Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary - Jacksonville

Readiness for Ministry Exit Seminar (MC850)
Spring, 2016

January 8-9, 2016
February 12-13, 2016
April 8-9, 2016

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I. Course Description
This course focuses on bridging the world of the seminary with the world of the local congregation. The course will provide an opportunity for critical reflection for the vocational preparation of the student. An interdisciplinary approach on the nature of the ministerial identity, calling, life, and practice will flow together in the course. Issues related to personal formation, ministerial ethics, and congregational leadership will also be examined.

Multiple perspectives from biblical, theological, historical, pastoral studies and the social sciences will be introduced through the readings, and case studies. Student reports, research, and discussions will also provide significant input into the seminar context. As outcomes for the course, students will develop for themselves a clear doctrinal statement, a cogent philosophy of ministry, and a comprehensive model of pastoral care and practice presented in the Readiness for Ministry presentation.

II. Course Relationship to Curriculum
MC850 is a core course in the Master of Divinity degree under the current catalogue. It serves as a capstone course for the Practical Theology sequence. This course also serves as the final component of the Mentored Ministry program.

III. Course Objectives:
At the conclusion of this course, the student should be able to do the following:
1. Identify and exegete key biblical passages regarding pastoral ministry and relate the findings to a personal statement of pastoral ministry.
2. Describe various historical and theological models of the pastorate and show how they relate to contemporary ministry.
3. Articulate key elements of ecclesiology as a context for understanding pastoral ministry.
4. Discuss issues pertaining to ministerial authority and ethics and the congregation.
5. Reflect on a host of pastoral practices and how your theology will be expressed in those.
6. Examine various models of leadership and how they relate to one’s personal ministry vision.
7. Determine how personal characteristics and traits influence personal ministry style.
8. Develop a comprehensive personal doctrinal statement.
9. Compose a philosophy of pastoral ministry.

**IV. Course Requirements**
- Attend all weekend class sessions.
- Complete required reading and study assignments.
- Produce a comprehensive, annotated doctrinal statement.
- Create a philosophy statement delineating key values for the practice of ministry.
- Prepare and present a Readiness for Ministry presentation.

*All written course work will be due one week before the student’s Readiness for Ministry Presentation.*

**V. Course Textbooks and Required Reading**

The following books are required reading for the class. Due dates for the readings are posted in the assignments. Books are available through the bookstore or on the reserve library shelf:


**Further Resources – Helpful for purchase for your libraries, but not required**

In addition, 500 pages of additional reading will be required from the listed bibliography at the end of the syllabus. **Students will be required to submit a one page summary statement for each book read, including those from the *extra* reading sources.**

VI. Class Projects

1. Personal Doctrinal Statement
   The student will develop a doctrinal statement that reflects the current state of the student’s theological understanding of his or her faith. The paper will be at least 5-10 pages in length and cover the following major areas of belief:
   - Prolegomena describing epistemological basis for theology
   - Doctrine of Scripture
   - Doctrine of God (Theology)
   - The Person of Christ (Christology)
   - Doctrine of Humanity (Anthropology)
   - Doctrine of Sin (Hamartiology)
   - The Nature of Redemption (Soteriology)
   - The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)
   - The Church and its Mission (Ecclesiology and Missiology)
   - The Final Things (Eschatology)

   The doctrinal statement **should** include a presentation of the student’s views regarding the following key theological issues:
   - The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible
   - The Trinity
   - The Nature of the Fall and Effect upon Humanity
   - Election
   - The Nature and the Extent of the Atonement
   - The Uniqueness of Christ
   - The Work of the Holy Spirit
   - Eschatological Distinctions

   The doctrinal statement should seek to be succinct and confessional in content. It should flow together with creedal like statement supported by discussion or commentary as needed. The citations for the commentary can be in parentheses. The commentary section could include discussion of areas of tension or personal struggle. This exercise could prove to be a valuable resource for the student to compile a theological framework for ordination and ministry. The student will be graded on quality of synthesis, clarity of expression, and the ability to demonstrate mature theological reflection underlying the statement of faith. The student is expected to use proper grammar, punctuation, and style.

