Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston  
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Course Syllabus: MC670  
Working with Marginalized Groups and the Urban Poor

Instructor: Mark G. Harden, PhD  
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Class Room: 213, 6 to 10:00 p.m.  
Office Hours: Monday, 1:00 to 6:00 p.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course will explore how the church can be effective in the context of pervasive economic and social conditions that often lead people to adapt to a culture of survival in many urban communities around the world. The Bible is replete with principles for ethical practices around working with and on behalf of the marginalized and the poor. Understanding the universal need to survive, helps one to understand how Scriptures illuminate practices for righteous treatment of the widows, orphans, stranger, and fatherless. Principles for assessing and interpreting human behavior for the purpose of preaching, worship, teaching, service, and discipleship are discussed in light of understanding how to work with the marginalize and poor in the urban context. Students will be provided with the necessary tools for using a cultural analysis to guide their actions and inform their ministry. Models and best practices will be discussed in light of social, cultural, political, and economic urban realities.

BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION
Students will also learn biblical principles and how to develop practical skills for engaging cross-culturally with various social and ethnic groups and individuals in an urban environment. Particular attention is on understanding how the church can minister to the marginalized and urban poor in ways that empower them to overcome adverse social and economic conditions in their environment. This is an elective course that fulfills the requirement for the Master of Arts in Urban Ministry and Master of Divinity at the Boston Campus.
STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

• Demonstrate self-awareness and understanding of barriers related to how one interacts and lives among marginalized groups and the poor.

• Articulate a biblical and/or practical theology based upon biblical themes related the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and the question of what it means to live out one’s faith in service to others.

• Understand the role of social and cultural factors in how people at-risk live and survive in a diverse and underserved urban environments.

• Demonstrate the ability to have compassion and engage according to perceived strengths of and what the marginalized individuals and the poor can bring to the ministry setting.

REQUIRED READINGS:


Price: $12.21 at Amazon.com


Price: $8.49 at Amazon.com


Price: $10.19 at Amazon.com


Price: $9.59 at Amazon.com

RECOMMENDED READINGS:


COURSE PAPERS:

Matthew 25: Critical Reflection Papers – Third Session of Class: February 11th
You must write a 6 to 7-page critical reflection paper based upon as participant observers in one ministry situation of your choosing and the readings. The situation must be based upon a literal and intentional engagement with ‘other’ as indicated in Matthew 25: 31-45. In other words, you must literately serve the “poor” and learn via reflection of your experience in light of the readings in Fikkert, et al., Lupton, (2011 and 2007). This means that you must engage in a ministry of feeding the hungry, providing a drink for the thirsty, visiting someone incarcerated, or visiting the sick stranger, and link the significance to your readings. An approach that is recommended is that you provide a one to two-page brief summary of each book and highlight key points the author(s) are making, and respond to the authors in reference to your ministry situation assignment. No more than two is expected for this initial part.

More Detail Instructions: Locate an agency, church, or outreach event where you can participate from within a faith-based agency as a volunteer to complete this assignment. The individual(s) you meet must be stranger(s) to you. The balance of the paper you write (5 to 6 pages) should include describing facts about the event, making a critical self-assessment of your first perception, indicating what you have learned (i.e., externalize for the reader what you have reflected upon), and describe the relevance of the insight for future ministry. A concise paper in narrative form is expected. Seek to develop a brief “practical theology of ministry” as a part of the process, but the emphasis is on allegorical usage of theological themes and biblical images for reflection purposes. Do not proof text or read too much into the Scriptures or the situation.

Vision and Application Paper: A Church-Based Ministry Perspective: Due February 25th
Write a brief 3 to 5-page proposal for how you can provide leadership in improving a ministry at your church or within your Christian organization integrating what you have learned in the readings and course. Reference 3 or more points in each of the book (you may use the ones identified in first paper) that illustrate your rationale or thinking around compassion and charity issues in a church of which you are familiar. Include the following: (1) a rationale for your approach; (2) one or more strategies based on the challenges; (3) a brief description of the community context; (4) how the initiative will happen; and (5) outcomes that you would expect as a result of the initiative. This paper should be written with a title of your choosing, headings, and in narrative form.
Urban Ministry Planning Paper: Due March 25th

The application paper must be based on analyses of one of two specific cases according to your understanding of the Poor and Anderson’s Book. You must filter out anything that is counter to the lessons you have learned through a critical reading of Anderson’s book. The point of this paper is to utilize Anderson’s descriptions and case studies to conduct an analysis that reflects what you have learned in this course as it relates to core values or survival intelligence.

