

ERSKINE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PM 763

Small Church Dynamics

Summer, 2008

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a study of the peculiarities of ministry and leadership in a small church. The course provides the opportunity for students to integrate biblical research on ministry in small settings and rural sociology, in an attempt to develop contextually appropriate models of ministry in selected small churches. The need to make the small church effective but not necessarily larger is emphasized.

ELECTIVE (Ministry). Three hours credit.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

“The mission of Erskine Theological Seminary is to educate persons for service in the Christian Church.” (ETS 2007-2008 *Catalogue*, p. 5) 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. Begin a preliminary bibliography in the area of the small church.

III. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Each student must purchase the following textbooks for the course:

Carl S. Dudley and Douglas Alan Walrath, *Developing Your Small Church's Potential*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1988.

Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*. Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, 2000.

Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Beyond the Ordinary: 10 Strengths Of U.S. Congregations*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004.

NOTE: Required textbooks may be ordered through the Erskine Theological Seminary Virtual Bookstore at www.ecampus.com/erskine.

IV. CLASS MEETING DATES

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

Session 1: June 3

Session 2: July 1

Session 3: July 22

Session 4: August 19

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. **Two papers are required for this course.** Paper # 1 is a summary of the 10 strengths of Christian congregations in the United States based on *Beyond the Ordinary* by Woolever and Bruce. This paper should be no more than 10 pages long and is due in Session 2 (July 1). Paper # 2 is an analysis and plan of ministry for a particular small church which the student analyzes based on criteria, methods, etc. that are developed in class. If the student does not have a small church to analyze, another assignment will be substituted for this one. This paper should be no more than 20 pages long and will be due in Session 4 (August 19). These two papers will be graded primarily on the basis of content but also on style and form. The papers must be well-written and fully documented in proper form with footnotes and a bibliography. The form should be governed by the standards set forth in Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th edition or later.
5. **A final exam will be given at the end of the course.** This exam will be given during Session 4. Students will be given specific instructions about this exam in Session 3.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. The Seminary encourages all students to make use of language, in reference to human beings, that is inclusive rather than needlessly exclusive. It is the mark of a good communicator to build bridges rather than barriers; therefore, such language should be used in all written work and oral presentations. The Seminary *Catalogue* stands as an example of recommended usage.
9. The student should review the Seminary policy on “Incompletes.” A grade of “Incomplete” is not a privilege of the student. It is the prerogative of the professor. It can be given as a final grade only (1) when the student has completed most of his/her course work and (2) when the student has been providentially hindered from doing the rest. In this class, the grade “Incomplete” will be given only when both of these conditions are met. **The deadline for removing an Incomplete is November 1. After this date, the student’s grade automatically becomes an “F.”**
10. The student should note the following administrative policy concerning registration, withdrawal, etc. The student’s completed and signed registration form is a binding contract and the student’s billing is based on this contract. If the student decides to drop/add a course, he/she must fill out the appropriate form and submit it to the Registrar. Failure to do this will result in the student’s being charged for the course even if he/she does not attend or the student’s not getting academic credit if the student has added it without registering for it. Under no circumstances can a professor

withdraw a student from or add a student to a course. **NO EXCEPTIONS WILL BE MADE TO THIS POLICY.**

11. I will be around for most of the summer. However, the student who desires to see me should make an appointment ahead of time.

VI. EVALUATION

The Seminary grade scale will be used (ETS 2007-2008 *Catalogue*, p. 36). The student's final grade will be determined as follows:

Paper # 1	=	20%
Paper # 2	=	50%
Final exam	=	30%

COURSE OUTLINE

Session 1: Tuesday, June 3

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

- 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 special needs of 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 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.

Session 2: Tuesday, July 1

- IV. What Makes Strong Churches?
 - A. Introduction
 - B. Strength 1: Growing Spiritually
 - C. Strength 2: Meaningful Worship
 - D. Strength 3: Participating in the Congregation
 - E. Strength 4: Having a Sense of Belonging
 - F. Strength 5: Caring for Children and Youth
 - G. Strength 6: Focusing on the Community
 - H. Strength 7: Sharing Faith
 - I. Strength 8: Welcoming New People
 - J. Strength 9: Empowering Leadership
 - K. Strength 10: Looking to the Future

ASSIGNMENT FOR SESSION 2:

1. Read Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Beyond the Ordinary: 10 Strengths*

of *U.S. Congregations*, pp. 1-139.

2. **Paper # 1 is due in this session.**

Session 3: Tuesday, July 22

V. 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.

Session 4: Tuesday, August 19

VI. 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
- G. Renewal possibilities in the history of 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. **Paper # 2 is due in this session.**
4. The final examination will be given at 11:30 a.m. in this session.