



## **P 515 The Art of Reading Congregations**

### **Course Information**

- \*Spring 2018
- \*BLC 105
- \*Tuesdays 6:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m.

### **Instructor(s) Information**

- \*Dr. Jeffery L. Tribble, Sr.
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### **Course Description**

Recognizing that theological education must heighten student awareness of the character, content and agency of multiple contexts, this course helps students to read the context of a congregation as a “living human document” or “living human webs of life.” Multiple interpretive frames and ethnographic methods for analyzing congregations are explored as a means of practical theological interpretation and ministry leadership. A central feature of this course is student practicing pastoral research skills in a congregation of their choosing and writing a theological narrative about that congregation. A set of readings will be engaged to deepen theological and theoretical understanding of congregations and congregational leadership. This course meets program goals 1 and 3 of the MDiv program, program goals 1 and 2 of the MAPT program. No prerequisites. 3 credit hours.

### **Learning Outcomes/Course Objectives (enumerated)**

1. Students will demonstrate a reflexive self-awareness of who they are as leaders in a respectful relationship with others. This includes learning skills of patience, active listening, and acting in kind and respectful ways in the classroom as well as in the congregation. This also includes fostering respect for racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural differences (including theological, religious, ecclesial, political, economic, and those with disabilities) in the classroom and the congregation (Guideline to Support Multicultural Teaching and Learning).

2. Students will demonstrate skill in research methods of congregational studies and ethnographic research to engage, interpret, and reflect on a particular ministry context (MDiv SLO 3 and MAPT SLO 2).
3. Students will demonstrate understanding of theoretical and theological perspectives of congregations and the practical implications for their leadership (MDiv SLO 1 and MAPT SLO1).

## **Course Materials**

### Required Resources

Baker, Dori Grinenko, ed. *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2011. ISBN 978-1-56699-409-5

Becker, Penny Edgell. *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999. ISBN 0521594626

Eiseland, Nancy. *A Particular Place: Urban Restructuring and Religious Ecology in a Southern Exurb*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 2000 ISBN 0813527384

Fulkerson, Mary McClintock. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Wordly Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-19-929647-7

Moschella, Mary Clark. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8298-1774-4

### Recommended Resources

<http://studyingcongregations.org/> [Studying Congregations is an online resource which makes available the research tools of the text, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* eds. Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, and related work related to the field of congregational studies]

<http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/> [The National Congregations Study surveys a representative sample of houses of worship in the US—churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of US. The study, initiated in 1998 and repeated in 2006 and 2012, surveys congregational leaders.]

<http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/> [A series of ongoing research and reports on congregational life conducted by a multi-faith partnership of researchers and faith leaders]

<https://alban.org/> [Alban Institute, a 40 year old organization providing practical research for congregational life, passed on its resources to Duke Divinity School. Books, articles, and newsletters to strengthen congregational life]

<https://www.faithandleadership.com/> [A learning resource for Christian leaders and the organizations that they serve]

### Resources Posted on Moodle

Tribble Lecture Notes/Materials:

1. Multiple Interpretive Frames Part 1: Theology, Ecology, and Culture
2. Multiple Interpretive Frames Part 2: Process, Resources, and Leadership
3. Form Letter for Congregational Consent for Student Research
4. Analytic Strategy of Coding and Memos with Example, "God Did It"

### **Course Requirements (enumerated)**

- 1. Class Attendance and Participation.** For the class to function as a seminar, each student is expected to be present in class – physically, mentally, and spiritually. Careful preparation and full participation will be essential for the learning ecology to be healthy. Participation includes preparation for class in which we will discuss both the contexts that we are exploring and the texts that we are reading as an accompaniment. For our practice of ethnography, the class will serve as an “accountability group” to process research experiences from design to finish (Moschella, p. 108-109) Commitment to respect racial, gender, ethnic, and cultural differences is expected in accordance with the multicultural justice framework of the policy Guideline to Support Multicultural Teaching and Learning. In accordance with the policy on attendance, it is expected that no more than two class sessions will be missed. Notify instructor in advance if possible of a required absence.
- 2. Journal papers.** Reflective papers for your tool kit of the praxis of leadership. You will write two page papers identifying concepts, principles, or processes that you personally deem as “worth knowing” from your reading and demonstrating understanding of how you would use this knowledge in various situations and contexts that you may encounter in your leadership. Eight journal papers are to be written for the assigned reading from *Greenhouses of Hope* (journal paper 1), *Congregations in Conflict* (journal papers 2 and 3), *A Particular Place* (journal papers 4 and 5) , and *Places of Redemption* (journal papers 6,7,8). due on the date of the Tuesday class session. **Due Dates: Feb. 13, Feb. 27, Mar. 6, Mar. 20, Mar. 27, Apr. 10, Apr. 17, Apr. 24. 30%**
- 3. Case Study.** A congregation of your own choosing will be a primary “text” for this course. Given the constraints of the semester and the rhythms of life, this is a limited case study (requirement of 2 activities observed, requirement of 2 interviews, and limited number of representative documents/ artifacts) providing an opportunity to “practice being an observer, listening closely to the people in your congregation, at times withholding your immediate response in order to slowly and carefully tease out a full description of another person’s way of seeing things.” (Baker, p. 26) Each student will select a local congregation/ ministry accessible to them physically and socially in which you will gain hands-on practice exploring a question or two in the congregation. By week three you should have picked this site and made arrangements with the leadership to use this congregational setting for your *pastoral* research. In succeeding

weeks, we will spend a portion of our class time discussing your field experiences. **Submittals will include a set of field notes of your direct observation of one activity (Mar. 9. 10%), a set of field notes of one interview (Mar. 23. 10%), an artifact/document analysis (Apr. 13. 10%), an analytic memo (Apr. 27. 10%) and a final paper weaving your insights and reflecting theologically on them (May 4 for graduating seniors. May 11 for others. 30%). (All five parts must be completed)**

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week One: Introduction to Multiple Perspectives and Methods of Understanding Congregations**

#### **Tuesday January 30**

Topics: Exploring our social location and subjectivity in a multicultural world seeking multicultural justice. Expanding what we see through multiple perspectives of understanding congregations. The complex character, content, and agency of congregational life. Congregational Studies/ Ethnography as both research tools and means of transformative ministry.

