centered learning is people centered and people oriented. Many an idea that sounds good on paper fails when one tries to put it into practice. A good project manager, consequently, uses consultants and others who have tried to do similar things. And once of good experience may be worth a shelf of books.

What is evaluation? Basically evaluation is your attempt to answer the question of whether the project met its goals or not. Clarity at the beginning is, thus, a sine qua non of good evaluation at the end. If my goal was to organize to teach a Bible class, for example, I might want to set as my goal an increased knowledge of the Gospels. So, I might administer a pre and post class test to see if the participants had new information or new insights. But, particularly in ministry, the planned goal may not be what was
actually achieved. One may have planned to launch an evangelistic campaign, but the participants may have found the participation and fellowship to be more important to them. And if you did not really identify a need, the project may go nowhere, no matter how well it was planned.

Projects do not have to succeed to be credited. The student, however, should have a clear picture of what actually happened and why.

**How I include “theology” in my project and my project report?** All religious actions presuppose some understanding of the Sacred and of how the human person relates to the Sacred. In the case of projects that are explicitly Christian, the churches have a body of teaching, codified in various pronouncements and found in the Scriptures, that forms a matrix for further theological reflection. In addition, there is a significant body of contemporary Christian thought that sets to relate Christian norms to a variety of issues, cultural and religious. Perhaps because of its development in dialogue with Greek and Roman philosophy, Christianity ranks its intellectual component higher than other world religions. For instance, Judaism and Islam, both similar monotheisms, stress practice and law higher than abstract reflection. In a project involving one of these religious traditions, one would have to be aware of how important the practical component was to those faiths.

Formal theology is only part of the story of how theology relates to the project. Often more important than formal statements are implicit theological and religious assumptions that may penetrate a project. Part of the task of theological reflection is to lift up those easily hidden theological assumptions to the point where they can be viewed clearly and perhaps even critiqued. Failure to do this may make it difficult to understand what the project actually achieved or at times to understand why it was not as successful as might have been hoped.

There are also theological flavorings that may be more important than either formal or implicit theological affirmations. One does not have to be very skilled at religious matters to sense when the ambiance of an organization is Anglican. Baptist, United Church of Christ, even when formal and informal teachings are not expressed and may even be consciously ignored. It is always helpful to be aware and critical of all of the religious dimensions of a project.