

Wesley Theological Seminary Course of Study School
May 27 – Orientation and Opening Worship (synchronous)
June 1 – July 6, 2025 (asynchronous)
July 7 - 11, 2025 via Zoom (synchronous)

Syllabus *(updated 22 Apr 2025)*

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)

Miles, Rebekah L. *The Pastor as Moral Guide*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. (ISBN 0-8006-31366)

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church: 2020/2024. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2024. (ISBN: 978-1791010966).

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

Orientation and Opening Worship

On **Tuesday, May 27** from 11 a.m. to noon (Eastern) an orientation to the summer term and COS 424 *Ethics* will be conducted online, followed by COS Opening Worship. Connection information will be provided by the Wesley Course of Study office.

Video Lectures

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

- June 2** – The Search for the Good Life
- June 9** – Goals, Rules and Virtue
- June 16** – Sources of Ethics
- June 23** – United Methodist Social Thought

Written Assignments

Birch/Lovin Reflection	Friday, June 13 @ 11 p.m.
Topic Statement	Wednesday, June 18 @ 11 p.m.
Miles Reflection	Wednesday, July 2 @ 11 p.m.
Ethics Research Paper	Monday, July 14 @ 11 p.m.

Birch/Lovin Reflection

Due Friday, **June 13** @ 11 p.m.

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. Discuss Birch et al.'s understanding of the authority of the Bible for Christian ethical formation and discernment and how this might inform your own theological work and ministry.
2. What is the place of "social sin" in moral formation, according to Birch et al and how might this effect your own understanding of ethics and pastoral responsibility?
3. Discuss "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 18 @ 11 p.m.**

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

Class Presentations to be scheduled Thursday and/or Friday, **July 10 - 11**

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 or generative AI) related to your topic, in addition to the required reading for the course. Be sure to cite your sources. The paper should be no less than eight and no more than 10 pages in length (approximately 2500 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, such as the *Community of All Creation*, *The Economic Community*, *The Social Community* or *The Political Community*; and at least two sources that the student will utilize beyond the course materials. You might find specific resolutions from *The Book of Resolutions* to be suggestive of possible topics, but are free to explore topics of particular relevance and interest to you. The instructor will approve or suggest revisions to students by the weekend following the statement's due date. Students will post topic statements on the respective Discussion Board following approval by the instructor.

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 (i.e. the Wesleyan Quadrilateral) 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.

Miles Reflection

Due Wednesday, **July 2 @ 11 p.m.**

Read the Miles text and write a reflection paper in which you evaluate the principles and guidelines presented for pastoral ministry. Be sure to address the content of Miles' understanding of the role of the pastor in moral guidance; the use of "The Guiding Questions;" the place of responsibility in pastoral care settings as it relates to moral guidance; and sexual accountability in ministry. What did you find particularly helpful in the text? Is there any critique you might offer? The paper should be no less than three and no more than five pages (825 – 1375 words).

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 initial post and to respond to at least two colleagues according to the schedule below, and are encouraged to dialogue with additional students as well, with a minimum of four responses in addition to your original post.

Grading, in addition to meeting minimum requirements, will be based on the initial post's responsiveness to the topic, with evidence of critical thinking and engagement with course materials. Responses to colleagues' posts should include an initial assessment of the writer's post along with contributions of your own ideas and questions to promote a deeper understanding of the topic.

Opening Date	Initial Post Due	Response Due
Tuesday, May 27	Monday, June 2 @ 5 pm	Wednesday, June 4 @ 5 pm
Monday, June 2	Monday, June 9 @ 5 pm	Wednesday, June 11 @ 5 pm
Monday, June 16	Wednesday, June 18 @ 5 pm	Friday, June 20 @ 5 pm
Friday, June 20	Monday, June 23 @ 5 pm	Wednesday, June 25 @ 5 pm

Discussion Board One

Opens Tuesday, **May 27**

The first step in establishing an online community is to get to know each other. 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. Monday, June 2. Post initial responses to colleagues' introductions by 5 p.m. Wednesday, June 4. This first Board will not be graded, but completion will count toward class participation grades.

Discussion Board Two

Opens Monday, **June 2**

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. Post your initial comments by 5 p.m. on Monday, June 9. Post initial responses to colleagues' posts by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, June 11.

Discussion Board Three

Opens Monday, **June 16**

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

- The Contents and User's Guide (pages 7-32)
- Social Creed (pages 33-34)
- The Social Principles, including:
 - Preface and Preamble (pages 35-39)
 - Community of All Creation (pages 40-46)
 - The Economic Community (pages 92-99)
 - The Social Community (pages 173-187)
 - The Political Community (pages 393-405)

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 12 resolutions.

In the Discussion Board answer the following three questions with a one paragraph response of no more than 150 words each (three paragraphs total). Post your initial comments by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, June 18. Post initial responses to colleagues' posts by 5 p.m. on Friday, June 20.

1. What does it mean for your ministry that the Social Principles "are a call to faithfulness and to social engagement and intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit" (p. 36)?

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. How might you utilize particular resolutions in the practice of your ministry. What challenges might be presented and how would you address or respond?

Discussion Board Four
Opens Friday, **June 20**

After receiving approval from the instructor of your Research Paper Topic (see above), post your topic summary in the Discussion Board by 5 p.m. on Monday, June 23 and make a brief comment on why you chose this subject. Initial responses to colleagues' posts will be due by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, June 25.

Synchronous Class Sessions July 7 – 11, 2025 (via Zoom)

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

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

You may join the sessions at Zoom.us directly [here](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85108132067) or use on Zoom.us:

Meeting ID: 851 0813 2067

Passcode: **GoodLife**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85108132067?pwd=XVaTbAbuuYooVsEnHlIzgaMcPWZQwU.1>

Grading

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Birch/Lovin Reflection	25 %	Research Paper/Presentation	35 %
Discussion Boards	15 %	Class Participation	10 %
Miles Reflection	15 %		

Grade Scale:

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

Grades will be reduced a step (e.g. from B to a B-) for assignments submitted 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.

Generative AI

The Course of Study office is currently developing guidelines regarding generative AI. In the meantime, the instructor's guidelines state that you may use generative AI to brainstorm ideas, clarify concepts, identify examples, or contextualize your learning in this course. The output of a generative AI tool may not be included in any of your submitted data, thus you may not copy/paste output, including outlines of essays or arguments. You may use AI tools designed to improve the language or readability of your submission. Note either such utilization in your submission, naming the tool and a brief description of how it was used, such as "I used *Grammarly* to check and improve my spelling and grammar."

Technical Instructions

Blackboard support information is available at
<https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/blackboardsupport/>

Participants in Online courses must have regular access to high-speed internet and an up-to-date anti-virus program.

Microsoft Windows

- Windows 11 or higher
- Intel Core i5 or higher or AMD equivalent, at least 8GB of RAM
- At least 100GB of free storage space
- At least 100GB hard drive

Mac OS/X

- OS/XMac OS X 10.15 or newer
- Intel processor and at least 8 GB of RAM
- At least 16GB of free storage

- Up-to-date browser: Firefox, Chrome, Safari ([click here for Blackboard browser checker](#))
- 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

Please note: Chromebooks (Chrome OS), iPads (iOS), Android devices, and iPhones do not meet the minimum requirements for online or virtual coursework at Wesley Theological Seminary.

Syllabus subject to change.
(22 April 2025)