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CS 638 Ethics of Community

Christine Pohl

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Syllabus

Course: CS638 W1 (SP 2009)

Title: Ethics of Community

Hours: 2.00 - 3.00

Published: Yes, on 01/01/2009

Prerequisites:

CS601

Department: Church in Society

Faculty: Dr. Christine Pohl



Email: christine.pohl@asburyseminary.edu

Office: AD

SPO: 922

Meetings:

During 02/09/2009 to 05/22/2009 on Tuesday and Thursday from 9:30a to 10:45a in AD306.

Maximum Registration: 25

Catalog Description:

Objectives:

CS 638 Ethics of Community

CS638: Ethics of Community

Asbury Theological Seminary, Spring 2009

Tuesday & Thursday 9:30-10:45am, Admin. Bldg. 306

Dr. Christine Pohl, Professor

Office Location: Admin. Bldg. 304D

Office Phone: 858-2284 *** Home Phone 858-8136

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 1:00-3:00pm and by appointment

Purpose: To prepare students for the moral challenges of congregational ministry by providing moral, theological, biblical, and sociological analysis of the practices that are necessary for community life. To enable ministers to foster communities of growth and accountability by identifying requisites of community. To prepare students to reflect morally and theologically on difficulties they encounter in congregational life by looking closely at the interaction between contemporary culture and the practices of promise-keeping, truth-telling, hospitality, and gratitude.

Learning Objectives: Having successfully completed this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify and critically engage key biblical and historical/theological texts on Christian community and the practices of promise-keeping, truth-telling, hospitality, and gratitude.
2. Interpret the contemporary socio-cultural context and its implications for the practices of community and congregational life (e.g., mobility, autonomy, pluralism, fragmentation, technology).
3. Articulate a Wesleyan understanding of Christian community, practices, and their deformations.
4. Interpret various practical and interpersonal problems in congregational life through the theological/moral lens of practices and their deformations.
5. Identify various ways through which to discern, celebrate, and strengthen these practices within a congregation.
6. Articulate the distinctive role of discernment and forgiveness in community life, the four practices, and their deformations.

Texts: (total pages: approximately 1800—higher than usual, but two of the books are stories)

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1954)

Hallie, Philip. *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed* (HarperPerennial, 1979, 1994)

Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus and Community* (Fortress, 1984)

Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone* (Simon & Schuster, 2000)

Rice, Chris. *Grace Matters* (Jossey-Bass, 2002)

Vanier, Jean. *Community and Growth* (Paulist, 1989)

Volf, Miroslav, and Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Theology* (Eerdmans, 2002), selections: read pages 1-48, 94-181, 206-227, 245-263.

Evaluation and Assignments:

This course is designed as a three credit course, but students may choose to take it for two credits. For students taking the course for three credits, the assignments are weighted as follows:

10% 3-page reflection paper. Identify one practice (gratitude, truth-telling, fidelity, or hospitality) of the community of Le Chambon (*Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*) that seemed central to their life together. Describe how it was expressed and why it was important. Discuss the tensions that emerged for the community as they engaged in this practice. Explain how faithful engagement in this one practice involved other practices or their deformations.

25% 5-page interaction paper. Choose three key insights from Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* about the

character of Christian community. Discuss their implications for congregational ministry today using relevant aspects of sociological analysis from Putnam's work in *Bowling Alone*. Be sure to engage both Bonhoeffer and Putnam substantively.

20% 4-page integrative paper. Identify an aspect of congregational life that becomes particularly complex when ministry is cross-cultural or multi-ethnic (e.g. worship styles, staff relations, understandings of the role of the pastor, or something else drawn from your experience). Using insights regarding congregational life drawn from *Grace Matters*, *Community and Growth*, *Practicing Theology*, and *Jesus and Community*, discuss resources that you as a pastor (or youth minister, Christian educator, or pastoral care giver) might bring to the situation.

10% 3-page essay. Describe an incident in ministry in which you saw the practice (or its deformation) of hospitality (exclusion), promise-keeping (betrayal), truth-telling (deception), or gratitude (envy/entitlement) at work. Recount the incident carefully but succinctly. Then reflect on it in light of our readings and discussions on community and the various other practices. Identify questions that remain.

