

MN 255W BEING BODY OF CHRIST

Instructor: Craig L. Nesson

Required for Second Year MDiv students; open to MA students

2 Credits; letter grade or credit/no credit

This course articulates the meaning of church as the body of Christ by constructing a theology of the congregation. Components of this theology include worship, prayer, education, community, stewardship, evangelizing, global connections, ecumenism, and social ministry. Special attention is given to the congregation's identity and mission. Implications for congregational leadership are examined. The church takes on the character of Jesus Christ through immersion in the biblical narrative and the pattern of worship as we are sent to engage in practices that conform to the way of Jesus Christ: peacemaking, justice, care for creation, and respect for human dignity. This semester will include special focus on the challenges of climate change. Readings, discussion, and speakers will engage the class in matters related to advocating for earth, sky, waters, and all creatures under threat in this era of the Anthropocene.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To introduce Luther's two strategies paradigm as a framework practice of ministry (practice of biblical and theological wisdom).
2. To consider how church becomes the body of Christ through Scripture and worship (practice of *Missio Dei* in Word and Sacrament).
3. To understand the interconnections between worship, prayer, education, life in community, stewardship, evangelizing, global connections, ecumenism, and social ministry in congregational mission (practice of pastoral concern).
4. To become conversant about the theology and practice of full communion with the partners of the ELCA (practice of ecclesial partnership).
5. To reclaim the four marks of the church as a schema for social ministry (practice of engagement with cross-cultural and global dimensions).
6. To claim one's own theological voice in understanding, acting, and advocating in relation to the challenges of climate change (practice of complex analysis).

PROCEDURE: The course will meet once per week. Teaching and learning methods will include presentations with interactive discussion, group discussion, guest lectures, and student presentations.

EVALUATION: Evaluation is based on 1) Attendance and demonstrating informed contributions to discuss assigned readings. (10%); 2) Writing and sharing evangelizing testimony (20%); 3) Group presentation on assigned text (30%), and 4) Summative assignment (40%).

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Required Reading:

Sallie McFague. *A New Climate for Christology: Kenosis, Climate Change, and Befriending Nature.*

Bill McKibben. *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?*

Craig L. Nesson. *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation.* 2nd Edition.

Craig L. Nesson. *Shalom Church: The Body of Christ as Ministering Community.*

ELCA Constitution (ELCA webpage).

ELCA full communion agreements with ecumenical partners (ELCA webpage).

"A Declaration of Our Inter-Religious Commitment: A Policy Statement of the ELCA" (ELCA webpage)

Hanover Report, The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity (available online).

Climate Justice Reading. The following texts will be used for group presentations:

Amitav Ghosh. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.*

Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love.*

Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, Editors. *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation.*

James B. Martin-Schramm. *Climate Justice: Ethics, Energy and Public Policy.*

Recommended: Lisa Dahill and James Martin-Schramm, editors. *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril.*

Date	Theme	Reading
2/1	Luther's Two Strategies/Ecclesiology	"Reappropriating Luther's Two Kingdoms": https://gudribassakums.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/2005-two-kingdoms-nessen.pdf
2/3	Mission of the Universal Priesthood	Two Articles: http://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/156 http://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/155 Climate Change: James Martin-Schramm
2/10	Being Body of Christ Climate Change: Larry Rasmussen	Shalom Church, Chaps. 1-3/McKibben, Part 1 https://portal.knme.org/video/faith-in-a-time-of-climate-change-q9c4iq/ Rasmussen, "Author's Note"/"Epoch Times"
2/17	Kingdom of God/Theology of Worship	Beyond Maintenance to Mission, 1-4/McKibben, Part 2
2/24	Education/ELCA Constitution	Beyond Maintenance to Mission, 5-6/McKibben, Part 3 ELCA Constitution https://www.elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions
3/3	Life in Community/Stewardship	Beyond Maintenance to Mission, 7-8/McKibben, Part 4 "The Diaconate as an Ecumenical Opportunity" https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/102181/the_hanover_report.pdf Book Discussion: Bill McKibben, <i>Falter</i>
3/10	Research and Reading Week	"After the Death of Evangelism"/Work on Testimony
3/17	Evangelizing/Global Connections	Beyond Maintenance to Mission, 9-10/McFague, Intro-1 Evangelizing Testimony Due.
3/24	Ecumenism Full Communion Partners	Beyond Maintenance to Mission, 11/McFague, 2-3 ELCA Full Communion Agreements: http://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion?_ga=2.41783077.622092960.1515782396-1660177343.1378417152
3/31	The Oneness of the Body of Christ Book Discussion: Sallie McFague, <i>A New Climate for Christology</i>	Shalom Church, Chap. 4/McFague, 4-Afterword
4/7	The Holiness of the Body of Christ Group Presentation #1	Shalom Church, Chap. 5
4/14	Research and Reading/Holy Week	Work on Summative Assignment
4/21	The Catholicity of the Body of Christ Group Presentation #2	Shalom Church, Chap. 6
4/28	The Apostolicity of the Body of Christ Group Presentation #3	Shalom Church, Chap. 7