**Assigned Reading for Jan. 30:** Introduction and Chapter One of *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice*; Exploration of *Studying Congregations* website; Lecture notes posted in Moodle on Multiple Interpretive Frames, Parts 1 and 2.

### **Week Two: Foundational Perspectives in Congregational Studies/ Ethnographic Research**

#### **Tuesday February 6**

Topics: Ethnography and Ministry; finding and clarifying your questions; creating a research design to answer your question; the ethics of pastoral research; obtaining informed consent from congregation and from individuals. Appreciation of congregations as potential "Greenhouses of Hope." Discussion of student selected sites for case studies.

**Assigned Reading for Feb. 6:** *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, chapters 2-4. Introduction and Chapter One of *Greenhouses of Hope*

### **Week Three: Reading other written ethnographic narratives**

#### **Tuesday February 13**

Topics: Research Design of FTE Calling Congregations' Greenhouses of Hope. Discussion of ethnographic narrative in a particular context as a means of imaginative insight in your own different context.

**Assigned Reading for Feb. 13:** One selected chapter for group (groups of 3) discussion (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7).

Discussion of ideas for research plans (purpose, 1-2 questions, religious practice to explore, intellectual puzzles)

### **Week Four: Entering the Field to Observe and Listen to Stories**

**Tuesday February 20**

Topics: Observation and Listening in the field/ recording observations in field notes, inviting people to tell their stories.

**Assigned Reading for Feb. 20:** *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, chapters 5-6

**Letter of congregational consent on church letterhead and draft of individual consent form should be submitted to Instructor the week of Feb. 20**

### **Week Five: Congregational Conflict and Congregational Models**

**Tuesday February 27**

Topics: Culture and process frames for studying congregational conflict, core tasks of congregational models, congregational identity and mission, conflict issues.

**Assigned Reading for Feb. 27:** *Congregations in Conflict*, Chapters 1-4

Visit Montreat Collection of CTS library to learn from CTS archivist about researching local histories, congregational records, and artifacts. Archival document analysis; data analysis and interpretation.

### **Week Six: Conflict in Different Models and Implications for American Congregational Life**

**Tuesday March 6**

Topics: Continued discussion of congregational models, patterns of conflict, comparison of conflict in different models, implications for understanding American congregational religion

**Assigned Reading for Mar. 6:** *Congregations in Conflict* Chapters 5-9

**Field notes assignment of participation observation due (guideline figure 4, Moschella p. 122)**

### **Week Seven: Exam and Midterm Assessment Week**

**March 12-16—No Class**

**Assigned reading:** *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* Chapters 7-10

## **Week Eight: Ecological Frame for Understanding Congregational Transitions**

### **Tuesday March 20**

Topics: Ecological frame for understanding congregational transitions (how organizations adapt or fail to adapt to changes in their environment); urban restructuring and religious restructuring; religious ecologies; community transitions perceived through demographic changes, infrastructure changes, and cultural changes; congregations in transition and their responses. Discussion of data analysis.

**Assigned Reading for Mar. 20:** *A Particular Place*, Chapters 1-4

**Field notes of interview due March 23**

## **Week Nine: People Navigating Routines in Changing Communities**

### **Tuesday March 27**

Topics: Emergent logic for how people navigate spatially situated routines of belonging in changing environments; engaging in community fights

**Assigned reading for Mar. 27:** *A Particular Place*, Chapters 5-7

**Spring Break: April 2-6, No Class**

## **Week Ten: Ethnography as Practical Theology**

### **Tue. April 10**

**Topics:** Attention to the situational character of church life and its wounding on “marked bodies”; redefining “place”. Example of “pulling it all together” in the Analytic Memo and constructing the story.

**Assigned Reading for Apr 10:** *Places of Redemption, Part 1*

Posted: Tribble notes on “Analytic memo and coding;” Chapter “God Did it”: A Tale of a Male Pastor in a Transforming Traditional Church from Tribble, *Transformative Pastoral Leadership in the Black Church*

**Document/material artifact analysis due April 13**

## **Week Eleven: Congregational Practices in a Particular Place**

### **Tuesday April 17**

Topics: Methods of Analysis and Composing your Story

**Assigned Reading for Apr 17:** *Places of Redemption, Part II*

**Week Twelve:**

**Tuesday April 24**

Topic: Sharing the Results/ weaving a theological narrative

*Assigned reading for Apr. 24: Places of Redemption, Part III*

**Analytic memo due April 26**

**Week Thirteen: Final Things**

**Tuesday May 1 –Final Class**

Topic: The possibilities and limitations of Congregational Studies and Ethnographic Research as tools for transformative ministry

**Final Paper due May 4 for senior/graduating students**

**Week Fourteen:**

**Assessment and Exams Week: May 7-11 No Class**

**Final Paper Due May 11 (non-graduating seniors)**