

IN 782: Gospel in Context

University of Dubuque Theological Seminary | August 2021

3 Credits, letter grade only

Prerequisite: IN 520: God's Redemptive Mission

Instructors: Rev. Dr. Christopher James, Dr. Mary Emily Duba, Rev. Dr. Marcus Allen

Course Description

Wherever one does ministry, the character of the context shapes the forms of evangelism and mission that are viable, appropriate, and faithful. This course explores the work of contextualization—how the gospel is proclaimed and embodied contextually. This course includes an **immersion trip, August 13-17 in Dane County, WI**, as well as classroom sessions to help students develop an initial skill at exegeting contexts for Christian ministry. **Preload begins July 26, 2021.** Building on a theological foundation, it considers how context is reflected in the forms of ministry and witness observed. Cost per person for the immersion, to be billed to students by the student accounts office, is \$400.00. Travel group assignments will be determined by the instructors.

Course Learning Objectives

By participating fully in this class, students will be able to:

1. Discuss the universal promise of the gospel and its necessary particularity in cultural and communal embodiments.
2. Explain the theological basis for and practical importance of attention to context in Christian mission and evangelism.
3. Experiment with practices and postures for faithful Christian witness including humility, attention, curiosity, initiative, and collaboration.
4. Interpret the ways in which congregations live their understanding of the gospel in word and deed.
5. Design a plan for exegeting a context for Christian mission.

M.Div. Curricular Goals

1. Evangelize the world with faithfulness and contextual sensitivity.
2. Educate and equip individuals and congregations to live and minister joyfully and faithfully as part of their own denomination and the ecumenical church.
3. Lead and nurture congregations to promote peace and justice in the public arena and encourage the witness and service of the church in mission to the world.

MAMD Curricular Goals

1. Develop, implement, and assess strategies for missional living in a specific cultural context.
2. Adopt spiritual practices that nurture personal lives as faithful disciples and witnesses.
3. Develop skills and capacities for faithful and competent Christian witness.

Required Reading and Viewing

Scott Hagley, *Eat What is Set Before You: A Missiology of the Congregation in Context* Eric Jacobsen, *Sidewalks in the Kingdom: New Urbanism and the Christian Faith*
Brad Roth, *God's Country: Faith, Hope and the Future of the Rural Church*

Other reading & media content as assigned, including the following which reflect UDTS' participation in the Science for Seminaries grant:

- Lecture: "Watersheds and the Missio Dei," Dr. Duba (8/11)
- Watch: "Watershed Learning Animation," USDA
- Explore: "How's My Waterway?" US EPA
- Assignment: Bring the name of your watershed and one of the local bodies of water in that watershed to class on 8/11
- Read: "Reinhabiting the River of Life: Rehydration, Redemption, and Watershed Discipleship," by Ched Meyers

Course Administrative Information

1. All papers should be written in 12pt, Times New Roman, double-spaced, following the Turabian Style Guide unless otherwise noted in the assignment description. Page one should include a simple header with your name, course name, and date.
2. A grading penalty will be assessed on all late work unless a legitimate reason for tardiness exists. Please consult with an instructor before missing due dates.
3. All work must be a student's own. Be sure you know what plagiarism is. You are responsible for adhering to the Seminary's policies on academic honesty. The most recent Student Handbook details important information on plagiarism on page 101.
4. At the Academic Support Center on the second floor of Myers Library, there are writing tutors who are able to help you with writing issues and problems you may encounter working on assignments for this course. Please make use of this service provided free of charge by the University.
5. Americans With Disability Act (ADA) Statement: A student who has a disability that may affect his/her performance in this course should consult with the instructor and the campus ADA compliance office, in confidence, by the second class session. UD's ADA compliance officer is Megan Ruiz, at the Academic Support Center, ext. 3722.
6. Failure to attend class or participate in all aspects of the immersion may result in a requirement to repeat the course.
7. This syllabus, course calendar and other attending documents are subject to change during the term.

Course Requirements

1. **Engaged Participation:** Conscientious attendance and participation in class sessions; vigorous attention, initiative and curiosity during the immersion; and robust engagement with the assigned material.
2. **Preload: Hagley paper due 8/4 (the Wednesday before the residency begins)**

“Faithful mission is forged in crisis. This is good news.”

Defend this thesis in a 1,000 -1,250 word essay (4-5 pages), using Scott Hagley’s *Eat What Is Set Before You: A Missiology of the Congregation in Context* to construct your argument. Your essay should include:

- a clear articulation of what Hagley means by “crisis,” with particular attention to what he terms crises of call, cultivation, and context;
- an account of how such crises together forge faithful mission, according to Hagley;
- and an affirmation of why such crisis is good news (hint: it has to do with God!).

Engage with and **draw on** the Hagley book directly but avoid long quotations. Instead, favor brief impactful quotes embedded in your own paraphrase and explanation of his ideas.

Reference the page number where a quote or idea appears. Page numbers should be inserted in parentheses at the end of the sentence, inside the final punctuation, like this: “At the table,” Hagley writes, “the stranger becomes the host,” creating a crisis of expectation and identity (263).

