



ERSKINE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

For Christ and His Church

DC 975
Effective Ministry in the Small Church
Fall, 2011
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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students in this course examine the importance of the small church in Christian history and its unique characteristics. The course focuses on learning the culture of the small church. Special emphasis is given to the small church in a rural setting. Students develop a model of ministry that is appropriate in helping the small church to be more effective in its ministry.

ELECTIVE (*Contexts*). Three hours credit.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

“The mission of Erskine Theological Seminary is to educate persons for service in the Christian Church.” (ETS 2010-2011 *Catalog*, p. 6) The dominant form of the Christian Church throughout history has been the small-numbered congregation. Thus, this course is a direct attempt to implement the mission of the Seminary.

More specifically, by the end of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Define what is meant by “small church”;
2. Describe the basic characteristics of the small church;
3. Describe the unique needs of the small church;
4. Summarize the current crisis in rural America and describe how it affects small rural churches;
5. Define and explain various forms of the small church;
6. Describe the unique contributions that a small church makes to the Christian Church at large;
7. Diagnose the current health, using a Life Cycle model, of a small church;
8. Write a plan of ministry for a particular small church with concrete suggestions for more effective ministry;
9. Explain in detail some aspect of small church life and/or culture on the basis of research that has been done;
10. Begin a preliminary bibliography in the area of the small church.

III. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Students are expected to secure their own copies of all required textbooks. As a convenience, the seminary has a bookstore portal of the website at <http://www.erskineseminary.org/bookstore.html>. There you will find links to familiar vendors (CBD, Amazon, B&N, and Books-A-Million) and can check availability of texts, compare prices, and place orders. The ETS SBA will receive a modest percentage of the profits from students' and professors' purchases through this portal. The Erskine Campus Bookstore will carry a limited number of copies of every required text and orders for books can be placed through the Campus Bookstore.

Each student must purchase the following textbooks for the course:

Robert Dale, *To Dream Again*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2004.
ISBN 9781-5975-2030-0

Glenn C. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008. **ISBN 9780-8254-2449-6**

Carl S. Dudley and Douglas Alan Walrath, *Developing Your Small Church's Potential*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1988. **ISBN 0-8170-1120-X**

Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*. Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2000. **ISBN 1-5669-9236-2**

Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Beyond the Ordinary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. **ISBN 9780-6642-2693-0**

IV. CLASS MEETING DATES

This class will meet on the following Tuesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Session 1: September 20

Session 2: October 18

Session 3: November 15

Session 4: December 6

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Each student must attend every class meeting. If a student must miss part or all of a class meeting, he/she is responsible for all work done and/or missed that day. **A student who misses more than a total of one class meeting will not pass the course.** Normally, a student who misses all or part of a class session will be assigned additional reading and written work.

2. Each student must be adequately prepared for each class session. Adequate preparation consists of completion of all reading and/or writing assignments for that day. The format of the class will be lecture/discussion, case study, and some small group work. The student is expected to participate intelligently and in an informed way in classroom discussions based on his/her reading as well as experience.
3. All work must be done on time. **Work that is turned in past the due date is subject to at least a one-letter grade penalty.** The professor reserves the right to reject any work that is excessively late.
4. **Three papers are required for this course.** Paper # 1 is due in Session 1. Instructions for this paper are given in the assignment for Session 1. Paper # 2 is due in Session 3. Instructions for this paper are given in the assignment for Session 3. The major paper (Paper #3) is an analysis and plan of ministry of the student's own church based on the readings and class discussions of the course. A guide-sheet will be provided for this paper. If the student's ministry setting will not allow or is not appropriate for this kind of analysis, he/she may choose to do a research paper on some aspect of the small church. Some possible topics are suggested at the end of the syllabus. Paper #3 is due no later than December 13. This paper should be no more than 20 pages long.
5. Students may be given short, research assignments about an issue that is being studied in class. These assignments will take the form of an oral report back to the class with no written work required to be turned in.
6. The student is encouraged to keep a loose-leaf notebook for the course. He/she can use it for class notes, reading notes, hand-outs, bibliographical information, etc.
7. There are several Seminary policies of which the student in this class should be aware. The student should go to the following link to familiarize himself/herself with these policies.
http://seminary.erskine.edu/content_policies/SeminaryPoliciesforETSStudents.pdf
8. My regular office hours for the fall semester are posted on my office door (Office 20). The student is advised to make an appointment before coming.

VI. EVALUATION

The Seminary grade scale will be used (ETS 2010-2011 *Catalog*, p. 46). The student's final grade will be determined as follows:

Paper # 1	=	25%
Paper # 2	=	25%
Paper # 3	=	50%

COURSE OUTLINE

Session 1: Tuesday, September 20

Course introduction, requirements, etc.