5/5	Saints, Heroes, Icons Group Presentation #4	Shalom Church, Chap. 8
5/12	Global Horizons and Climate Change	Beyond Maintenance to Mission, Chap. 12/Conclusion Summative Assignment Due.

EVANGELIZING TESTIMONY: Based on the assigned readings and your own theology of evangelizing, prepare and share an evangelical testimony based on your personal experience that includes performative language to share the Gospel with others. **Due March 17.**

BOOK PRESENTATIONS: Students will be work together in one of four groups to prepare 45-minute class presentation on one of four texts:

1. Amitav Ghosh. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.*
2. James B. Martin-Schramm. *Climate Justice: Ethics, Energy and Public Policy.*
3. Elizabeth A. Johnson. *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love.*
4. Kiara A. Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett, Editors. *Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation.*

Each group should prepare and lead two versions of the book presentation, one synchronous and one asynchronous. Instructions:

1. Develop a detailed lesson plan to be submitted to instructor on day of presentation.
2. Briefly summarize central themes from the book.
3. Select the section(s) of the book you decide are most important for class presentation.
4. Engage the class interactively.
5. Employ creativity in teaching and learning methods.

One resource (of many) for thinking about the lesson plan is Stiliana Milkova, “Strategies for Effective Lesson Planning”: https://crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p2_5

SUMMATIVE ASSIGNMENT: Prepare and submit *either* a final paper (6-8 pages) on the core theological commitments which inform your understanding of how God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit seeks to work through congregations *or* a summative project on one of the central themes of this course in a medium to be used in your church leadership. **Due by May 12.**

Accommodations Policy

It is Seminary policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disability conditions that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students are responsible for informing their instructor of any documented disability by the end of the first week of class or upon subsequent diagnosis. Documentation on disability conditions is kept in a confidential file in the ADA Compliance Officer’s office.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

Creating Beloved Community and a learning environment full of mutual respect is hard and ongoing work. We are a diverse community seeking greater diversity, and this diversity is paramount in the beauty of God’s good creation and even the Trinity itself. Diversity can refer to multiple ways that we identify ourselves, including but not limited to race, national origin, languages, sex, ability, body type, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, gender identity, ancestry, veteran status, culture, or genetic information. These diversities and more contribute to the perspectives and excellence we bring into the classroom and beyond and will be affirmed.

My own commitment to DEI at WTS is grounded in the very method of doing theology. The starting point for liberation theologies begins with the suffering ones of this world and their cries. Alongside the suffering of creation itself, we attend today to the cries of those persons oppressed and suffering under the weight of systemic injustice according to race, gender, sexual identities, ethnic origins, immigration status, class inequities, disabilities, age, religion, and many other categories used to classify people and disregard their inherent dignity as those created in God's image. These experiences of suffering belong to the heart of theological inquiry as I seek to understand the causes of systemic injustices and bring the resources of Scripture and theology toward a praxis that appreciates diversity, advocates for equity, and practices inclusion.

Topics covered in seminary are often difficult on various planes. When we embrace diverse perspectives, we embrace healthful disagreement—a mark of deep and true community. Please engage in discussion with care and empathy for yourself and others. In this class we endeavor to embrace the uncomfortable as we critically examine some of our most basic assumptions, values, and beliefs. As you work to bring good courage to this course, I will work to ensure an environment that supports your full participation and risk taking.