

# Congregational Studies Signature Sequence

## - The Seminar -

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Meadville Lombard Theological School

September 2010 – May 2011

## Syllabus

### Faculty:

- Dr. Mark Hicks—Angus MacLean Professor of Religious Education ([mhicks@meadville.edu](mailto:mhicks@meadville.edu))
- Rev. Dr. Qiyamah A. Rahman—Director of Contextual Ministry, Senior Lecturer ([qrahman@meadville.edu](mailto:qrahman@meadville.edu))
- Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris, Affiliated Faculty ([ltakahashi@meadville.edu](mailto:ltakahashi@meadville.edu))
- Rev. Dr. John Tolley, Associate Professor of Ministry and the Arts ([jtolley@meadville.edu](mailto:jtolley@meadville.edu))

**Office Hours:** By appointment only

### Course Description

The Congregational Studies Year will provide a Student Minister with a unique experience to learn about ministry through the lens of real interaction with an actual congregation. Through structured observation, students will have opportunity to blend academic learning with structured reflection on a wide range of congregational life including preaching, pastoral care, religious education, administration and conflict engagement. Congregations will commit to the formation of a Congregational Lay Committee that will meet monthly with the Student Minister to supplement the work of the designated Teaching Pastor who commits to meet weekly with the Student Minister. In addition, Student Ministers will be reflecting with peers and faculty to gain other perspectives as well as supplementing the work with readings. At the end of the year, each Student Minister will chose an area of congregational life for further and deeper analysis during the Leadership Studies Year. The principles that underlie the weekly assignments assume:

- The major “text” of the course is the site itself;
- Readings and a diversity of media help interpret and analyze the myths and realities of the congregation;
- Self- and congregational analysis allows all parties to get beyond gut-level critique in order to minister effectively and holistically to individuals and groups;
- Religious work must be nested in relationships of loving accountability, integrity, curiosity, and willingness to work with human imperfections;
- Growing understandings of congregations as systems will be used to place observations in context and to begin to comprehend positive and effective ways of making change as a professional religious leader.

## Pedagogical Framework

### Facilitation of Weekly Seminars

Even though we are not physically present with each other on a weekly basis, faculty are guiding and monitoring your ministerial formation. Each week, seminars are 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. Through phone conversations, written feedback and digital podcasts, faculty will serve in the role of instructors, mentors, and coaches in your educational ventures. Because adult learning is predicated on the mutual negotiation of aims and outcomes, we expect that you will be full-partners in this process, letting us know how better to facilitate good learning on your part.

### Site Placement in UU Congregations

Each Student Minister will be assigned to a UU congregation near his/her residence, being in residence in the congregation for an average of 20 per week, from August 2010 through June 2010. Student Ministers will create a **Learning Service Agreement** (which is aligned with MFC expectations for internships) with the Teaching Pastor [See LiveText for the official form to be used]. Students will need to take into account the expectations of the Congregational Studies sequence faculty, personal learning goals, as well as special learning opportunities that will be made available through the normal rhythms of congregational life. The Student Minister must negotiate this contract, gaining final approval from the Director of Contextual Ministry and the Teaching Pastor. *The first iteration of this form must be completed and uploaded to the Congregational Studies Documents "course" in LiveText by October 1.*

### Dialogical Triads Meetings and 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 at strategic points during the course 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 that is 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 (1-2 pages). **This memo should be uploaded to LiveText by 5:00 pm each Thursday.** Assignments for these weekly meetings will be distributed, roughly, in four-week blocks in order to allow sufficient planning.

### Faculty Jam’inar

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 Mondays. The faculty (John, Leslie, Mark & Qiyamah) 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 (**10 am-noon, 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. **Please see Course Overview for dates of Saturday Seminars.**

### Teaching Pastors

The congregation’s minister is considered a “Teaching Pastor” whose purpose is to be a supervisor, mentor, coach, translator, confidant and model for how to be effective in Unitarian Universalist ministry. The Teaching Pastor and Student Minister are expected to meet weekly for approximately one hour. As a supervisor, the Teaching Pastor should help the Student Minister design a schedule of activity that gives insights into diverse roles and expectations of ministry. As a coach, the Teaching Pastor should help the Student learn to navigate the interpersonal and group dynamics of congregational life. As a translator, the Teaching Pastor should help the Student Minister learn to listen to and articulate values, mystified assumptions, and other factors that impede effective communication. As a confidant, the Teaching Pastor ministers to the awakenings and growing edges the Student Minister presents. And, as role model, the Teaching Pastor models how to preach, lead worship, educate, and generally live into the diverse, and often competing roles a minister must play.

At the outset of each semester, Teaching Pastors will receive a sketch of the seminar topics that will guide student learning in the seminar so as to be informed of the trajectory of his/her student’s learning. Teaching Pastors are also eligible to enroll in one MLTS course per year free of charge.

