

Wesley Theological Seminary Course of Study School
March 1 – April 11, 2024 (asynchronous)
April 12-13, 2024 via Zoom

Syllabus *(updated 5Feb24)*

424 Ethics

Instructor: Gary MacDonald

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Course Description

This course introduces the biblical and theological bases for Christian behavior, emphasizing the pastoral skills needed for moral leadership in the congregation and community.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course the student will be able to:

1. Articulate a biblical and theological basis for ethical thinking and moral behavior, and distinguish major approaches to ethical reasoning.
2. Comprehend the relationship between their personal stories, pastoral vocation, local contexts, and responsibility as moral leaders.
3. Develop a Christian framework for moral reason and action, and apply it to the use of power and the setting of boundaries in ministry.
4. Demonstrate familiarity with and make use of the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church as a resource for ethical reflection and action

Textbooks

Birch, Bruce C., Jacqueline E. Lapsley, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, and Larry L. Rasmussen. *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life: A New Conversation. Third Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018. (ISBN: 978-0800697617)

Lovin, Robin W. *An Introduction to Christian Ethics: Goals, Duties, and Virtues*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2011. (ISBN: 978-0687467365)

Stephens, Darryl W. and Patricia Beattie Jung, eds. *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013. (ISBN: 978-0800699437)

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church: 2016. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016. (ISBN: 978-1501833243).

Advance Daily Christian Advocate (2024), Vol 2, Sec. 1

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/Website/Properties/general-conference/2020/documents/ADCA-English-Vol-2-Sec-1.pdf>

(Additional material may be posted on the Blackboard platform.)

Video Lectures

Video lectures will be posted on Mondays for students' access on the following schedule:

March 4 – The Search for the Good Life

March 11 – Goals, Rules and Virtue

March 18 – Sources of Ethics

March 25 – United Methodist Social Thought

Assignment Instructions

Students are to read all required texts before doing assignments. Please pay attention to the due dates for all assignments. Instructions on posting to Blackboard are on the COS webpage. If you run into trouble, please contact edtech@wesleyseminary.edu and they will help you. If you are new to Course of Study at Wesley, please be sure to check Blackboard once you receive your logon information from the IT department. Some faculty will use Blackboard heavily and some will not, but it is up to you as the student to check and see what is posted.

All synchronous class sessions will be conducted via Zoom.us (connection information below).

Technical Requirements

Microsoft Windows

- Windows 8 or 10
- Intel Core i5 or higher or AMD equivalent
- At least 16GB of free storage space

Mac OS/X

- OS/XMac OS X 10.14 or newer
- Intel processor and at least 4 GB of RAM

All Systems

- Up-to-date browser: Firefox, Chrome, Safari, Edge
- Up-to-date PDF reader
- Up-to-date version of Adobe Flash Player
- Up-to-date video player
- Up-to-date Word processor and presentation package (Wesley Theological Seminary offers free Office 365 Basic for students)
- High speed internet connection

Other Required Materials: Students should all have a web cam and microphone. US/wireless headset and microphone are ideal.

Written Assignments

Birch/Lovin Reflection	Friday, March 15 @ 11 p.m.
Topic Statement	Wednesday, March 27 @ 11 p.m.
Sexual Ethics Reflection	Wednesday, April 3 @ 11 p.m.
Ethics Research Paper	Sunday, April 14 @ 11 p.m.

Birch/Lovin Reflection

Read the Birch et al. and Lovin texts in their entirety and prepare a paper responding to the five questions below, drawing particularly from your understanding of the readings, the video lectures, and your own experience. It is expected that each answer be 500-600 words long, about two pages each, for a total of approximately 10 pages. Please number your answers and format papers with one-inch margins, double-spaced, using 12-point type with a font such as Times New Roman. Include your name, the class name and date in your heading. Papers are submitted through Blackboard online learning platform under the *Assignments* tab. This assignment is due on **Friday, March 15**.

1. Summarize Birch et al.'s understanding of the authority of the Bible for Christian ethical formation and discernment.
2. What is the place of "social sin" in moral formation, according to Birch et al.?
3. Define "Christian stance" and compare and contrast two of its variations, as presented by Lovin.
4. Summarize one of the primary ways of moral reasoning discussed by Lovin – deontology, teleology or virtue ethics – including the thought of at least one of its prominent theorists, and, from your experience, provide one example of how the theory has influenced Christian practice.
5. Choose a moral dilemma that has presented in your ministry past or present (you are invited to change names as appropriate). What specific insights from these texts are helpful in discerning how you as a Christian leader might respond? What challenges do the texts illuminate?

Research Paper

Topic Statement Due: Wednesday, **March 27** @ 11 p.m.

Paper Due: Sunday, **April 14** @ 11 p.m.

