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CS 750 Tutorial in Christian Ethics and Society

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CS750: Tutorial in Christian Ethics and Society
Ethics of Community
Spring 2005
Tuesdays, 6:15-9:00pm, Admissions Bldg., Rm. #303

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Office Location: Estes 106*Office Phone: 858-2284**
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:15-3:30pm
And by appointment

Purpose: To prepare students for the moral challenges of congregational ministry by providing analysis of the practices that are necessary for community life. To enable ministers to foster communities of growth and accountability by identifying requisites of community. To prepare students to reflect morally and theologically on difficulties they encounter in congregational life by looking closely at the interaction between contemporary culture and the practices of promise-keeping, truth-telling, hospitality, and gratitude.

Learning Objectives: Having successfully completed this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and critically engage key biblical and historical/theological texts on Christian community and the practices of promise-keeping, truth-telling, hospitality, and gratitude.
2. Interpret the contemporary socio-cultural context and its implications for the practices of community and congregational life (e.g., mobility, autonomy, pluralism, fragmentation, technology).
3. Articulate a Wesleyan understanding of Christian community, practices, and their deformations.
4. Interpret various practical and interpersonal problems in congregational life through the theological/moral lens of practices and their deformations.
5. Identify various ways through which to discern, celebrate, and strengthen these practices within a congregation.
6. Articulate the distinctive role of discernment and forgiveness in community life, the four practices, and their deformations.

Texts:

Banks, Robert. *Paul's Idea of Community*, rev. ed. (Hendrickson, 1994)
 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1954)
 Hallie, Philip. *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed* (HarperPerennial, 1979, 1994)
 Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus and Community* (Fortress, 1984)
 Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone* (Simon & Schuster, 2000)
 Rice, Chris. *Grace Matters* (Jossey-Bass, 2002)
 Vanier, Jean. *Community and Growth* (Paulist, 1989)

Readings on Individual Practices—on electronic or library reserve

Written Assignments and Evaluation:

5% 2-page reflection paper (due February 15). Identify one practice (gratitude, truth-telling, fidelity, hospitality, discernment or forgiveness) of the community of Le Chambon that seemed central to their life together. Describe how it was expressed and why it was important. Discuss the tensions that emerged for the community as they engaged in this practice. Explain how faithful engagement in this one practice involved other practices or their deformations.

15% 5-page interaction paper (due March 1). Choose three key insights from Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* about the character of Christian community. Discuss their implications for congregational ministry today using relevant aspects of sociological analysis from Putnam's work in *Bowling Alone*. Be sure to engage both Bonhoeffer and Putnam substantively.

5% 3-page essay (due March 15). Describe an incident in ministry in which you saw the practice (or its deformation) of hospitality (exclusion) or promise-keeping (betrayal) at work. Recount the incident carefully but succinctly. Then reflect on it in light of our work on community and the various other practices. Identify questions that remain.

5% 3-page essay (due April 5). Describe an incident in ministry in which you saw the practice (or its deformation) of truth-telling (deception) or gratitude (envy/entitlement) at work. Recount the incident carefully but succinctly. Then reflect on it in light of our work on community and the various other practices. Identify questions that remain.

25% Class presentation on a practice and its deformation (attention to biblical, historical, theological, ethical and sociological resources). More detailed instructions will be provided.

35% Final research paper or project on the ethics of community in relation to a particular practice (12 pages). More detailed instructions will be provided.

10% Class participation and timely completion of reading assignments.

Grade Range: Work for CS750 will be evaluated at a graduate/professional school level.

A=(4.0) Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives

B=(3.0) Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives

C=(2.0) Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives

D=(1.0) Marginal work: inadequate, minimal achievement of course objectives

F=(0) Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives

Student Responsibilities: This course is designed as a seminar. It is therefore essential that students come to class having read the assigned material carefully and critically. Class attendance and active participation in discussions are expected and are factored into the final grade. Reading records will be collected on the last day of class.

All written work must be typed with 12-point type, one-inch margins on all four sides, and true double-spacing. There will be a penalty for late papers commensurate with the degree of lateness and the adequacy of the excuse. Papers are due in class on assigned date.

All written work must use inclusive language when reference is made to human beings (male and female). This provides for both greater inclusion and greater precision.

Class Sessions and Assignments:

February 8: Reflecting on Community from our Experience
Introductions, review syllabus and expectations of course

February 15: Community and Practices through the Eyes of Experienced Practitioners #1: The community of Le Chambon

Reading Assignment: *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (entire book)

Written Assignment: 2-page reflection paper (see above)

February 22: Exegeting the Contemporary Context

Reading Assignment: *Bowling Alone*, pp. 15-284

March 1: Sociological and Theological Reflection on Life in Community

Reading Assignment: *Bowling Alone*, pp. 284-414

Life Together (entire book)

Written Assignment: 5-page interaction paper (see above)

March 8: Community and Practices through the Eyes of Experienced Practitioners #2: The community of L'Arche

Reading Assignment: *Community and Growth* (entire book)

March 15: Jesus and Community

Reading Assignment: *Jesus and Community* (entire book)

Written Assignment: 3-page essay on a practice (see above)

March 22: Reading Week

March 29: Community and Practices through the Eyes of Experienced Practitioners #3: The Community of Antioch

Reading Assignment: *Grace Matters* (entire book)

April 5: Paul, the Early Church, and Christian Community

Reading Assignment: *Paul's Idea of Community* (entire book)

Written Assignment: 3-page essay on a practice (see above)

April 12: Practices that Make and Break Community: Hospitality and Exclusion

Reading Assignment: Readings in Packet, tba

April 19: Practices that Make and Break Community: Fidelity/Promise-keeping and Betrayal

Reading Assignment: Readings in Packet, tba

April 26: Practices that Make and Break Community: Truth-telling and Deception

Reading Assignment: Readings in Packet, tba

May 3: Practices that Make and Break Community: Gratitude and Envy/Entitlement

Reading Assignment: Readings in Packet, tba

May 10: Practicing Community: Fostering practices and virtues in the Christian life and community

May 17: Finals week; final paper due