Format your paper in this way:

- Name and course
- Double-spaced
- Include the thesis in your introduction
- Page numbers in footer
- Indent the first line of paragraphs; no extra space between paragraphs
- Times New Roman 12-point type
- 1-inch margins all around
- A Works Cited list should appear at the end. Only the Hagley book is necessary,

but if you do cite the Bible or any other additional works – and again, you don’t have to! – they should be included, in this format:

- Scott Hagley, *Eat What is Set Before You: A Missiology of the Congregation* (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2019).

Note: This assignment is an exercise in attentive, charitable reading (tracking the argument of an author with openness to its being true). If you would like to pose

objections to or raise questions about this thesis (or other aspects of Hagley's argument), you may include those at the end of your paper. We will take them up during our discussions of the book when we're together in August.

3. Jacobsen/Roth Contextual Theologies Paper, due 8/7 (the Saturday before the residency begins)

Submit at 1400-1800 word (6-8 page) document in response to *Sidewalks in the Kingdom* and *God's Country* as an examples of urban and rural contextual theologies. The first page will be a single-spaced collection of significant quotations from the two books, 1/2 page each (quotes should be of no more than 2 sentences). Then respond concisely to the following questions in 1.5 - 2 pages for each book: How does this author interpret, exegete, or 'read' their context (which features do they attend to and how)? How does this author understand the meaning of the gospel in relation to this context? Which

theological themes significantly shape this contextual theology—and how? In the final 2- 3 pages of the paper, describe what you are learning about practical importance of attention to context in ministry and mission as you observe the similarities and differences between Jacobsen and Roth's approaches. Conclude with 2-3 single-spaced questions related to contextual theology you intend to keep wrestling with during the immersion and through this course.

1. **Context Journal:** Keep a daily written journal during the immersion trip for use in writing the final paper which contains: observations of the communities and sites you visit, notes on the way locals describe their community, descriptions of the forms of Christian community and ministry happening, summaries of how Christians give expression to their faith in that place, and indications of the ministry's relation to its broader community. In addition, reflect on: What did I experience emotionally and spiritually today? Where did I see God? This journal will not be submitted in full but will enrich group conversations and should inform the writing of your Gospel in Context Paper. A small, pocket-size journal for taking notes on site is recommended.
2. **Gospel in Context Paper, due 8/31:** Drawing on course readings, your journal entries, and discussions, write a 10-page paper in three equal sections.

CONTEXT In Section One, present a robust *description* of either the rural or urban context in which you spent time. In so doing, identify and describe 3-5 key characteristics of that place. You might include aspects of the place's culture, values, norms, material environment, personal and communal narratives, social dynamics, contemporary challenges, "the human situation," etc. Your development of these key characteristics should be grounded in details and quotations from local experts or pastors, as well as your own experience in the place. Show engagement with the relevant texts.

GOSPEL In Section Two, charitably articulate the understanding of the gospel that you witnessed among *at least two* Christian communities in this context. How do they understand, proclaim, and embody the significance of the gospel in their context, shaped by and in response to the particular features of their context? How do they embody the gospel in their way of life and forms of ministry and worship? What are the themes or sources in Scripture and Tradition that anchor their understanding and practice? This

section should include quotations or observations from among the Christian communities we met in that context that indicate their sense of their place and the gospel as they know it. Once you have articulated the contextual theology of the gospel for each of two Christian communities, you may then engage in a brief (one-paragraph), preliminary *evaluation* of these Christian ministries.

PRACTICE In Section Three, propose specific practices for spiritual and missional discernment in a place like that which you have written about. (If you were to relocate to a similar context, what habits and practices would you adopt in order to learn the culture, discover the contextual meaning of the gospel, and discern the Spirit's missional invitations?) *Do not propose mission or outreach programs*, but rather identify specific practices you would use for learning your context and for developing a contextual theology. (These are prerequisite steps to doing faithful, contextually appropriate

mission.) This section should include insights gained from local experts, Christian leaders, and our readings and lectures.

Tips for a strong paper:

- Begin with an introductory paragraph that includes a description of your overall argument (a thesis statement and a preview of how you will develop that claim through the three sections of the paper).
- Strive for a strong sense of cohesion and logical flow between the three elements of the project.
- Avoid writing a travelogue. Your paper should be organized around the development of an argument in three sections rather than around your itinerary.
- Adopt a posture and tone of curiosity and charity with respect to the Christian communities and their approaches to the gospel. Limit evaluative comments to the final paragraph of Section Two.
- Draw on course readings and lectures. Cite your sources appropriately.
- When editing your paper prior to submission, make sure each paragraph has and develops one main point. Then, make sure that each of the paragraphs in a section serve the development of the main point of the section.
- Read the model paper posted on Moodle

Assignment Grade Weights

Engaged Participation 25% Hagley Paper 20% Jacobsen & Roth Paper 25% Gospel in Context Paper 30%