

Wesley Theological Seminary Course of Study School
Summer 2024
Virtual Format

Syllabus

424 Ethics

Instructor: Gary MacDonald

gmacdonald@wesleyseminary.edu

Asynchronous Session: June 1 – 30, 2024

Synchronous Class Sessions: July 8 – 12, 2024; 1:00 – 3:45 p.m. Eastern

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). Available at:

<https://www.umcsc.org/home/wp-content/uploads/2016-Book-of-Resolutions.pdf>

Additional resources will be added to the Syllabus following the conclusion of the United Methodist General Conference in May 2024. In the interim, students may access:

[*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

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

Technical Instructions

All Wesley courses use Blackboard. Some are web enhanced, hybrid or fully online. It is essential to have the right tools to participate fully. You must have a computer or regular & reliable access to a computer. Many items on Blackboard can be accessed using a mobile device, but you will be expected to complete tasks that require a computer or robust tablet. Minimum technical requirements are listed below. If your system does not meet minimum requirements or you do not have the necessary tools and you will not be able to complete your courses.

Microsoft Windows

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

Mac

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

- Up-to-date browser: Firefox, Chrome, Safari, Edge ([click here for Blackboard browser checker](#))
- Up-to-date PDF reader ([Adobe](#) or [FoxIt](#))
- Up-to-date video player:
- Windows Media player or
- [VideoLAN VLC media player](#)
- Up-to-date Word processor and presentation package ([Wesley Theological Seminary offers free Office 365 Basic for students click here for instructions on how to download](#))
- High speed internet connection (10 mpbs or higher is required)

Asynchronous Session – June 1-30 (via BlackBoard)

Video Lectures

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

June 3 – The Search for the Good Life

June 10 – Goals, Rules and Virtue

June 17 – Sources of Ethics

June 24 – United Methodist Social Thought

Written Assignments

Birch/Lovin Reflection	Friday, June 14 @ 11 p.m.
Topic Statement	Wednesday, June 26 @ 11 p.m.
Sexual Ethics Reflection	Wednesday, July 3 @ 11 p.m.
Ethics Research Paper	Sunday, July 14 @ 11 p.m.

Birch/Lovin Reflection **June 14**

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.

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, **June 26 @ 11 p.m.**

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

Class Presentations to be scheduled Thursday and/or Friday, **July 11 – 12.**

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).

Students will provide the instructor a one-paragraph summary of the topic to be addressed. 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, after which students will post topic statements on the respective Discussion Board.

Based on the topics selected, a schedule of class presentations will be developed. 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 July 3

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

In addition to written assignments, asynchronous sessions will comprise engaging texts, articles and videos via Blackboard and entering into online discussion with colleagues. Students will be asked to respond to a question or topic within a discussion forum on Blackboard. Unless otherwise noted, each individual forum will open on a respective Monday and students will be asked to make an initial response by the following Wednesday, and to respond to at least one colleague by the following Friday, according to the schedule below.

Opening Date	Initial Post Due	Response Due
Monday, June 3	Wednesday, June 5 @ 11 p.m.	Friday, June 7, @ 11 p.m.
Monday, June 10	Wednesday June 12 @ 11 p.m.	Friday, June 14 @ 11 p.m.
Monday, June 17	Wednesday, June 19 @ 11 p.m.	Friday, June 21 @ 11 p.m.

Monday, June 24	Wednesday, June 26 @ 11 p.m.	Friday, June 28 @ 11 p.m.
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Discussion Board One

Opens Monday, **June 3**

In the Discussion Board introduce yourself to your colleagues in one paragraph of about 200 words. In your introduction, briefly describe your ministry; introduce your family, if you desire; and present a core question you bring to this course.

Discussion Board Two

Opens Monday, **June 10**

In the Discussion Board respond to the following prompts with a one paragraph response of about 200 words.

1. Share at least two key “takeaways” from your reading of the Lovin and Birch et al. texts.
2. What did you find particularly enlightening or challenging in the texts for your faith and ministry?

Discussion Board Three

Opens Monday, **June 17**

After receiving approval from the instructor of your Research Paper Topic (see below), post your topic summary in the Discussion Board by Wednesday, June 23 and make a brief comment on why you chose this subject.

Discussion Board Four

Opens Monday, **June 24**

Watch the video from the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.
<https://www.umc.org/en/content/methodist-history-1908-social-creed-for-workers>)

(Readings subject to change given the work of the General Conference session at Charlotte, N.C. in April/May 2024)

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.

In the Discussion Board answer the following questions with a one paragraph response of no more than 150 words each.

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?

Synchronous Class Sessions – July 8 -12 (via Zoom)

Live class sessions will be conducted via Zoom from 1 – 3:45 p.m. Eastern.

You may join the session at Zoom.us directly [here](#) or use: Meeting ID: 894 6382 6202
Passcode: GoodLife

An optional Zoom session to discuss any questions with the instructor will be offered:

- Monday, June 10 @ 7 p.m.

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 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.

(Topics and schedule subject to change)
(Updated 8 April 2024)