Class Presentations to be scheduled Saturday, **April 13**

The Research Paper is an opportunity for you to engage in a depth examination of a practical moral issue addressed within the United Methodist Social Principles and to provide a constructive response from a Christian perspective. It is recommended that you

choose a topic that has a level of moral ambiguity in your initial assessment, however you are free to choose a topic that reflects your practical interests in ministry, or one that relates to a particular moral or theological problem of interest to you. The paper will be evaluated primarily on the clarity of the writing and the quality of the thinking evident in your analysis and arguments. The paper should also give evidence of reading in sources (beyond Wikipedia) related to your topic, in addition to the required reading for the course. The paper should be no less than eight and no more than 10 pages in length (approximately 2750 words). The paper is due by 11 p.m. on **Sunday, April 14**.

Students will provide the instructor a one-paragraph summary of the topic to be addressed by 11 p.m. on **Wednesday, March 27**. The summary should include a one-sentence statement of the question to be addressed; an indication of the social category as defined by the Social Principles to which the question pertains (The Natural World, The Nurturing Community ...), and at least two sources that the student will utilize beyond the course materials. The instructor will approve or suggest revisions with a goal of having all topics finalized by Friday, March 29. Students will post topic statements on the respective Discussion Board the week of April 1.

Based on the topics selected, a schedule of class presentations will be developed for April 13. Guidelines for these presentations will be provided students following the finalization of topics.

You will want, in your paper, to provide a clear statement of the question you are working to answer, along with an analysis of the question, identifying inherently the key elements calling for ethical investigation, analyzing these with the help of your course materials and research. Identify the sources for ethics on which you rely and how these sources operate, and then draw on these sources for your own ethical analysis. Analyze how the various approaches to ethics you have read about have any bearing on the issue. In addition, ensure that you consider both your own viewpoint and possible alternative or contrary viewpoints from an ethical and theological perspective. Ensure that you give reasons for the position at which you arrive; do not simply state your position and assume the reasons behind it are obvious. Finally, make sure that you properly cite references, using footnotes or endnotes. A bibliography of all sources consulted, regardless of whether you quote from them or not, should also be included.

Examples of Research Topics:

The Natural World

- How should Christians respond to a proposal to ban the practice of fracking?
- Who should receive preferential treatment, if any, when the flourishing of an endangered species conflicts with business or agricultural interests?

The Nurturing Community

- Should a divorce be relevant to the ordination or appointment of a United Methodist pastor?

- Is abortion ever morally justified? If so, under what circumstances, and if not, why not?

The Social Community

- What is the responsibility of the church in addressing white supremacy in American culture?
- Should the government mandate universal access to health care?

The Economic Community

- Should a state government or sovereign tribal nation sanction or sponsor gambling?
- Should the state mandate a minimum wage that employers must pay and, if so, how should the rate be set?

The Political Community

- Under what circumstances, if any, is capital punishment morally justifiable?
- Should public and organized prayer be allowed in public schools and under what circumstances?

The World Community

- When, if ever, is it morally justifiable for a nation to go to war?
- What responsibility does the United States have for addressing human rights issues within other sovereign nations?

Reflection on Sexual Ethics

Due Wednesday, **April 3 @ 11 p.m.**

Read in *Professional Sexual Ethics* the Introduction and at least two of the essays from each of the four parts of the text (Ethical Landscape of Ministry, Sources of Wisdom, Practices of Ministry, Pastoral Leadership). Write a paper of no less than two and no more than three pages (550 to 825 words). List the essays that you have read and comment on what elements you found particularly instructive for your pastoral vocation. From an essay of your choosing, select and respond to one of the discussion questions from the end of the chapter.

Discussion Boards

During the course, students will be asked to respond to a question or topic within a discussion forum on Blackboard. Students are asked to make an post and to respond to at least one colleague according to the schedule below.

Opening Date	Initial Post Due	Response Due
Friday, March 1	Monday, March 4 @ 5 pm	Wed., March 6 @ 5 pm
Friday, March 8,	Monday, March 11 @ 5 pm	Wed., March 13 @ 5 pm
Friday, March 22	Monday, March 25 @ 5 pm	Wed., March 27 @ 5 pm
Monday, April 1	Wednesday, April 3 @ 5 pm	Friday, April 5 @ 5 pm

Discussion Board One Due Monday, **March 4**

In the Discussion Board introduce yourself to your colleagues in one paragraph of no more than 200 words. In your introduction, briefly describe your ministry; introduce your family, if you desire; and present one or two core questions you bring to this course. Post your initial comments by 5 p.m. on Friday, March 3. Post responses to colleagues' posts by 5 p.m. on Monday, March 6.

