Introduction to Practical Theology  
LIM 703, Fall 2008

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Course Description:

This course seeks to help participants develop a rhythm of disciplined reflection and action for the sake of the reign of God. The sociocultural, personal, and institutional contexts of one’s primary ministry praxis along with the Christian tradition form the matrices of practical theology. Interpretation theory and social analysis are key components of the conversation in which faith and daily life meet and build.

Introduction to Practical Theology presents a methodological grounding for the entire MPS and MRE programs. It describes key features of practical theology and then presents a model for understanding the contexts that shape our ministries. It also presents a method for reflecting critically on ministerial experiences and on the ideas and social forces that influence our spiritualities and interpretations. The specific goals of the course are to assist participants in developing:

• an initial understanding of practical theology
• a working description of their ministry praxis
• an appreciation of the dynamic, hermeneutical, critical and transformative character of practical theology
• a method for engaging in practical theology
• some first steps in practicing this method.

Required Texts:

Fleischer, Barbara et al.  Introduction to Practical Theology.  New Orleans: Loyola Institute for Ministry, 2008.  (Please email the instructor to obtain a copy: fleische@loyno.edu)


Articles as assigned.  Please see the “Course Materials” section of the Blackboard course web site for articles and other resources.

8-12-08
**Evaluation**

10% Class participation, including leading some class discussions, and presenting praxis-related projects as assigned.

Please submit all written assignments via the “dropbox” in the Blackboard course web site, or via email to the instructor. Graded papers will be returned via the “dropbox” in Blackboard.

20% Reflective essay 1: Description of "concern" and initial understanding of it. (3-4 pages)

Due: Sept. 22, 2008

A "concern" is a situation that you can concretely observe (or gather data about it) and in which you are already involved in trying to address the situation. If you are not already involved in your situation of concern, it may be one in which you are willing to invest some of your energy to assist in addressing it.

25% Reflective essay 2: Practical Theology and its meaning for your own life. (4-6 pages)

Drawing from your readings for this course and other resources, how would you describe the major facets of practical theology, and what does engagement in practical theology mean for your own life?

Note: Please use MLA style in citing sources. Examples of MLA style may be found in the LIM Guide to Written Theological Reflection.

Due: December 1, 2008

45% Reflective essay 3: Reflection on your concern, using the method and model of practical theology presented in this course (12-14 pages):

Present your description (identification) and initial understanding of your concern as a starting point. Then, based on your research, reflect on the personal, sociocultural, and institutional contexts of your praxis concern and the theological perspectives from the Christian tradition (e.g., biblical selections, prophetic writings, church documents, or other theological sources) that speak to you in relation to this situation. 

*Test your initial understandings* against the new information you have gained through your research and the reflections that have emerged since you first thought about this situation of concern (i.e., Where have your initial assumptions and perspectives been challenged, modified, expanded or affirmed by new information?). Be sure to cite and document your sources.
Finally, based upon your analyses and reflections, discuss the implications of your new understandings for your future praxis in this situation and develop an imaginative pastoral strategy that responds to some of the issues you have uncovered as you explored your situation of concern.

Total paper: approximately 12-14 pages (including your statement of your description and initial understanding of your concern (a polished version of your first paper for this course).

Use MLA Style for citations (See the Written Guide to Theological Reflection for a brief style manual. It is located on the course web site "Course Materials")

Due: December 10, 2008

(Note: If you don't want to pick up your graded paper from the LIM office, please include a self-addressed large envelope with your paper. Thanks.)

Grading Scale:

A, B+, B, C+, C, D+, D, F.

The Association of Graduate Program in Ministry Position Statement on Practical Theology

The Association of Graduate Programs in Ministry (AGPIM), an organization of Roman Catholic graduate programs, recognizes and supports the emergence of a new theological paradigm in graduate education for ministry. This theology, commonly referred to as practical or pastoral theology, is a mutually interpretive, critical and transforming conversation between the Christian tradition and contemporary experience. Historical, hermeneutical, and socio-cultural analyses are integral to this method of theology. Pastoral or practical theology takes place in a community of faith, implies a spirituality that is both personal and liturgical, and is directed towards individual and social transformation in Christ.
Tentative Class Schedule

**Foundations of Practical Theology**

August 25: Introductions, beginning with practical theology, syllabus review.
Identify an issue of concern.