### The Congregational Lay Committee

**By November 1,** the Teaching Pastor and Student should have identified and selected a group of five members from the congregation/community who will serve as an advisory council for the Student Minister (faculty will coach you through this process). This group should mirror the

diversity of the congregation along the lines such as race/ethnicity, age, theological diversity, class, sexual orientation and, (strongly encouraged!) the community in which the congregation is located. The Lay Committee should plan to meet with the Student Minister once per month to check-in on the Student’s experience, celebrate achievements, identify areas of growth, and provide insight into congregational systems, values, and practices. The Lay Committee is expected to evaluate the Student Minister at two points during the year.

Sample Weekly Flow

Saturday	Sunday	Mon	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday <b>(Day 1)</b>	Friday
3. Work in congregation	4. Work in congregation		5. Meet with Dialogue Triad to discuss your assignment.	6. Write collaborative memo on what you learned and noticed in your assignment.	7. Memo posted to faculty by 5:00 today.  Faculty read your memo over the weekend, and post personal responses, and publish a Jaminar on Monday.  <b>1. Start assignment.</b> Note questions, connections, and begin assignment for following week.	2. Use your weekend time in the congregation to notice, take notes, check your assumptions and observations.

**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 three formats for our work in Congregational Studies:

*Conference Calls:* A primary tool we will use 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 numbers and passwords; look for the information on LiveText ([www.livetext.com](http://www.livetext.com)).

*e-portfolio:* 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.

*Webinar:* have also added into our mix the use of “webinar” software. Webinars provide you with an opportunity to literally share your desk/laptop computer screens with a multiple users at the same time. This software will be a useful support for your weekly Dialogue Triad meetings for sharing videos, digital images, etc. with peers. Imagine that you’ve preached a sermon or did a

Powerpoint show of images from your congregation. A webinar allows you to run your presentation –using your preferred software on your computer – and all your users need to do is to log into the Webinar site and view your presentation. The audio portion of the Webinar is the same conference call provider you use for your weekly phone calls. The Webinar service we have selected is “dimdim.com”. The service is FREE for users who are connecting with fewer than FIVE people in a single session. Go online, create your own account, and begin using it today! We will exhibit the software during the September Learning Convocation, and will also be using this software for our Saturday Seminars, and especially for presentations of learning to faculty and peers.

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)

### **Community Building in a Distance Learning World**

In a traditional classroom, there are many opportunities for students and faculty to exchange feedback on the quality of the learning experience. In a distance-learning world where visual cues and time limitations lead to disconnections, we must be intentional about how we ensure that learning is happening in useful and effective ways. We hope these measures provide ample space for feedback and learning improvement:

*Weekly Memos:* During the course of your weekly Dialogue Triad meetings, if you have a concern, check it out with your teammates and see if you can find a solution. If that is not possible, add a short paragraph to your team’s memo to the faculty, and we’ll provide a response for your particular issue, or if it is a system-wide problem, we’ll take a response to that level.

*Special Requests/Needs:* The Teaching Team meets every Monday to review student work, plan upcoming seminars, and respond to student concerns and issues. In order to avoid issues of triangulation and also provide consistent responses to all students, we ask that students contact the Teaching Team Leader for the team, who will respond to your request directly, or refer your request to the teaching team at its next meeting.

*Special Needs Adaptations:* Student Ministers who require learning style adaptations or accommodations because of issues of physical conditions or mental affect should contact the faculty immediately upon enrollment. We will make every reasonable effort to adapt assignments to ensure coursework you is relevant and accessible. Unless you negotiate inadequate conditions, we will assume your learning needs are being met. Note that MLTS Chaplain David Owen-O’Quill is available in the Student Services Office ([dowen-oquill@meadville.edu](mailto:dowen-oquill@meadville.edu), or at 773-256-3000, x238) for spiritual and pastoral support.

### 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.

### **Assessment & Evaluation Frameworks**

Building upon the Community Studies approach, we draw 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.

### Classroom-Based Assessment

*Meadville Learnings:* We will ask you to evaluate all aspects of this seminar at regular intervals—formal course evaluations, Dialogue Team evaluations, and self-assessments. This information will help us not only to fine-tune future sessions but also to better understand the nature and dynamics of this new process for ministerial formation. These evaluations will be posted in dedicated places within LiveText.

*Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) Mid-Point Internship Evaluation:* The MFC requires students to complete an evaluation of the internship experience at the half-way point. Since yours is a two-year integrated internship, the MFC translates your work as a part-time internship. As such, you will complete a mid-point evaluation at the close of this Congregational Studies year.

### Grades/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 and faculty);
- 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 Teaching Pastor, Director of Contextual Ministries, and course faculty.

While our general disposition is to be flexible and respectful of the dynamics associated with “adult learning,” our accreditation as an institution of higher education 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.

### Congregation-Based Assessment

*Teaching Pastors* will assess your ministerial formation and site-performance in December and May. Both the Teaching Pastor and Student Minister will review the assessment (which includes certification of an average of 20 hours per week on site), and submit the final evaluation to the appropriate “assignment” in Congregational Studies Document course. Please refer to the Congregational Studies Documents for the assessment form.