- I. An Introduction to the Small Church
 - A. When is a church considered small?
 - B. The small church in America today
 - C. The small church in Christian history
 - D. Basic characteristics of a small church
 - E. Specific challenges for the small church
 - F. Unique contributions of the small church
 - G. The myth: Small churches need to become large churches

- II. The Social Context of the Small Church
 - A. Introduction
 - B. Rural churches
 - C. Fringe churches
 - D. City churches
 - E. How the social context affects the small church

ASSIGNMENT FOR SESSION 1:

1. Read Carl S. Dudley and Douglas Alan Walrath, *Developing Your Small Church's Potential*, pp. 7-31.
2. Read Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*, pp. 3-22.
3. Read Glenn C. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 2nd ed., pp. 11-64.
4. **Paper # 1 is due in this session.** For this paper, summarize Daman's 14 characteristics of the small church (pp. 42-51) and assess to what degree your church possesses each characteristic. If possible, give specific evidence from your church to justify your assessment. This paper should be no more than 10 pages long.

Session 2: Tuesday, October 18

- III. The Rural Church
 - A. Introduction
 - B. The current crisis in rural America
 - C. Types of rural American communities
 - 1. Ribbonville
 - 2. Agraville
 - 3. Mighthavebeenville
 - 4. Fairview
 - D. Emerging issues in rural America
 - 1. The changing nature of the rural economy
 - 2. Population shifts in rural America
 - 3. The change in community services in rural America
 - 4. Diversity, racism, and violence in rural America
 - 5. The environment
 - E. The rural church
 - 1. Basic characteristics of the rural church
 - 2. The problems of the rural church
 - 3. The rural understanding of the functions of ministry
 - a. Worship
 - b. Outreach/witness
 - c. Nurture/discipleship
 - d. Ministry
 - e. Fellowship
 - f. Mission

ASSIGNMENT FOR SESSION 2:

- 1. Specific reading materials on the rural church will be provided.
- 2. Read Glenn C. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 2nd ed., pp. 65-143.

Session 3: Tuesday, November 15

- IV. Analyzing the Small Church
 - A. Introduction
 - B. Developing a model of ministry
 - C. Discovering the sacred spaces in the small church
 - D. Aspects of small-church ministry
 - 1. Worship
 - 2. Leadership
 - 3. The Sunday School

4. Fellowship
5. Pastoral care
6. Pastor/member tensions
- E. The self-image of a small church
- F. Ministry in a small church
 1. Caring
 2. Conserving
 3. Coping
- G. Realistic issues in small-church life
 1. When should a small church be allowed to die?
 2. What issues arise when small churches are yoked together in a parish?
 3. What alternate ways of financing can the small church use?
 4. What style of leader does the small church need?
 5. What kind of structure should the small church have?
 6. How can small churches cooperate with other churches in ministry?
 7. When should small churches merge?

ASSIGNMENT FOR SESSION 3:

1. Read Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*, pp. 37-110.
2. Read Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Beyond the Ordinary*. Write a paper (Paper # 2) in which you write a summary in your own words of each of the 10 strengths of U. S. congregations that are discussed in the book. For each strength, assess to what extent your congregation possesses that strength. As much as possible, justify your assessment with evidence from your church. This paper should be no more than 10-12 pages.

Session 4: Tuesday, December 6

- V. Renewal and Effectiveness in the Small Church
 - A. Introduction
 - B. The life cycle of a church
 - C. Enabling a small church to dream again
 - D. Discovering the connections of the small church to its community
 - E. Integrating community change into the small church
 - F. Instilling hope in the small church

ASSIGNMENT FOR SESSION 4:

1. Read Carl S. Dudley and Douglas Alan Walrath, *Developing Your Small Church's Potential*, pp. 32-96.

2. Read Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*, pp. 111-140.
3. Read Glenn C. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church*, 2nd ed., pp. 144-254.
3. Read Robert Dale, *To Dream Again*, in its entirety.

PAPER # 3 IS DUE NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 13.

POSSIBLE RESEARCH TOPICS

Note: Below are listed some possible topics for research in the area of the small church.. If chosen, most of these topics will need to be narrowed down. The student is encouraged to devise a topic of his/her own.

1. Yoked Churches
2. Rural Churches in Suburbia
3. Challenges and Opportunities for Urban Small Churches
4. Small Churches' Perceptions of Denominations
5. Denominational Perceptions of Small Churches
6. Case Study: A Small Church Which Has Creatively Engaged Its Changing Community
7. The Small Church's Expectations of the Pastor
8. Families in Small Churches
9. Small Churches and Public Schools
10. Options for Financing Small Churches
11. Seminary Education and Small Churches