**Reimagining Congregations in Mission**

Bexley Hall-Seabury Western Seminary Federation

Summer Term: June 5-9, 2017

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**Course Description**

The 21st century cultural context brings major challenges to the primary form of religious association in American life, the congregation. This course explores inherited assumptions, structures, and patterns of Christian congregational life in light of today’s new apostolic environment. Biblical and theological perspectives on missional ecclesiology offer a framework for renewing congregational identity and practice. Students critically engage insights from organizational, leadership, and innovation theory with an eye toward leading local churches deeper into participation in the triune God’s mission.

**Course format**

This course uses a hybrid format: teaching and learning take place both online and in the classroom. The course uses the Moodle online learning platform for communication, conversation, readings, assignments, and so on. Participants are expected to familiarize themselves with Moodle and to check the site often. Participants should also check their email regularly for course information.

The course will meet at Seabury 8:30 am to 4:30 pm on June 5-9. Prior to the classroom week, students are asked to complete reading as indicated below and write a short paper. Following the classroom week, students will have a final paper to write that will be due June 27, as well as another short paper due June 30. The detailed course schedule gives readings and assignments for each week, which are to be posted on Moodle in accord with the course schedule.

**Curricular Objectives Addressed by Course**

All Seabury courses offer participants opportunities to develop their theological, cultural, and ministerial competency. In particular, this course will enable participants to:

* + - *Engage in theological reflection on responsible life in faith.* Students meet this objective by reading, participating in class discussions, and writing the final paper, which explores the difference a missional ecclesiology makes for congregational life today.
    - *Think theologically about assumptions, biases, and knowledge about themselves and others.* Students meet this objective through class discussion that invites them to name their own operating assumptions and perspectives in conversation with those different from them, including other students, and the authors read. Issues of race, gender, and culture are specifically addressed in light of congregational life, mission, and leadership.
    - *Develop knowledge and skills for leadership in the missional church.* Students meet this objective through examining paradigms, practices, and competencies of missional leadership and reflecting on their own leadership in light of them.
    - *Contribute to a learning community characterized by dialogue, mutual respect, and appreciation of diverse views.* Students meet this objective through responsible participation in discussion and worship.
    - *Explore in a disciplined manner the dynamics, context, and organizational structures of a religious congregation.* Students meet this objective through engaging and discussing case studies of actual congregations. For DMin students, their final paper focuses on analysis of the congregation they are serving.
    - *Develop ministry approaches that enable them to be more effective as leaders of vital and healthy religious congregations and communities.* Students meet this objective through articulating the implications of missional ecclesiology for congregational ministry and leadership, having explored key leadership paradigms, approaches, and practices in readings and course presentations and reflecting on their own experience.

**A Word about Assessment**

The Bexley Seabury Seminary Federation regularly evaluates the quality of our programs using a variety of data and artifacts, including portfolios of students’ work. These portfolios consist of designated student work (artifacts) from each course, along with the instructor’s rubric-based evaluation of the artifact. At the end of the term, the course instructor will send your final paper and the evaluation of your work to you and to the Officer for Academic Affairs for inclusion in your portfolio. We use your portfolio annually as a checklist to track your progress toward the degree, diploma, or certificate. This usually does not involve any further evaluation of your work. Your portfolio or parts of it may be included in a small, random selection of portfolios from a 3-4 year period so that we can assess overall (aggregate) student learning relative to curricular goals and program effectiveness. No portfolio or artifact is evaluated until all identifying information is removed, and no identifying information will be included in any evaluation or report. For further information, see the Student Handbook. You may also talk with your instructor, the Assessment Coordinator (Susan Brookhart, [susanbrookhart@bresnan.net](mailto:ewondra@bexleyseabury.edu)), or the Academic Dean.

**Course Requirements**[[1]](#footnote-1)

In order to achieve these objectives, participants are required to:

1. Complete all assigned reading. Note that students should come to the intensive course having read *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*. It is highly recommended that students complete as much of the additional readings as possible prior to the intensive week, as this will enrich your learning experience. Reading is assigned for each day of the intensive week, and additional reading will take place following it.
2. Participate in course discussions during the entirety of the June on-campus class session. (20% of grade)

Post on Moodle a 500-word paper on the topic “What challenges does the 21st century context bring for congregations in America?” by **5 p.m. on May 27**. The purpose of this paper is for you to begin to identify what’s different about the contemporary environment for congregational life, before we begin our work. There is a complementary assignment at the end of the course, which will give you a chance to indicate how your understanding has changed. (15% of grade)

1. MA/MDiv Students: Submit a 2500-3000-page paper (10-12 pages double-spaced, 11-12 pt font, 1” margins). The paper is to address the following:

* Drawing on biblical, theological, and theoretical sources from the course, articulate the difference a missional ecclesiology makes for congregational identity and life today. What does it mean that God’s mission has a church? What are salient implications for how local churches might practice the Way of Jesus in relationship with their neighbors? What does leadership look like in a missional church?