*Congregational Lay Committee* will also submit an assessment of the Student Minister in December and June. Students will be assessed on their participation in congregational life using the criteria outlined in the MFC Midpoint Assessment Form. Given the half-time nature of the internship, special attention will be given to issues of personal effectiveness, preaching, ministerial presence and authority, effective communication, and ability to navigate the contours of congregational life.

### **Learning Objectives for Congregational Studies**

Student Minister will begin and/or deepen their lived competency in (not listed by priority):

- Administration and management
- Building effective relationships with congregations, members and leadership
- Congregational governance and administration
- Family, organizational systems and cultural change
- Interfaith ministry
- Ministerial presence and authority
- Multi-racial, multicultural congregational theory and practices
- Pastoral care and counseling
- Preaching fundamentals
- Professional ethics/ UUMA Guidelines
- Religious education theory and practice
- Sexual health, sexual boundaries, sexual justice
- Worship and aesthetics

### **Overview of Assignments**

September 9	Reading Reflection on Multicultural Congregations
September 16	Reading Reflection on System Analysis
September 18	<b>SATURDAY SEMINAR:</b> Congregational Size Dynamics (10:00 -Noon CST)
September 23	Congregational Identity
September 30	Re-visit preaching from Convocation; Set preaching goals

October 7	Congregational Analysis of Pastoral Care Culture and Styles* <b>Draft of Learning and Serving Agreement Due</b>
October 9	SATURDAY SEMINAR: Analysis of Pastoral Care Systems (10am - Noon pm CST)
October 13	Congregation as a Learning Community
October 28	Analysis on Worship, Aesthetics* (READING WEEK Oct 18-22)
November 4	Congregational Analysis on Border-Crossing*,**
November 11	Congregational Analysis on Ministerial Authority*
November 13	SATURDAY SEMINAR: Conflict Engagement and Transformation (10-Noon- CST)
November 18	Congregational Analysis of Family Systems*
November 25	OFF for Thanksgiving Holiday
December 2	Self-Reflection on Ministerial Authority **
December 9	Semester Summation Assignment
December 11	SATURDAY SEMINAR: Mid-Year Reflections
January 5-7	JANUARY LEARNING CONVOCATION (Jan
February 3	Reflection on self-learning
February 10	Congregational Analysis on Leadership Styles*
February 17	Congregational Power Analysis**
February 19	SATURDAY SEMINAR: Preliminary Discussion of Final Project
February 24	Preaching Assignment # 2 on Theological Diversity
February 28-March 5	READING WEEK
March 3	Congregational Analysis of Inter-faith Relationships
March 10	Congregational Analysis of Staffing *
March 17	Congregational Analysis on Available Technology
March 19	SATURDAY SEMINAR: Building Community
March 24	Congregational Analysis on Building Multicultural Community**
March 28-April 1	SPRING BREAK
April 7	Reading Reflection on Ministerial Misconduct
April 14	Preaching Assignment # 3: Preaching as Religious Education

April 16	SATURDAY SEMINAR: MFC Mid-Year and Congregational Analysis
April 21	Congregational Analysis on Congregation Policies and Procedures
April 28	Writing Assignment on Congregational Assessment
	<b>Present Leadership Project Proposal (random dates)</b>
May 5	Reflection on Presentation to Lay Committee and Teaching Pastor*,**
May 7	<b>FINAL SATURDAY SEMINAR:</b> Leadership Proposals

\*Requires interview with minister

\*\*Requires interview with lay committee

### **Final Project**

The final project of the year (due in May 2011) will be a summation of the analysis that you have done for the entire year. Student Ministers will make an assessment about an area that they would address if they had the freedom to do it in the Leadership Year. Student Ministers will think about the political realities of the congregation and their own skills and attributes, and make an assessment around what would make the most difference and what is most feasible. Student Ministers will present their thoughts to the Congregational Lay Committee, Teaching Pastor and, through digital recording, the Congregational Studies faculty. The Student Minister will synthesize the learnings from the presentation, and during the summer months prior to the Leadership Studies sequence, begin thinking through how to launch this project at the outset of the Leadership Studies year.

### **Readings/Texts**

Adams, James Luther. (1976). On being Human Religiously: Selected essays in religion and society (Max Stackhouse, Ed).

DeYoung, Chris. et al. (2003). United by faith: The multiracial congregation as an answer to the problem of race (Oxford University Press: New York)

Northcutt, Kay. (2009). Kindling Desire for God: Preaching as Spiritual Direction. Fortress Press: Minneapolis)

Bordas, Juanda (2007). Soul, Salsa and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age (Berrett-Koehler: San Francisco)

Steinke, Peter (1996). Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach. (Alban Institute: New York)

Takahashi Morris, L. et al (2010). The Arc of the Universe Is Long: Unitarian Universalists, Anti-Racism and the Journey from Calgary (Skinner House: Boston)

UUMA (2010). Unitarian Universalist Minister's Association Code of Professional Conduct/Guideline [<http://www.uuma.org/?page=guidelines>]