

**Hearing the Faithful:  
Discerning Our Theologies of Ministry through  
Paying Attention to Others**

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**T**his syllabus, designed by David Mellott for students at Lancaster Theological Seminary, is included here as a resource for those interested in the pedagogical issues involved in introducing theology students to ethnographic practices.

***Course Overview & Outcomes***

Is there anything we—theologians and pastoral ministers—can learn by asking our Christian companions about their everyday lives, about what they consider to be their spiritual practices, and about the ways in which they understand and interpret those practices in the midst of their contexts? Yes, there is much of considerable importance we can learn from studying the lived experience of practicing Christians. In fact, this course proposes that asking our Christian companions about what they consider to be their spiritual practices and about the ways in which they understand and interpret those practices in their context is a *theological act*.

When we theologians and pastoral ministers enter into a conversation with other members of our denomination and share the details of our daily lives and the ways in which we have experienced God, something more than “knowledge retrieval” is happening. This is most striking when the people we are inviting to the conversation have been asked by the denomination to keep silent about the very ways in which they have experienced the grace of God. We are creating a space together, charged with, in the words of Robert Orsi, “. . .an attitude of disciplined openness and at-

tentiveness....” Here, the theologian or pastoral minister sets aside the hierarchical constructs that so often govern the relationships between pastor and parishioner; clergy and layperson; theologian and average Christian. The point of the conversation is not to evaluate the extent to which the practitioners are doing what they should be doing or the extent to which they have become the people they are supposed to become. The point is to create a context where the reality of their lives and ours can emerge, without the threat of condemnation and obliteration. When this happens, lives and relationships are transformed. This is a theological act.

The year-long seminar supports five explicit learning outcomes, which are rooted in the proposition outlined above. Upon completion of this year, I expect each student to be able,

- To practice pastoral visits, interviews, and life stories as methodologies for becoming more aware of the spiritual lives of others;
- To create interview protocols and to distinguish between what a researcher wants to know and what kind of questions the researcher needs to ask;
- To generate research questions rooted in conversations with their informants and observations of the material context of their informants;
- To articulate the connections between their own practice of ministry and their espoused theology of ministry;
- To identify more clearly their implied theology of ministry and its implications for the theology and ministry of the church.

During the *Fall semester*, seminar participants will engage in the practice of making pastoral visits and performing interviews. In our seminar meetings we will design together the protocols and documentation we will need for these activities. We will utilize several texts and resources in the creation of our research protocols.

During the *Spring semester*, seminar participants will engage in the practice of collecting life histories, performing follow-up interviews, and analyzing the results. In our seminar meetings we will spend time designing some of the questions for the interview protocols. Students will be expected to utilize their experience in the seminar in the creation of the interview protocols and research plans.

**NOTE:** In order to protect the privacy of those you are visiting and interviewing, please use pseudonyms for all informants.

Seminar participants will then study the data gathered through their research and consider what implications, if any, the data has for their theologies of ministry. In addition, students will be asked to consider the extent to which the seminar results could help them in conceiving their final Doctor of Ministry project.

## ***Assessment***

This course will be taught pass/fail. You will receive regular feedback from me on your written work and class participation.

***Out of respect to the other members of the seminar and to yourselves, all participants are asked to turn off (that includes vibration) all cell phones and PDAs during class time.***

## ***Main Assignments***

### Readings

You will be asked to read assigned texts for most weeks and to prepare for a critical discussion of the texts in class. Participants are asked to write a one-page response for each reading assignment. The intention is not to summarize the text, but to raise critical questions about the content and structure of text, which we hope will stimulate conversation.

### Pastoral Visits

You will make 5 pastoral visits to members of your congregation. The structure for those visits will be created together in class. You will provide brief summaries of each visit. In addition you will record field notes and personal notes on each experience. You will share portions of these notes with your colleagues. More details will be provided as we develop the assignment together.

### Interviews

From among the 5 pastoral visits, you will select 2 people for a more in-depth interview. The interview must be recorded and should last no less than 55 minutes and no longer than 70 minutes. You are not required to make a transcription of the interview, but you will make a report to the group about what you learned from the interviews.

### Individual Life Stories

In the Fall Semester, you will be asked to collect life stories from a person in your congregation. You are to record the life stories. Candidates for this may emerge from the pastoral visits, but they need not do so.

In the Spring semester you will collect two more life histories. You will also transcribe those results.

