reNEW: Skills for Leading New and Renewing Progressive Churches

AM-612: Breaking the Rules - Growing a Mainline Church
Hartford Seminary

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Description

This course teaches practical skills for starting a new progressive church or leading the renewal of a church that is stagnant or in decline. It is designed around the premise that churches rarely are resurrected, but can be born again; hence, the skills needed in both situations are similar: creating compelling vision, an effective communication strategy, data management, community development, external mission, transformational worship, etc. This class is designed by the Center for Progressive Renewal and offered for credit or continuing education units.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Design approaches to worship that are diverse, meaningful, inclusive, and vibrant;
- Articulate a definition of leadership that encompasses issues such as visioning, marketing, stewardship, change, and conflict resolution;
- Research contextual implications of location and population in their local ministry setting;
- Name and describe types of diversity that impact community formation.

Format

The class will meet daily (Monday-Friday) from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. for one week. The class will be highly engaging, and blend peer-learning, video conferencing, and lecture. Students will have readings and/or writing assignments to be completed each night. Writing assignments are intended to incorporate concepts derived from in-class work and readings.
Course Structure and Schedule

Day One: The Future of Church and the Future Church

- Understanding major global, national, and local shifts that are changing the church.
- Why are we in such a mess? Looking at the impact of these shifts on congregations, we will talk about what systemic decline means for local churches. Rev. Cameron Trimble will join us via Skype to discuss what trends she sees nationally and globally, as well as emerging movements.
- Assessment Tools: Given the change we are living in, how do we assess the needs and opportunities in your church? How do we decide what kind of church to start in the community? We will touch briefly on Appreciative Inquiry, Strategic Planning, Mission Insite, and other research tools.

Required Reading (to be completed BEFORE class):

- The Great Emergence by Phyllis Tickle
- Chapter 1 of Liberating Hope by Michael Piazza and Cameron Trimble

Assignment:

Write a 1,000-1,200 word paper on your own predictions for the future of the mainline church in light of Phyllis Tickle’s insights.

Day Two: Leadership, Change and Conflict

- We will examine specific skills that transforming leaders need. To be a catalyst for change in an existing congregation, or to start something new, a leader must have the ability to elicit from the community a vision of what is needed.
- Creating change is both an art and a science. There are skills that can be learned, and an awareness that must be created. The effective leader can learn how to be a midwife of change. Failing to acquire the knowledge, sensitivity, and skills dooms the community to stagnation and decline.
- Conflict is inevitably produced in a dynamic community that is seeking to change and to be an agent of change. Learning to anticipate conflict, and to lead a group though the various stages, is a critical learning. It must begin by the leader identifying her or his own conflict style. Using the DISC profile
and materials from other assessment systems, we hope to assist the student’s self-realization in this important area.

- Transitions can be critical opportunities for growth and renewal, or they can be occasions for conflict and decline. Rev. Matt Laney, senior pastor of Asylum Hill United Church of Christ, will share his insights gained having recently followed a long-time, highly successful, and highly esteemed pastor. He also will offer his learnings how, in the event of conflict, he found it helpful that he has a black belt in Tae Kwon Do.

Required reading:

- Chapter 8 and 11 of Liberating Hope by Michael Piazza and Cameron Trimble
- Discovering Your Conflict Management Style by Speed Leas (recommended, but not required)

Assignment:

Identify your conflict management style and write up a brief case study of an experience in your life that validates or disputes the outcome. If you have been unable to acquire Speed Lea’s book use the simple assessment found here: www.ncsu.edu/grad/preparing-future-leaders/docs/conflict-management-styles-quiz.pdf

**Day Three: Structures and Systems: Asset or Liability?**

- Churches that have compelling, externally-focused missions grow. In this session, we will explore the skills needed to facilitate a congregation identifying and clarifying a compelling, externally-focused mission.
- Leaders must be able to guide congregations through the ever-changing landscape of discipleship in this age. We will explore what distinguishes effective leaders and how to develop leaders in your congregation.
- What structures and systems liberate a congregation to respond effectively to the dynamism of the 21st century? What are the principles that allow a faith community to be responsive rather than reactive?

