

# Community Studies Signature Course

## Meadville Lombard Theological School

### Fall Semester 2009

#### Faculty:

- Dr. Mark Hicks—Angus MacLean Professor of Religious Education (mhicks@meadville.edu)
- Dr. Mike Hogue—Associate Professor of Theology (mhogue@meadville.edu)
- Rev. Dr. Qiyamah A. Rahman—Director of Contextual Ministry, Senior Lecturer (qrahman@meadville.edu)
- Dr. Sharon Welch—Provost, Professor of Religion and Society (swelch@meadville.edu)

“Ministerial formation is an ongoing process throughout the professional life cycle. The healthy practice of ministry is based on deep and regular reflection on our experiences in ministry” [Unitarian Universalist Ministry Association CENTER News 2008-09.1].

“Service-learning supports the possibility that a person’s original intentions of generosity can be married to intellectually sharpened, academically probed skills and insights so that practice becomes praxis and sentiment can become strategy...we are more likely to act ourselves into new ways of thinking than think ourselves into new ways of acting” [Paul Fitzgerald, “Doing Theology in the City,” *Cross Currents* (Spring 2001), p.89].

#### Course Description:

This course is *attuned* to the contextual nature of learning and ministry; *aligned* with the values of Unitarian Universalism and the mission of MLTS; *alert* to the strategic roles, tasks, and callings of liberal religious ministry; *aware* of the need for contemporary liberal religious ministers to partner with communities and resources outside of religious liberalism; and *attentive* to the complex cultural factors and dynamics that affect effective (mutually beneficial) community partnerships.

The overarching purpose of the seminar is to provide occasion for the reflective integration of students’ practical site experiences with theoretical learning. Student experiences in the field serve as this course’s primary texts, and these will be critically examined in light of an array of multidisciplinary, multimedia secondary texts.

Each semester of the seminar is designed to provide space and structure for (1) student *exploration of the tasks, challenges, and possibilities of community partnership within liberal religious ministry* and also for the (2) *negotiation of vocational identity, theological voice, and forms of religious community through reflection on the variety and range of human experiences in diverse social contexts* (religious and otherwise).

The fall semester will focus on exploring, analyzing, and sustaining community. The spring semester will focus on the meanings of religion and religious community, public theology, and vocation. In sum, the course is designed to encourage student development of a *critically reflexive hermeneutical praxis* (about which more will be said through the course) as the vital starting point for liberal theology and liberal religious ministry.

#### Pedagogical Framework:

It has been said that if you want to learn something new, you must do things differently. As diversity of thought, style, history, preference and values are at the heart of a UU-based ministry, we believe your learning should be

nested in such a reality. This course will therefore employ a variety of different strategies and methods, each designed to evoke new insights and ways of thinking/feeling and to lead you into experiences “outside your comfort zone.”

*It is likely that many of us, your instructors included, will experience varying degrees of cognitive and affective “disequilibrium.”* We look forward to this kind of experience (REALLY, WE DO!) not only as a challenge, but as an opportunity for growth and insight. The emphasis in this course is not primarily on the accumulation of *information* but the *formation* of ministerial disposition.

We will thus experiment and improvise and challenge and support one another throughout the course by drawing upon an integrative pedagogy for theological education and ministerial formation that addresses:

- the “knowing” dimension of learning (academic excellence and rigor, theological voice) through critical examination of multidisciplinary resources helpful to understanding the nature and tasks of contextual theology and ministry in a multicultural, pluralistic world;
- the “being” dimension of learners (ministerial formation, vocational identity, religious self-understanding) by nurturing student self-awareness as this emerges through collaboration with diverse cultures, service organizations, and faith perspectives and linking this to the ways we conceive, imagine, and embody our religious lives and vocations; and, finally,
- the “doing” dimension of learning (praxis) through exploration of approaches and resources for the wise, competent, and agile practice of leadership in ministry through community service partnerships.

## **Learning Objectives:**

This course will help students to:

- 1) articulate the challenges and possibilities of contextual liberal religious ministry;
- 2) gain an understanding of the complexities of contemporary social issues;
- 3) learn basic skills of social analysis;
- 4) identify, develop and internalize analytic, imaginative, and interpersonal skills useful for ministry in diverse congregational and social settings;
- 5) analyze strategies to mobilize liberal religionists and the broader world to respond to, participate in, and/or to lead creative change;
- 6) acquire a range of multicultural competencies;

## **Expectations and Evaluation:**

This course is a pass/fail course. Passing entails:

- Active participation in every aspect of the course and completion of all reading and writing assignments;
- Completion of the requisite number of on-site hours (exceptions must be negotiated with the Director of Contextual Ministries, Qiyamah Rahman);
- Engagement in ministerial formation as a mutual process, that is, showing a disposition to humility, charity, honesty and diligence, and a willingness to witness to and support the growing process of your peers;

- All other requirements as agreed upon with your Site-Supervisor and the Director of Contextual Ministries.