2. Philosophy of Ministry Paper
   The student will complete a thorough description of his or her current philosophy of ministry. The paper should be 8-10 pages in length. The statement should present the core values and
beliefs that shape current ministerial practice. It should clearly express what you do in ministry and why you do it. The paper should include a discussion of the following:

- Definition of pastoral ministry
- Exposition of current ecclesiology, including the cultural context for ministry
- Core values and beliefs under girding ministerial practice
- Ethical guidelines and expectations for ministry in areas of divorce-remarriage, personal ministry ethics, use of money, etc.
- Views of church governance and polity
- Key biblical passages shaping one’s view of ministry, including the role of women in ministry.
- Biblical models impacting your understanding of pastoral authority and leadership
- Impact of personality, style and preferences
- The Nature of your calling and the way it has changed over time.

3. Readiness for Ministry Paper
Formal theological education should present a “season” or opportunity for students to pursue development as a whole person-in-ministry. In addition to academic preparation, students should intentionally address spiritual and character formation issues, vocational development, and connection with a faith community over their course in seminary. In a sense, students need to see themselves as responsibly working with God and the faith community to “author” this new chapter in their lives by integrating seminary education into a “meta-curriculum” of holistic preparation for leadership in God’s Kingdom. This exercise provides you the opportunity to reflect on your current ministry readiness from a variety of perspectives. Please use the following prompts to complete a 2-3 page, written assessment of your current condition in the various development areas indicated below:

1. Spiritual formation
2. Relational health
3. Integrity of character
4. Personal Health
5. Emotional Health
6. Vocational experience and competency
7. Ecclesial connections

Provocative Prompts
The following thoughts and questions are meant to be suggestive of possible ways to assess and your life in various areas and aid you in your development plan. Please do not think you are obligated to respond to all of these or that you are limited to these prompts.

Spiritual Formation
What is the nature and quality of your relationship to God? How consistent and vital are your times of intimacy with the Lord? What seems to be lacking and why? How varied and comprehensive are your approaches of spiritual formation? What models of spiritual development and formation guide your devotional practices? How can accountability relationships or spiritual friendships foster your involvement in personal and corporate spiritual disciplines? What are you doing to enhance the spiritual growth of others? What can you do to
insure that seminary life does not erode your walk with God? Who do you pray with on a regular basis? Whom should you be praying with? How does your faith help you to trust God in difficult situations, to do things out of your comfort zone?

**Relational Health**
Do you have close friends? Are you satisfied with the quality of your relationships? Do you have anyone that you can confide with about your deepest concerns and struggles? Why not? Are you involved in Christian community (small group fellowship) and to what degree? What is the quality of your relationship to your family and wife (if married)? What can you do to enhance intimacy in your relationship with your spouse or children? Do you have healthy boundaries in your relationships? Do you have problematic relationships? What can you do to reconcile these? Do you have Christian colleagues with whom you can be vulnerable? What will you do to establish and maintain current relationships?

**Integrity of Character**
In what areas of your life do you feel a lack of integrity or personal honesty? Do you have a history of problem with a life controlling behavior such as addiction to sex, substances, money, etc.? What behaviors or attitudes do you feel shame? Do you owe money to people? Do you cheat on your finances and taxes? Do you struggle with issues of sexuality or gender preference that might compromise your vocation? Are you who you publicly present yourself to be? What behaviors or attitudes do you feel that are not consistent with your sense of calling and vocation? What can you do to change? What kind of support or assistance will you need to improve?

**Personal Health**
What concerns or issues has testing revealed about your personality and temperament? Do you have problems with anxiety, depression, impulsivity, or anger? Do you see a counselor or therapist? Are you on medication? Do you feel well most of the time? What problems do you have with your energy levels? Do you sleep well? Do you sleep too much? Not enough? Are you significantly overweight? Do you get enough exercise? Do you have any health problems that may interfere with your ability to do ministry? Do you have a health condition that could be remedied by medical intervention but have not done anything about it? If you could have an elective medical or dental procedure, what would it be? What do you do recreationally? Do you take enough days off? Why not?