Required Reading:

- reVISION by Michael Piazza and Cameron Trimble
Assignment:

- Write a 500-word essay about the most effective church leader you have encountered and discuss what made them effective.
- Write a 500-word essay about one bylaw, regulation, or policy that needs to change in a church you know well. How is it having a negative impact?

Day Four: Marketing and Fundraising

- The Basics of Church Communication: Successfully starting or renewing a church is highly dependent on your ability to get the word out about your church. We will talk about the basics of marketing and branding and how to use social media to increase awareness of your ministry.
- Business of Church: Once people hear about your church and start coming, you have to find ways to keep them coming back. We will talk about ways to create and cultivate an administrative structure that gives permission for creative ministry rather than trying to control ministry.
- Stewardship and Fundraising Principles: In this age of online giving and social media campaigns, the church now has access to a number of new tools for engaging stewardship. We will review the theological grounding of giving and the tools your church should use as it encourages generosity in and from its people.

Recommended Reading:

- Read the Introduction and chapters 1 and 2 of Tweet If You Love Jesus by Elizabeth Drescher
- Chapters 3-5 Liberating Hope by Michael Piazza and Cameron Trimble

Assignment:

Set up a trial account on Constant Contact or Mail Chimp. Develop an e-newsletter template for your church as if you were going to send it to your congregation. Be creative with graphics, text, and flow. What are you communicating? What do you want people to do after reading it? Email a copy to Michael for review before midnight.
Day Five: Transformational Worship
Facilitators: Michael Piazza, David Plunkett

- Principles guiding the crafting of worship experiences that are diverse, compelling, relevant, and emotive.
- Utilizing technology to connect worship with the contemporary human experience.
- Reclaiming ancient practices in ways that intersect contemporary needs; ancient doors to new experiences of the Divine.
- Preaching to the Internetted.
- Exploring the wealth of resources available to those who craft worship.
- Creating effective worship teams.
- Facilitating change without launching a worship war.

Suggested Reading:

- Beyond the Worship Wars by Thomas Long (Chapters 1, 9, 10)
- Prophetic Renewal by Michael Piazza (Chapter 6)
- Delivering the Sermon by Teresa Fry Brown (Chapters 5, 6)

Assignment (Due within 2 weeks of completing the course):

Design a worship experience for your church that engages all of the senses. Develop the multimedia plan, the sermon, and the order of worship. This assignment is a culmination of all we have covered in this class and should be at least 8-10 pages in length.
Required Texts


Grading Criteria

For Academic Credit

- Class participation (consisting of your physical presence and creative verbal engagement with material during our time together in the classroom): 70%
- Assignments: 30%

For CEU Credit

- Class participation (consisting of your physical presence and creative verbal engagement with material during our time together in the classroom): 90%
- Assignments: 10%
Rev. Michael Piazza currently serves as the Co-Executive Director of the Center for Progressive Renewal, specializing in church multiplication and renewal. Rev. Piazza served as the senior pastor of the Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, Texas during a time of unprecedented growth. When he arrived in Dallas in 1987, the church had 280 members and a budget of $280,000. When he retired to become Dean of the Cathedral, the church’s membership was more than 3,500 with a consolidated budget of more than $3 million. This growth took place in a setting that was hostile to the church’s constituency and during a time in which the church performed more than 1,500 funerals for persons with HIV/AIDS. He is a recent recipient of the “Leading Voice” award from the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at Pacific School of Religion. He is adjunct faculty at Chicago Theological Seminary and Pacific School of Religion, has written 11 books, more than 1,300 devotional blogs entitled Liberating Word, and several hundred editorial and opinion pieces. Today, Rev. Piazza lives in Atlanta, GA with his partner of 34 years, and is, in addition to his full-time work with the Center for Progressive Renewal, the pastor of Virginia-Highland Church.