DMin Students: Submit a 4500-5000-page paper (18-20 pages double-spaced, 11-12 pt font, 1” margins). The paper is to address the following:

* Drawing on biblical, theological, and theoretical sources from the course, articulate the difference a missional ecclesiology might make for the identity and life of your congregation today. 1) Briefly describe the congregation you currently serve and its missionary context (3-5 pages). 2) What does it mean biblically and theologically that God’s mission has a church? (5-7 pages). 3) What are some implications of a missional ecclesiology for how your local church might practice the Way of Jesus in relationship with its neighbors? (5-7 pages). 4) What are specific steps you might take as a leader to help your congregation participate more deeply in God’s mission in its time and place? (5-7 pages).
* Final paper to be posted on Moodle by **5 p.m., June 27**. (50% of grade)

1. Post on Moodle a 650-750 word paper on the topic “What challenges does the 21st century context bring for congregations in America? How my mind has changed and stayed the same” by **5 p.m. on June 30**. This should be a reconsideration of what you said in your very first reflection paper; it’s a chance to assess your learning over the course of the term. (15% of grade)
2. Completion of the electronic course evaluation at the end of the term.

*Please note*: Participants are expected to complete all work on schedule. Extensions may or may not be granted at the discretion of the faculty member, which must be obtained before the due date. Work submitted after the due date will be graded down.

Students taking the course for credit are required to complete the student course evaluation before their grades will be recorded or released.

Participation in worship, while not required, is an integral part of students’ formation.

Writing

Clear, accessible writing is indispensible to effective mission and ministry. Therefore, posts and comments on Moodle as well as papers should use correct spelling, grammar, syntax, and the like; they should be substantive; and they should foster dialogue, mutual respect, and diverse views.

* Use Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*  (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) to find proper styles and formats for notes, references, and paper presentation.

The Federation’s Statement on Responsible Use of Material by Others

Plagiarism is the taking of the words, ideas, and methods of others as one's own. In academia, plagiarism involves the use of others' words and ideas without adequate reference to the author or indication of quotation. It is a serious form of academic dishonesty or academic fraud, and offenders are subject to discipline, up to and including expulsion from the school. In order to avoid plagiarism, especially by inappropriate use or citation of quotations and ideas, students are expected to familiarize themselves with the requirements and practices of citation found in Turabian’s *Manual for Writers*. Unfamiliarity with these requirements and practices is not an acceptable reason for unintentional plagiarism. Plagiarism cannot be evaded through the alteration of occasional words from one's source.

When plagiarism is detected, the instructor will assign the work an appropriate grade and then refer the matter, together with evidence, to the Academic Dean who, in consultation with the faculty and the President, will make an appropriate disposition of the matter, which may include failure of the course, academic probation for a designated period, suspension for a designated period, or expulsion from the program. The student's bishop will normally be notified of the situation.

Those who have questions about the nature and scope of plagiarism should consult the Academic Dean.

**Required reading list**:

Books

Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership* (IVP Academic, 2011)

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002)

Alan Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (Morehouse, 2015).

Stephanie Spellers, *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* (Church Publishing, 2006)

Optional Recommended Reading:

Dwight Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (Morehouse, 2014)

**Draft Course schedule**

Prior to June 5: Read Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*. Students are encouraged to read the remainder of the readings *prior* to the intensive week if they are able.

Monday, 6/5

Reading: *Joining God*, Part I

Tuesday, 6/6

Reading: *Joining God*, Part II

Wednesday, 6/7

Reading: *Radical Welcome*, Parts I-II (pp. 1-94)

Thursday, 6/8

Reading: *Radical Welcome*, Part III-Conclusion (pp. 95-163)

Friday, 6/9

Reading: *Leadership on the Line*, Parts One and Two (1-162)

Reading After Intensive Week:

Remainder of Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*

1. Course requirements apply to participants taking the course for academic credit (a letter grade, or Credit/No Credit). Auditors and lifelong learners are expected to do all the work that is necessary for them to be full participants in classroom discussions; in this course, that includes all reading. Auditors and lifelong learners may participate in online as well as classroom discussions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)