### Follow-up Interview

You will select one of your life stories participants for a follow-up interview. You will be asked to do one follow-up interview with that person. The interview must be

recorded and should last no less than 60 minutes and no longer than 120 minutes. The interview is to be transcribed and shared with your seminar colleagues.

All interviews must utilize an interview protocol. We will spend some time in class crafting questions that can be used for your interview protocol.

#### Final Life Story Project

The completed interview project is to include:

- the transcript of the life stories of one person,
- the protocol of the follow-up interview,
- the transcript of the follow-up interview,
- an analysis of both life stories and the follow-up interview.

The analysis should be approximately 6-7 pages (1600-1800 words) in length. The analysis should cover both the content and the research methodology. The analysis should also include some commentary on how performing interviews with church members could play a role in the ministry of the church. More guidance for creating the analysis will be given in class.

#### Exploration of Ideas for Doctor of Ministry Final Project

During the last quarter of the Spring semester, participants will review and explore a variety of models for their final project. As our guide, we will use the questions that are required to be addressed in The Project Proposal. We will also supplement that list of questions, based upon what participants have learned from the seminar.

### ***Moodle***

I have set up a Moodle classroom for our work together. The syllabus will be posted there. In addition to class assignments, seminar participants are welcome to use the on-line classroom as a venue for sharing information about ministry.

In addition, all work to be shared by seminar participants should be uploaded to the Moodle site. Please be sure to pay attention to the deadlines so that your colleagues will have time to read your work in advance of the class sessions.

Because the class will be larger than our typical doctoral seminar, participants will be divided into small groups. The members of the small groups will be responsible for reading and responding to the works posted in their group.

**Required and Suggested Texts**

Bender, Courtney. *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Isay, Dave, ed. *Listening Is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the Storycorps Project*. New York: Penguin Press, 2007.

Lawless, Elaine J. *Handmaidens of the Lord: Pentecostal Women Preachers and Traditional Religion*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

McClintock Fulkerson, Mary. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Mellott, David M. *I Was and Am Dust*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009.

Orsi, Robert A. "Have You Ever Prayed to Saint Jude?": Reflections on Fieldwork in Catholic Chicago." In *Reimagining Denominationalism: Interpretive Essays*, edited by Robert Bruce Mullin and Russell E. Richey. New York: Oxford University Press 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

**Suggested Text**

McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

*Studying Local Churches: A Handbook*, edited by Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies, and Frances Ward. London: SCM Press, 2005.

**Required Resources**

Some of the assignments require voice recording and the making of transcriptions. Digital recorders are the most practical. When purchasing a digital recorder, make sure the device allows

you to rewind and fast forward to specific spots. Some devices will only allow you to return to the beginning of the recording. Another helpful feature is the ability to download your recording onto your computer.

Two models worth considering: the Olympus WS-210S (\$60) or the Olympus WS-331M (\$115). For more information, see: <http://www.consumersearch.com/digital-voice-recorders>

Fall Semester Schedule		
Session	Date	Session Information
1	September 24	<p>Introductions Opening Conversation about the Syllabus</p> <p>11:00 am Convocation Lecture Charles Foster “Theological Education at the Edge of History”</p>
2	September 1	<p>Theology of Ministry Exercise</p> <p>Designing Pastoral Visits</p> <p><i>Listening as an Act of Love</i></p>
3	October 8	<p>Designing Pastoral Visits</p> <p><i>Listening as an Act of Love</i></p>
4	October 15	No class meeting. Time for pastoral visitation.
5	October 22	<p>Check-in on pastoral visitation work.</p> <p>Discussion of <i>Handmaidens of the Lord</i>, chapters 1 and 2.</p> <p>11:00 am Ward Lecture Carol Lakey Hess, “Fiction is Truth: Novels as a Source for (Paradoxical) Theology”</p>
6	October 29	<p>Summary reports on pastoral visits due. Readings from your field and personal notes. What did you learn from the pastoral visits that can be applied to the interview process?</p> <p>Crafting an Interview---working together.</p> <p>Continue discussion of <i>Handmaidens of the Lord</i>.</p>
7	November 5	<p>Crafting a protocol for collecting life stories.</p> <p>Advising for Registration</p>