#### Note:

While our general disposition is to be flexible and respectful of the dynamics associated with “adult learning,” our accreditation as an institution of higher learning requires us to be strict in terms of workload and hours of participation. Therefore, failure to meet the basic requirements of the course – i.e., regular attendance in both small and large group formats, weekly site visits, and timely completion of assignments – will result in a failing grade. Note that this course is required for graduation from MLTS.

#### Distractions, absences, etc...:

We expect, from time to time, that life circumstances will complicate your participation in coursework. Our expectation is that you will be responsible and alert faculty or your Dialogue Partners of any shift in an agreed upon commitment. Should circumstances accumulate to a degree that you are not able to participate fully in the course, expect that faculty will engage you in a discussion about the appropriateness of continuing the course.

#### Statement Regarding Adaptation or Accommodation

Students experience learning challenges for a variety of reasons. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because you are differently abled, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. Likewise, see me if you encounter difficulty with the course or feel that you could be performing at a higher level, or have a learning style issue that provides a challenge. As an instructor, my obligation is to ensure that the work you encounter is relevant to your needs and accessible. Unless you come to see me about these or other related issues, I will assume your learning needs are being met.

### **Curricular Structure:**

#### Facilitation of seminars

Seminars will be co-planned and co-taught by members of the MLTS faculty. While all instructors may not attend each session, each has contributed to its content. Faculty will sometimes serve in the role of instructors, and at other times mentors, and at other times coaches. Adult learning is predicated on the mutual negotiation of aims and outcomes; we expect that you will be full-partners in this process.

#### Evaluation

We will ask you to evaluate all aspects of this seminar at regular intervals—through end of day evaluations and formal end-of-course evaluations at the end of both terms. This information will help us not only to fine-tune future sessions but also better to understand the nature and dynamics of this new process for ministerial formation.

#### Site Placement

Each student will work in a community service agency for a total of eight hours each week. Students will negotiate a “learning agreement” with Site Supervisors that encourages not only a wide range of growth and development, but also the expectations each has one for the other. *Please refer to the Community Studies Handbook for more detailed information about the philosophy and expectations of this aspect of the course.*

## Dialogical Triads, Meetings, Weekly Memos

Students will be assigned to work in Dialogical Triads (DTs) which will meet weekly over the phone at a time agreed upon by the triad. The composition of the groups will shift roughly every two months to provide opportunities to learn from and hear different perspectives. These partnerships are intended to be locations where you can make sense of the day-to-day experiences on your site, as well as a place for linking ideas from class discussions and other various texts.

Each meeting will have a work agenda, set by the faculty. Care should be taken to ensure that each member of your team has sufficient time to share his/her work and that the group can also engage in general discussion. Meetings should be informal in tone yet still aim to accomplish tasks and to provide mutual support for one another. As a learning community separated by distance, it is critically important to carve out intentional spaces that support collegial and intellectual relationships. At the outset of each DT meeting, one person should volunteer to serve as recorder / time-keeper and one person should keep conversation on topic. (NOTE: *This feature of the course contributes to accreditation requirements to satisfy a set number of "seat hours," so failure to participate regularly puts you in jeopardy of not meeting basic requirements of the MDiv degree.*)

At the close of each meeting, the team should write a joint "memo" that describes the major themes of your discussion, insights that were surfaced, and questions you'd like to explore. This memo should be e-mailed to the appropriate faculty by 5:00 pm each Wednesday. Assignments for these weekly meetings will be distributed in four-week blocks in order to allow sufficient planning.

## M(2)QS Rapsinar

Upon receipt of your weekly memo summarizing your discussion within your Dialogical Triad, one member of the faculty will read your joint memo and respond. Each of your memos will then be read by the rest of the faculty on Thursdays. The faculty – M(2)QS - will then videotape its informal response to your collective essays, noting patterns, insights, connections and disconnections. This response will then be uploaded to a private website for your viewing by Friday of the week.

## Saturday Cohort Discussions

One Saturday per month (2-4 p.m. Central Standard Time), the entire cohort will meet via telephone for discussions that revisit learning experiences and add layers of insight. These phone calls are required for all enrolled students. Each of these sessions will be rooted in texts and articles. At the close of both the Fall and Spring terms, students will share lessons learned during this time.

