

SENIOR SEMINAR: FALL 2009

Theme: Vocation and the Public Good

Mondays 2:00-4:50

Gardencourt 213

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This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

Senior Seminar description

The Senior Seminar focuses on an area of theological study related to the practice of ministry, providing M.Div. students in their final year of study an opportunity to integrate the various elements of their theological education in a way that contributes to the ongoing discernment of their vocation. Students will produce a substantial essay that brings the methods of theological study to bear on problems and opportunities in ministry and that expresses the student's theological vision.

Course: Vocation and the Public Good

Women and men come to ministry by way of a vocation. However, vocation is not a once and for all experience. Each person continues to discern a path for ministry in each new situation and facing major new dilemmas. Both vocation and ethics carry an edge of ambiguity. This course is designed to help students recognize both vocational directions and the public vocation of Christian Ethics. Students will evaluate vocation as an instrument of change for the public good. The key is to gain skill in integrating faith traditions, using both Biblical and theological knowledge, into reflection and action on vocation directions that aspire to social justice.

Course goals

This course will provide an opportunity for senior students to integrate theological study with pastoral practice and build their capacity for contextual theological-ethical interpretation and analysis. The instructors will work with students to create a space for free, creative, and collaborative theological experimentation/play and discovery.

Students will

1. Bring their passions for ministry and theological reflection into productive conversation with religious and cultural traditions,
2. Gain practice in the practices of vocational discernment and ethical discipline,
3. Refine their skills of constructive theological and ethical reflection and expression,
4. Work towards a deeper understanding of the roles of vocation and ethics in the practices of ministry and the life of faith,
5. Continue processes of vocational discernment that are theologically grounded, ethically informed, and that draw on several theological disciplines (biblical studies, historical and constructive theology, ethics, practical theology).

Course requirements

1. *Preparation and participation*: Students are expected to attend all seminar meetings, read all assigned material, and enter into thoughtful discussion of the matters the class takes up. Students are partners to one another in their work for this course, so conscientious preparation for each seminar meeting is essential.
2. *Topic Description and Progress report*: Students will submit a description of the topic on which they will work in this seminar (due Week 3), and a revised description outlining progress made toward the goal of a completed essay or project, with a bibliography (due Week 5).
3. *Senior Seminar essay or project*. The culminating project of the seminar will focus on an area of interest that relates in some way to the seminar topic. The topic should emerge from the student's own theological interests and passions. The project may be expressed in the writing of a substantial essay (about 20 pages). It may also be a performance, a particular practice of ministry, a liturgical project, curriculum, or a work of art, in which case the project submitted would include some demonstration of the practice (where applicable) together with a substantial, written critical analysis (10-15 pages). The final determination of the project, its scope, and resources necessary to produce it will be the work of the student together with the instructors, in collaboration with the seminar as a whole. Students, thus, will have an opportunity to draw on the perspectives of their colleagues as the project is conceived and undertaken. To serve this end is the following work.
 - A. *Draft Presentation and Sample Reading*: Students will present to the seminar their work in progress (weeks 7-11), submitting five days in advance of the presentation a written summary (4-6 pages) that will serve as the basis for a student colleague's prepared response. In addition, students will be asked to assign short readings to accompany their presentations to the class of their work-in-progress.
 - B. *Response paper*: Students will write a short (2-3 page) responses to a student colleague's draft presentation of their final essay or project.
 - C. *Final conference*: Following the completion of the essay/project, students will meet with the instructors to assess their learning in the seminar, goals accomplished in their project, and possible directions for future vocational paths. Dates/times to be scheduled.

Readings

Required texts:

- Kise, Jane and David Stark. *Life Directions: experiencing the gift of God's guidance*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999. (Available on Reserve)
- Or: Kise, Stark and Hirsh. *LifeKeys: Discovering Who You Are, Why You're Here, What You do Best*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996 (Out of Print: Available on Reserve)
- Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- Preskill, Stephen and Stephen Brookfield. *Learning as a Way of Leading: Lessons from the Struggle for Social Justice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008. 272 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0787978075.
- Russell, Mary Doria. *The Sparrow*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1996.
- _____. *Children of God*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1999.
- Schmidt, Frederick. *What God Wants for your Life: finding Answers to the Deepest Questions*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an early date, since violations of seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grade for the course.

Inclusive Language

The use of inclusive language in course work is a policy of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, avoid language for people that leaves out part of the population or perpetuates stereotypes. Do not assume masculine gender when the gender of the person is unknown. When referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors. See

<http://www.lpts.edu/AcademicResources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp>.

CALENDAR

Week 1: Monday, September 14

Comprehensive Orientation to the Seminar

Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*.

Week 2: Monday, September 21

What will you do after your next move?

Russell, *The Sparrow*, and *Children of God*.

Week 3: Monday, September 28

Discussion of Senior Seminar Project Topics

Week 4: Monday, October 5

What are the public dimensions of your vocational decisions?

Preskill and Brookfield, *Learning as a Way of Leading: Lessons from the Struggle for Social Justice*.

*Shriver, "Emerging Issues in Urban Ethics," in *The Public Vocation of Christian Ethics*, edited by Beverly W. Harrison, Robert L. Stivers, and Ronald H. Stone. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1986, pp.139-155.

Additional Resources:

Harper, Niles. *Journeys into Justice: Religious Collaboratives Working for Social Transformation*. Minneapolis: Bascom Hill Publishing Group, 2009.

Week 5, Monday October 12

Thinking theologically about vocation

Schmidt, *What God wants for your Life: Finding Answers to the Deepest Questions*.

Sawyer, "The Coordinates of Call: Vocation and Life-Long Learning," Sermon, September 13, 2002, LPTS. (on CAMS Course Documents)

Sawyer, "Growing in Wisdom and Stature: The Leadership Practice of Lifelong Learning."
Convocation Address, Spring, 2005 (On CAMS Course Documents)

Additional Resources:

Migliore, Daniel. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004 edition, pp.223-248.
Battle, Michael and Charry, Ellen. "How Should We Live? The Christian Life," in William C. Placher, editor, *Essentials of Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, pp.257-297.

Week 6: Monday, October 19

Practical Steps: the nuts and bolts of vocational discernment

Kise, Jane and Stark, David. *Life Directions: Experiencing the Gift of God's Guidance*. Or LifeKeys. Liberation Praxis

Clearness Committee

Discernment Methods

Lifelong Learning Model

October 26-30 (Research and Study Week. No Class on 10-26)

Week 7: Monday, November 2 Student Presentations

Week 8: Monday, November 9 Student Presentations

Week 9: Monday, November 16 Student Presentations

Week 10: Monday, November 23 Student Presentations

Week 11: Monday, November 30 Student Presentations

Week 12: Monday, December 7 Summary/Integration/Evaluation

Pedagogy:

Present Narratives of concern that highlight vocational direction and ethical dilemmas, such as Mary Doria Russell's science fiction novel of the Jesuits who go to a far distant planet and Emilio Sandoz's struggle with call and ethics, or such as David Sawyer's dream as a scene from Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid as a call to engage the competing forces of integration and racial backlash in an all white community in the 1970's and 1980's. Find other images and stories to use for class discussion to integrate theological reflection on issues of vocation and ethics.