

MAINE SCHOOL OF MINISTRY, Spring, 2020

Course Title:

The Practice of Christian Theology in Ministry, Mission, and Devotional Life

Instructor: Rev. Dr. Deb Jenks, M.Div., D.Min., M.S.

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Class Meetings:

Saturdays, 9:00am – 3:00 pm at the Maine Conference Office, United Church of Christ, 337 State Street, Ste. 3, Augusta, Maine 04330.

February 8, March 7, April 4, May 2

Course Description:

In this course we will engage the practice of theology in the context of the church's community life, ministry, mission, and devotional life, with the purpose of claiming our common vocation as theologians, practitioners of "faith seeking understanding". Class discussion, assigned readings, and written work will focus our theological reflection through two sets of perspectives: (1) The theological concepts of the Triune God; the Incarnate Christ; and the Redemptive action of death and resurrection; and (2) The ministry practices of worship/prayer; pastoral/spiritual care; mission and service. The outcome of the course is for students to articulate the integration of theological concepts with the practice of ministry in our contemporary context.

This course is designed to meet MESOM certificate requirements of ThEth-Fnd 1 *Christian Theology* and ThEth-Pb 1 *Theological Reflection*.

For students who are Members-in-Discernment this course is designed to demonstrate understanding, skills, and experience under the "Participating in Theological Praxis" rubric of *The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Minister of the United Church of Christ*.

Books Required:

Copenhaver, Martin B. *To Begin at the Beginning: An Introduction to the Christian Faith, Revised and Expanded*. The Pilgrim Press, 2002.

Meyers, Robin R. *The Underground Church: Reclaiming the Subversive Way of Jesus*. Jossey-Bass, 2012.

Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. Eerdmans, 2014.

Course Outcomes & Intentions:

- Students will gain a deeper foundational understanding of the practice of Christian theology in their life of faith and ministry.
- Students will develop tools for integrating theological understanding and their practice of ministry.
- Students will have the opportunity to present a theological reflection on a practice of ministry for class discussion.
- Students will complete 3 written theological reflections (4-5 pages) on each of the following practices of ministry: Worship/prayer; Pastoral/spiritual care; mission/service.

Maine School of Ministry Evaluation Rubric, used for individual assignments and overall achievement:

1. **Completed with Distinction:** Shows superior grasp of material presented in class and in readings; completed all assigned work in timely fashion. Participates with intelligent questions and comments. Evidence of mature critical thought, analysis and insights in class and in assignments. Evidence of independent interest and pursuit of further knowledge in the subject matter. High level of competence in writing—grammar, syntax, spelling, clarity, organization and argumentation.
2. **Completed with Promise:** Shows ready grasp of material presented in class and in readings; completed all assigned work in timely fashion. Evidence of understanding and growth in ability to understand the Bible critically and in context, and willingness to participate in discussions and interactions. Competence in writing—grammar, syntax, spelling, clarity, organization and argumentation.
3. **Completed:** Shows interest and basic level of understanding of material presented in class and readings. Completed all assigned work, sometimes but not always, in timely fashion. Basic grasp of content and openness to growth in knowledge and proficiency. Limited participation in class discussions. Improvement needed in written work, e.g., grammar, punctuation, style, clarity, argumentation, and organization.

4. **Did not Complete:** Failed to turn in or complete assigned work without prior consultation with instructor. Absent without contacting instructor and arranging for makeup plan. Submitted written work at unacceptably low level of competence. Less than cooperative attitude or readiness to learn displayed in class.

Course Requirements:

- Students will be assigned reading and written work prior to each class meeting. Written work will consist of three (4-5 page) theological reflections based on the theological theme and practices for each class session. Instructions for written work will be given in our first class meeting. All written work will be given to the instructor by the end of each class meeting. Students are well-advised to begin reading and writing assignments at least one or two weeks in advance of the next class meeting. **NOTE there is an assigned reading and a brief reflection assignment prior to our first class meeting.**
- At the first class session students will be assigned a Learning Partner and arrange with the learning Partner a phone or face to face meeting one week in advance of the next class to discuss the required readings.
- Groupings of students will plan and lead the Opening Prayer and Meditation time for each class meeting, beginning with Session 2. In addition, groupings of students, based on the readings and their theological reflections, will facilitate the discussion on the topic for one of the class sessions.
- A required follow-up discussion over an internet discussion platform will follow each Saturday class session and will be initiated by the Instructor. A guiding follow-up question will be given to which each student will respond in a threaded format that allows everyone to participate. The intention is to extend and deepen the learning in the Saturday class meetings.

SESSION SCHEDULE:

Session 1 – February 8, 2020

Introduction to the Practice of Theological Reflection

In preparation please read:

- Chapters 1-3, Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding*.
- Prologue "Empty Sermons, Empty Pews" in Meyers' *The Underground Church*.
- Prepare to introduce yourself by describing your ministry setting or practice, and a theological doctrine/question which you find compelling or

challenging and why. (You may want to jot down some notes concerning a compelling or challenging theological question.)

Opening Prayer/Meditation:

Introductions

Some definitions and methods of Theological Reflection

Church (Christian community) as context for Practice of theology

Areas for practice: Worship/devotional life; pastoral/spiritual care; witness and mission.

Session 2 – March 7, 2020

The Triune God: Whom do we worship? Whom do we love? Whom do we serve?

In preparation, please read:

- Chapters 4-6, Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding*.
- Chapters 1-4, Copenhaver's *To Begin At the Beginning*.
- Writing Assignment: Theological Reflection 1 (Instruction to be given.)

Opening Prayer/Meditation:

Where does the Triune God come from? Where is God found and experienced? History of covenant relationship between human beings and God, and the church and God.

Presentations and discussion of students' Theological Reflections.

Session 3 – April 4, 2020

The Incarnate Christ & the Church as "Body of Christ"

In Preparation please read:

- Chapters 7-9, Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding*.
- Chapters 1-3, 5-6 Meyers' *The Underground Church*.
- Writing Assignment: Theological Reflection 2 (Instruction to be given.)

Opening Prayer/Meditation

The transcendence of God and intimacy with God. Human experiences of God's absence and presence. Belief in God? Life in relationship with God? What does it mean that "God became flesh and dwelt among us"?

Presentations and discussion of students' theological reflections.

Session 4 – May 2, 2020

Death & Resurrection: God's Redemptive Action & the Work of the Church

In preparation please read:

- Chapters 11,12, 14, Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding*.
- Chapters 7-8 Meyers' *The Underground Church*.
- Writing Assignment: Theological Reflection 3 (Instruction will be given.)

Opening Prayer/Meditation

Final Presentations & Discussion

Course Evaluation

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

Our required text, Daniel Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, contains outstanding lists for further reading at the end of all chapters. These, and the book's footnotes, include many good contemporary writings concerning the theological issues we will be discussing. These resources are a good source for further topics that interest you.

In addition, I have included below a supplemental list of resources related to issues and challenges facing the Christian Church in our time and culture.

Borg, Marcus J., *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2003.

Brueggemann, Walter, *Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church*, Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2007.

Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World*. Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 2006.

Robinson, Anthony B., *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*. Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008.

Robinson, Marilynne, *The Givenness of Things: Essays*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2015.

_____, *What Are We Doing Here? Essays*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, 2018.

Rohr, Richard, with Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*. Whitaker House, New Kensington, PA, 2016.

Steinke, Peter L. *Uproar: Calm Leadership in Anxious Times*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

Taylor, Barbara Brown, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others*. Harper One, New York. 2019.

_____, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

Tickle, Phyllis, *Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2012.