8	November 12	<p>Summary reports on interviews due.                      Readings from your field and personal notes.                      What did you learn from the interviews that can be applied to the collection of life stories?</p> <p><i>Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography</i>, 1-200.</p>
9	November 19	<p>Complete discussion of: <i>Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography</i>.</p> <p>11:00 am LGBT Lecture                      Kathryn Tanner “Unnatural Associations: Christianity as an Experiment in Human Community.”</p>
	November 26	<p>No Class                      Thanksgiving Day</p>
10	December 3	<p>No Class --- time for collecting the life stories and preparing the transcript.</p>
11	December 10	<p>Discussion of: <i>I Was and I Am Dust: Ethnography as Theology</i>.                      Check-in on life stories</p>
12	December 17	<p>Presentation of and conversation on the life stories results. Transcript due on 12 December to colleagues.</p> <p>Lunch together                      Feedback opportunity</p> <p>Review of Spring Semester</p>



<b>Spring Semester Schedule</b>		
Session	Date	Session Information
1	February 11	Opening Conversation  11:00 AM Gregory Lecture Michael Kinnamin "One Hundred Years Since Edinburgh: What Have We Learned Together about Mission?"  Theology of Ministry Exercise  <i>Thank You St. Jude</i> , pp. ix-118
2	February 18	<i>Thank You St. Jude</i> , pp. 119-211.  Transcription of Life Stories Two ---discussion Transcription due to colleagues by 13 February.
3	February 25	No Class  Transcription due to colleagues.
4	March 4	"Have You Ever Prayed to Saint Jude?": Reflections on Fieldwork in Catholic Chicago." ---library.  Analysis of one collection of life stories and implications for ministry due.
5	March 11	<i>Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver</i> pp. vii-89.  Preparing Interview protocols. Please bring in writing ideas for follow-up questions.  Interviewee must be selected by this date.
6	March 18	<i>Doctor of Ministry Symposium Day</i> <i>Hafer Center</i> Required for all Doctor of Ministry students. Please note that the hours for the symposium may be different from our class time.
7	March 25	Advising session for Fall '10 Registration  <i>Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver</i> pp. 90-151.

<b>Spring Semester Schedule</b>		
	April 1	No Class Holy Week and Reading Week
8	April 8	No Class Work on follow-up interview and transcription.
9	April 15	<i>Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church</i> , pp. 3-192.  Your congregation as a place of redemption discussion.  Interview transcripts due to colleagues.
10	April 22	<i>Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church</i> , pp. 195-254.  Final Life Story Project Due  Discussion of how a pastoral visit, life stories, and interview work together as research methods.
11	April 29	Doctor of Ministry Final Project Exploration --review of required questions --review of possible research models Reading: TBA
12	May 6	Doctor of Ministry Final Project Exploration --mapping of different projects --sharing of your ideas and options—brought to class --how could you imagine combining different methods? Readings: TBA  Final Evaluations Lunch together

DSEM  
Spring 2010  
Life Stories Projects

**General Steps**

1. Collect collections of life stories from 3 people.
2. Post collections on Moodle site.
3. Write an analysis of ONE collection of life stories.
4. Perform one follow-up interview with the person whose life stories you analyzed.
5. Write an analysis of the results of the follow-up interview.
6. Submit a hard-copy of all documents to the professor for comment.

**Details**

1. Collect collections of life stories from 3 people. Record each collection. Transcribe each collection
2. Post collections on Moodle site under the Life Stories Section. Be sure to label accordingly, #1, #2, and #3. You should now be able to post multiple times under each section.
3. Write an analysis of ONE collection of life stories. Post on Moodle and make one hard copy for professor. In the analysis address the following points:
  - a. What does this person value, based upon their stories?
  - b. What questions do their values raise for you?
  - c. What theological questions were raised or explored in their life stories?
  - d. To what extent did the person share how their stories shaped them? Be specific with examples.
  - e. What questions would you like to ask in the follow-up interview?
4. Perform one follow-up interview with the person whose life stories you analyzed.
5. Write an analysis of the results of the follow-up interview. Also write a concluding statement to the research done in the collection of life stories.
  - a. In the analysis be sure to address:
    - i. How did the person respond to seeing or reading the transcription of the collection of life stories?
    - ii. To what extent did they want to add or edit what they had said? What did their additions or change suggest to you?
    - iii. Did the values communicated by the person change in the follow-up interview?
    - iv. To what extent were theological themes explored or addressed in the follow-up interview?
  - b. In the concluding statement, please address:
    - i. To what extent does interviewing differ from collecting life stories? How do you see each method being beneficial?
    - ii. What are the weaknesses of using life stories for research?
    - iii. What topics or themes could you imagine researching through the collection of life stories?
    - iv. In what ways could you imagine life stories collection working in a congregational context?
6. Draw all documents (collection of the life stories of that ONE person, both analyses, and the concluding statement and submit to professor in hard copy.