Discussion Board Two Due Monday, **March 11**

In the Discussion Board comment on your initial reflections on the Birch and Lovin texts with a one paragraph response of no more than 150 words each. Post your initial comments by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 8. Post responses to colleagues' posts by 5 p.m. on Friday, March 10.

Discussion Board Three Due Monday, **March 25**

Read in *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*:

- The Contents and User's Guide (pages 7-34)
- Social Creed (pages 35-36)
- The Social Principles, including:
 - Preface and Preamble (pages 37-38)
 - The Natural World (pages 39-42)
 - The Nurturing Community (pages 83-92)
 - The Social Community (pages 133-146)
 - The Economic Community (pages 409-416)
 - The Political Community (pages 471-476)

- The World Community (pages 513-516)

In addition, within each section of the Social Principles, read at least two of the Resolutions pertaining to each category and at least two of the Resolutions listed under “X. Other Resolutions,” for a total of at least 14 resolutions.

Review in the *Advance Daily Christian Advocate (2024), Vol 2, Sec. 1*
(Available at www.resourceumc.org, pdf copy at https://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/general-conference/2020/documents/ADCA-English-Vol-2-Sec-1.pdf.)

- “Report of the General Board of Church and Society” (pages 125-128)
- “Report to the General Conference 2020 on Social Principles Revision” (pages 130-132)
- “Revised United Methodist Social Principles” (pages 133-155)

In the Discussion Board answer the following questions with a one paragraph response of no more than 150 words each. Post your initial comments by 5 p.m. on Monday, March 25. Post responses to colleagues’ posts by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 27.

1. What does it mean for your ministry that the Social Principles “are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit” (p. 37)?
2. How have you, or might you, utilize the Social Creed within the life of your congregation? If the Creed was unfamiliar to the congregation, how would you prepare for its introduction?
3. What do you see as the significance of the proposed revisions to the Social Principles being considered at General Conference in April-May 2024?

Discussion Board Four
Due Wednesday, **April 3**

After receiving approval from the instructor of your Research Paper Topic (see below), post your topic summary in the Discussion Board by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, April 3 and make a brief comment on why you chose this subject. Responses to colleagues’ posts will be due by 5 p.m. on Friday, April 5.

Synchronous Class Sessions (via Zoom)

Live class sessions will be conducted via Zoom from:

~ **10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time (US and Canada)**

~ **1:30 to 4 p.m. Eastern Time (US and Canada)**

On the following dates:

~ **Friday, April 12**

~ **Saturday, April 13**

(Our goal will be to have a short break each hour. Exact times are subject to adjustment.)

Optional Zoom Session in March

Optional Zoom sessions during which students may bring forth questions and comments will be conducted on:

~ Friday, March 4 @ 10 a.m.

~ Wednesday, March 13 @ 2 p.m.

You may join the sessions at Zoom.us directly [here](#) or use on Zoom.us:

Meeting ID: **864 7624 2482**

Passcode: **GoodLife**

Grading

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Birch/Lovin Reflection	25 %
Discussion Boards	15 %
Sexual Ethics Reflection	20 %
Research Paper/Presentation	30 %
Class Participation	10 %

Grade Scale:

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	88-89
B	83-87
B-	80-82
C+	78-79
C	73-77
C-	70-72
F	69 or below

Grades will be reduced a step (e.g. from B to a B-) for assignments handed in late, but within 24 hours after the assignment was due. Grades will be reduced a full letter grade for any assignments 24 hours past due. Students submitting assignments 48 hours or more past due should immediately set a time to conference with the instructor.

The final grade will be reduced a full letter grade for an unexcused absence from a zoom session. Students will not receive credit for the course with two or more unexcused absences from a required zoom session.

Inclusive Language

In both oral and written contributions to the course, students are expected to be conscious of the power of language in theology. Inclusive language respects both gender and racial diversity, and students should demonstrate awareness that language about persons and God expresses values and impacts theological ideas in the details of race and gender connotations. Both gender and race are socially-constructed categories, and changing language is part of bringing justice to theological discourse.

Academic Policies

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all classes in their entirety. Faculty members have the authority to set attendance policies for particular courses and those policies will be included in the course syllabus. Deviation from the attendance policy may result in reduction of grade or loss of credit for the course.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offense and will result in substantial penalties, including the possibility of academic dismissal. The faculty regards the following as form of plagiarism or dishonesty:

- Copying from another student's paper.
- Giving or receiving unauthorized assistance to or from another student during an examination.
- Using unauthorized material during an examination.
- Borrowing or presenting as one's own (i.e. without proper attribution) the composition or ideas of another.

Please refer to your Wesley Student Handbook (on-line) for more information about Wesley's academic policies or contact the Course of Study office 202-885-8688.

(Updated 4 February 2024)