### Sample Weekly Flow

Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Begin & wrap-up assignment-of-the-week.  (Take a nap, do the laundry, etc...)		Meet with Dialogical Triad to discuss your assignment.	Write collaborative memo on what you learned and noticed in your assignment.	Memo posted to faculty by 5:00 today.	Faculty reads memos, responds on video, then posts video.  Begin next assignment.	View faculty posting (roughly 20 minutes).  Note questions, connections, and begin assignment for following week.

## Technology

As each of you has likely experienced, technology can be amazingly facilitative or a downright hindrance to getting work done. We fully expect both things to be true throughout the course. We have explored a variety of technological vehicles that enable us to form a healthy learning community, and have settled on two formats for our fall work.

The first is the old-fashioned telephone! *Your Dialogue Triad* will meet weekly over the phone. There are several free conferencing serves that will serve you well. (Google “free conference call” and make a choice.) *For our monthly Saturday seminars*, we will provide call-in #'s and passwords; look for the information on LiveText.

We will also use a cutting-edge e-portfolio software company, LiveText, which will house our course documents (assignments, resources, essays, forms and lists), and also provide a place for you to archive your individual work in this course. The seminary expects to expand the use of this tool in the coming year in order to support your long-term learning, even after graduation. You will learn more about the functions of LiveText during New Student Orientation. We chose this particular company because of its outstanding record for customer service. They also have on-line tutorials (with great visuals) to help you figure things out as you go along.

To contact LiveText Technical Support with any questions, email [support@livetext.com](mailto:support@livetext.com) or call 1-866-LiveText (1-866-548-3839).

LiveText Tech Support Hours:

Monday to Thursday - 7:00am to 9:00pm (CDT)

Friday - 7:00am to 6:00pm (CDT)

Sunday - 2:00pm to 7:00pm (CDT)

**Fall Calendar:** (\*\*NOTE: for the fall, you will need to purchase and read Alex Kotlowitz's book, *Never a City So Real* and Sharon Welch's, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk*, both available through Amazon or other book dealers; we will post other articles on LiveText; DUE TO THE PEDAGOGICALLY ORGANIC NATURE OF THIS COURSE, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS WILL VERY DEFINITELY BE ADDED AND SOMETIMES THEMES WILL BE CHANGED. WE HAVE DECIDED TO GIVE YOU BASIC INFORMATION BELOW, ENOUGH TO GO ON, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO GET AHEAD OF YOURSELVES).

### **September Theme: *Exploring Community***

Week of 9/7: Beauty Walk Exercises: Read Carol Lee Sanchez, "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral" (to be provided)

Saturday 9/12: Processing Beauty Walk

Week of 9/14: Mapping Coming of Age Community (pre-21yrs)

Week of 9/21: Chronological Mapping of National and Local Change, Rupture, Novelty

Week of 9/28: What is Change?

### **October Theme: *Analyzing Community***

Week of 10/5: Communities as Ecologies: Read Aldo Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain" (to be provided); and, for Saturday, Alex Kotlowitz, *Never a City So Real*

Saturday 10/10: Eco/Systemic (3<sup>rd</sup> person) and Biographical (1<sup>st</sup> person) Analyses of Community

Week of 10/12: 1<sup>st</sup> Person Site Reports (*a la* Kotlowitz)

Week of 10/19: READING WEEK: NO SEMINAR WORK

Week of 10/26: 3<sup>rd</sup> Person Site Reports (*a la* Leopold)

### **November Theme: *Agency in Community***

Week of 11/2: Critical Incident: Conflicting Agencies on Site

Week of 11/9: Critical Incident: Conflicting Agencies in Your Life

Saturday 11/14: Multicultural Agencies in Community: Read in advance, Elizabeth Minnich, Transforming Knowledge, CHAPTER IV (to be provided)

Week of 11/16: Watcher Watching the Watched: Towards Reflexive Hermeneutical Praxis

Week of 11/23: THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week of 11/30: Beyond Paralysis and Blindness

### **December Theme: *Sustaining Community***

Week of 12/7

Saturday 12/12: Discussion of Sharon Welch, *Feminist Ethic of Risk*, chs. 1-5

**JANUARY LEARNING CONVOCATION: January 6-8 (details to be provided).**

**SPRING SEMESTER: RELIGION, PUBLIC THEOLOGY and VOCATION:** Spring syllabus will be distributed during the January Learning Convocation.