The application paper must include the following: (1) a description of a deficit view of the behavior that is exhibited in the case study; (2) a counter description using the core survival cultural value you have identified; (3) a description of the significant challenges faced individuals may face based on what people in poverty may face; and (4) a vision that expresses the hope you have regarding the person in the case study.

Overall, the paper must demonstrate that you have an understanding of the challenges related to poverty, the perceptions and realities typically associated with the marginalized in urban life, and ministry that can empower. Among the Anderson cases you must select one of the following:

Case Study #1
Review Anderson’s report on pages 80 through 106 about a young man named Tyree. (Examine his history, the life context, his household, and community situation. Think about what this young man should be doing with his life, in a “normal” life, as you would see it. Imagine that Tyree’s grandmother has brought him to church. She is telling you that her grandson is a good person, but he sometimes gets into trouble. Pretend that gender difference [if this is the case] is not an issue, you have done some homework about his life, and that Tyree has agreed to come out to your church for some reason at your invitation. Imagine that there are a few young people like Tyree coming to your church. What should be done for these young people?)

Case Study #2
Review Anderson’s report on pages 219 through 236 about Betty Washington, an inner-city grandmother. (Examine the grandmother’s story, the life context, household, and community situation. Put yourself in the story at the point in which Betty goes to work as a grandparent to raise her grandchildren. That is, think of becoming involved at one point in time rather than across several years. However, you are aware of her history as Anderson describes it. Also, imagine that there are several grandparents in your church’s community raising their grandchildren due to absent or negligent parents. What are the needs of this group? Using Betty as an example, think about what can be done or how can you or your church intervene?)
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<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Topic Covered</th>
<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
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| 1       | Biblical and Theological Perspectives  
• Old and New Testament Concepts  
• Fighting Poverty and Serving the Poor | **Read:** When Helping Hurts  
Perceptions of the Poor |
| 2       | The Church and the Poor: Who is Poor  
• Voices of the Poor Data  
• Defining Poverty and the Poor | **Read:** Toxic Charity (Lupton)  
Urban Values Survey  
Identifying Patterns of Poverty |
| 3       | Urban Cultural Patterns and Values  
• Universal Cultural Dimensions  
• Asset based Approaches | Discussion Groups on Visitation  
Identifying Urban Culture |
| 4       | Cultural Values and Behaviors in Urban Context | Case Study Exercises |
| 5       | Cultural Values and Behaviors in Urban Context Continued | **Read:** Anderson’s “Code of the Streets”  
Case Study Exercises |
| 6       | Urban Ministry Development  
• Best Practices in Context  
• Relational Ministry Model & Assumptions | **Read:** Compassion, Justice, and the Christian Life (Lupton)  
Case Studies: Developing Strategies |
| 7       | Wrap up:  
• Common Strategies and Best Practices For Urban Discipleship | SQ Values Identification Exercise |
Expected Work Quality
All written work must be of the highest quality in accordance with graduate level standards of Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. Since writing skills are particularly important, it is stressed that you communicate in a clear, complete, concise, and logical manner. You must provide references and due credit to outside sources that can be verified. All papers must be submitted in class or directly to the professor unless prior permission is given for an alternative submission for the assignment.

Course Grading
In this course there will be several assignments that will contribute to a final grade. The categories for these assignments, class participation, and their percentage points are as follows:

- Matthew 25 Reflection Papers 30%
- Vision and Application Paper 30%
- An Urban Ministry Planning 30%
- Class Participation 10%

Grading Scale

A 95-100
A- 92-94
B+ 88-91
B 85-87
B- 82-84
C+ 78-81
C 75-77
C- 72-74
D+ 68-71
D 65-67
D- 62-64
F Below 62

Note: A final grade of “B” (85-87) is reflective of an average demonstrated level of quality graduate studies. A final grade of “C” (75-77) is reflective of a below average demonstrated quality level for graduate studies.