35% Final research paper or project on the relation of a particular practice to the moral formation of a congregation (10-12 pages). More detailed instructions will be provided.

Debit (up to one letter grade) for inadequate class participation and/or late or incomplete readings.

Students taking the course for two credits will not be expected to do a final research paper, but all other expectations for the course are the same (readings, class attendance and participation, and the first four papers). The written assignments are re-weighted as follows:

15% 3-page reflection paper on community of Le Chambon

35% 5-page interaction paper on Bonhoeffer and Putnam

30% 4-page integrative paper on cross-cultural ministry

20% 3-page essay on hospitality/exclusion, promise-keeping/betrayal, truth-telling/deception, or gratitude/envy/entitlement

Debit (up to one letter grade) for inadequate class participation and/or late or incomplete readings

Grade Range: Work for CS638 will be evaluated at a graduate/professional school level.

A=(4.0) Exceptional work: surpassing, markedly outstanding achievement of course objectives

B=(3.0) Good work: strong, significant achievement of course objectives

C=(2.0) Acceptable work: basic, essential achievement of course objectives

D=(1.0) Marginal work: inadequate, minimal achievement of course objectives

F=(0) Unacceptable work: failure to achieve course objectives

Student Responsibilities: This course is designed as a seminar. It is therefore essential that students

come to class having read the assigned material carefully and critically. Class attendance and active participation in discussions are expected and are factored into the final grade. Reading records will be collected on the last day of class.

All written work must be typed with 12-point type, one-inch margins on all four sides, and true double-spacing. There will be a penalty for late papers commensurate with the degree of lateness and the adequacy of the excuse. Papers are due in class on assigned date.

All written work must use inclusive language when reference is made to human beings (male and female). This provides for both greater inclusion and greater precision.

Class Sessions and Assignments:

Feb. 10, 12: Reflecting on Community from our Experience
Introductions, review syllabus and expectations of course

Feb. 17, 19: Community and Practices through the Eyes of Experienced Practitioners
#1: The Community of Le Chambon

Reading Assignment: *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*
Written Assignment: 3-page reflection paper (see above)

Feb. 24, 26: Exegeting the Contemporary Context

Reading Assignment: *Bowling Alone*, pp. 15-284

Mar. 3, 5: Sociological and Theological Reflection on Life in Community

Reading Assignment: *Bowling Alone*, pp. 284-414
Life Together (entire book)
Written Assignment: 5-page interaction paper (see above)

Mar. 10, 12: Community and Practices through the Eyes of Experienced Practitioners
#2: The Community of L'Arche

Reading Assignment: *Community and Growth*

Mar. 17, 19: Jesus and Community

Reading Assignment: *Jesus and Community*

Mar. 24, 26: Community and Practices through the Eyes of Experienced Practitioners

#3: The Community of Antioch

Reading Assignment: *Grace Matters*

Mar. 30-April 3: Spring Reading Week

Apr. 7, 9: Historic Christian Understandings of Community with particular focus on Wesleyan tradition

Written Assignment: 3-page essay on a practice (see above)

Apr. 14, 16: Practices that Make and Break Community: Hospitality and Exclusion

Reading Assignment: *Practicing Theology*, selections
Selected student essays on hospitality and exclusion

Apr. 21, 23: Practices that Make and Break Community: Fidelity/Promise-keeping and Betrayal

Reading Assignment: Selected student essays on promise-keeping and betrayal

Apr. 28, 30: Practices that Make and Break Community: Truth-telling and Deception

Reading Assignment: *Practicing Theology*, selections
Selected student essays on truth-telling and deception

May 5, 7: Practices that Make and Break Community: Gratitude and Envy/Entitlement

Reading Assignment: Selected student essays on gratitude and envy/grumbling
/entitlement
Written Assignment: 4-page Integrative Paper

May 12, 14: Practicing Community: Fostering practices and virtues in the Christian life and community

May 18-22: Finals week; final paper due