**Emotional Health**
Do you find yourself with regular anxiety? Is there a history of depression? How easily are you frustrated when your plans are thwarted?

**Vocational Experiences and Competency**
In what areas of ministry do you lack experience? What are you going to do to gain more ministry experience? Do you have a ministry mentor? If so, is this relationship personally helpful and satisfying? If not, what can you do to improve it? What other developmental relationships can you foster to facilitate your growth in ministry? What are your current ministry avenues? What new types of ministry would you like to try? What do you to refresh or improve your
performance of ministry or leadership? What cross-cultural ministry opportunities have you had? What types of cross-cultural ministry would you like to do? What keeps you from them?

**Ecclesial Connections**
What is your current faith community? Are you satisfied with this relationship? If not, why not? Are you thinking about changing denominational affiliation? Why? What are you doing to solidify your professional status with your faith group (license, ordination)? Do you have a mentor or relationship with someone who can develop denominational connections for you? Where will you be serving God in five years? Ten years? How satisfied is your faith group with you and your current ministry? What doctrinal concerns or issues are you currently struggling with? How would these influence your identification with your current faith tradition?

**4. Presentation**
This hour long event during our third weekend will provide students with an opportunity to present a synthesis of personal and vocational development through their seminary experience. Discussion in class will guide how this presentation will be done. The student will make a presentation during the April weekend of the class. People interested in your development as a pastor are invited to attend.

**VII. Class Schedule and Assignments:**

**Class Session One:**  
January 8-9, 2016

**Calling and Ministerial Identity and Practice**
Readings and Assignments:  
Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring*  
Kim, *7 Lessons*  
Willimon, *Pastor*  
Swetland, *Hidden World*  
(Familiarity with Worship Resources)

Class Introduction  
What is a Call to Ministry?  
Defining Ministry  
Biblical Perspectives on Ministry  
Historical Perspectives on Ministry  
Role Identity  
Transitions in Calling

Pastoral Tasks: Worship Leadership  
Pastoral Tasks: Pastoral Care  
Pastoral Tasks: Weddings and Funerals
Class Session Two:  
February 12-13, 2014

**Character and Ministry**
Readings and Assignments:
Osterhaus, *Thriving Through Ministry Conflict*
Steinke (both books)
*Readiness Exercise (See Syllabus)*
(Familiarity with Administration Resources – like Berkley)

Pastoral Tasks: Teaching
Pastoral Tasks: Administration

The Roles of Ministry
Personality and Ministry
Character and Leadership
Conflict and Resolution
Ethical Issues
Writing Theology and Ministerial Philosophy
Maintaining Spiritual Vitality
The Readiness for Ministry Discussion

Class Session Three
April 8-9, 2016

Student Presentations

**VIII. Grading**
Class grades will be given for each of the three class projects. The final grade of the course will be compiled at the conclusion of the Readiness for Ministry Presentation.
Grading criteria for each assignment are included in the project descriptions.

Breakdown of class grade is as follows:
Class Reading and Annotated Bibliography 10%
Doctrinal Statement 25%
Philosophy of Ministry Statement 25%
Readiness for Ministry Statement 25%
In-Class Presentation – 15%

**IX. Attendance Policy:**
Students must attend all class sessions. Given the two weekend format, if something causes you to miss more than 3 hours of class, you should consider taking it the next year.

**X. Suggested Readings**
The following are suggested supplementary readings for this course. Students may elect other books to read with the permission of the course professor.
Laniak, Timothy, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks: Reflections on Biblical Leadership*. (Self-Published, 2007).
Malphurs, Aubrey. *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern & Shape Your Church Culture*. (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2013)
Susek, Ron. *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999)
Swanson, David D. *Everlasting Life: How God Answers Our Questions about Grief, Loss, and the Promise of Heaven.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012)
Swetland, Kenneth L. *Facing Messy Stuff in the Church: Case Studies for Pastors and Congregations* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005)
Tidball, Derek. *Skillful Shepherds.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervon, 1986).
Wilson, Michael T. and Hoffmann, Brad, *Preventing Ministry Failure,* (IVP, 2009).