Sept 8: **Contexts of Ministry Praxis**
*Before reading the assignments for this session, write a brief description of a concern or issue related to your ministry interests that you will continue to explore throughout this course. Include an outline or graph of what you see as the main dynamics at play in that situation.*
Read: Fleischer, *Intro to Practical Theology*, Chapter 1
Veling, *Practical Theology*, Chapter 1

Sept 15: **Conversation, Dialogue, and Spirituality in Practical Theology**
Fleischer, *Intro to Practical Theology*, Chapters 2 and 3
M. Cowan, “The Sacred Game of Conversation”
J. Viens, *Intro and Chapters 1 & 2.*

Sept 22: **Theological Reflection Rooted in Experience**
Fleischer, *Intro to Practical Theology*, Chapter 4
Veling, *Practical Theology*, Chapter 2
H. W. Stone and James O. Duke, “How to Think Theologically”
*Reflective Essay No. 1 due*

Sept 29: **Hermeneutics and Theological Reflection**
B. Lee: “Practical Theology: Its Character and Possible Implications”
Veling, *Practical Theology*, Chapter 4
M. Cowan, “Conversation with a Text”

**Exploring the Contexts of Praxis**

Oct. 6: **Sociocultural Considerations**
Read: Fleischer, *Intro to Practical Theology*, Chapter 5 (by M. Cowan)
Veling, *Practical Theology*, Chapters 9 and 10
B. Lonergan: Theology in a New Context

October 13: Fall Break

October 20: **Personal Experience and Social Location**
Read: *Intro to Practical Theology*, Chapter 6
Veling, *Practical Theology*, Chapter 6
October 27:  *Engaging the Christian Tradition*
Read:  *Intro to Practical Theology*, Chapter 6
Veling, *Practical Theology*, Chapter 12
**Progress report (oral)** on your contextual analysis of situation of concern

Nov. 3:  *Mediating Structures and the Institutional Context of Ministry*
Read:  *Intro to Practical Theology*, Chapter 7
Wheatley articles:  [http://margaretwheatley.com/articles/emergence.html](http://margaretwheatley.com/articles/emergence.html)  
[http://margaretwheatley.com/articles/relationships.html](http://margaretwheatley.com/articles/relationships.html)

Nov. 10  *The Natural World as a Meta-Context of Praxis*
Read:  T. Berry, “The Meadow Across the Creek”  
Veling, *Practical Theology*, Chapter 11
Optional:  “Northwest Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on the Columbia River Basin”  

Nov 17:  *Review of Practical Theology*
Read:  Fleischer, *Intro to Practical Theology*, Chapter 10 (by B. Lee)  
Veling, *Practical Theology*, Chapter 8
M. Cowan, “Spiritual Development, Faith’s Publicness and the Shalom of the City”

Nov. 24  *Oral Presentations: Contextual Reflection on Praxis*

Dec. 1  *Oral Presentations (cont.): Contextual Reflection on Praxis*
**Reflective Essay No. 2 due**

Dec. 10:  **Final Paper due.**
University Policy

Statement on Intellectual Honesty: Intellectual honesty is simply acknowledging, through documentation, all those sources that the writer has used in preparing any written work. Plagiarism, the obverse of intellectual honesty, is the use of any form of material, whether written or verbal, without formal indebtedness through documentation. The paraphrasing of any work, either written by other students or found in print or in an electronic form, without acknowledgement, is plagiarism. Not properly identifying the source of a quotation, even though the quotation is enclosed in quotation marks, is also plagiarism. Not only the exact language of a sentence or phrase, but any material falsely presented as one’s own – an ideal, a concept, data, graphs, or a line of argument – constitutes plagiarism. Any material that neither originates with the student nor is common knowledge among educated persons must be formally acknowledged.

It must be remembered that written work stands on its own, not on the intention of the writer. The burden of academic honesty rests on the student, not on the instructor. If students have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism or what is required, they should inquire before the work is submitted. Otherwise, they open themselves to charges of plagiarism.

The penalties for plagiarism are severe: a student who is found to have plagiarized or to have assisted another student in plagiarizing may be given a failing grade for the course on the first violation; a second offense may result in exclusion or dismissal from the university.

Statement of Incomplete Grades: Grades of “I” (incomplete) change to “F” automatically if the course is not completed and the grade changed by the sixth week of the subsequent term, excluding summer terms.

Disability Statement: Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services at 865-2990 as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.