D.Min. Colleague Seminar I (DM-720A)  
Fall 2015

In this first semester of Colleague Seminar courses, we will explore the social and contextual challenges within American religious life for the region and nation. Through readings, guest presentations and field trips we will explore the overarching challenges facing local congregations and then discover creative, out-of-the-box realistic solutions to address these challenges. Following each of these explorations and experiences, students will reflect theologically on the relevance and salience of these approaches as well as other possible solutions, from the perspective of their personal beliefs and within their specific tradition’s theological framework. Required of all first-year D.Min. students.

**Retreat**-Sunday evening 9/20 3:00 – 9:00 PM  (3-5:00 pm class then reception at 5:00 followed by 5:30 to 6:30 Dinner 6:30 – 8:30 presentation and informal time with other DMIN students and alumni/ae)

**Class**-Monday 9:45am - 5:00 pm Sept 21, Oct 19, Nov 16, Nov 30, and Dec 14 [I would encourage all Dmin students to come to the Religion in America conference on Nov 14 and for those interested to attend the University Chaplains conference Nov. 17] (Snow Make-up day if needed will happen online and/or thought Skype)

**NOTE:** Seminary Chapel begins at 9:00-9:30, community time at 9:30-9:45 (encouraged but optional).

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**Objectives:**
a. To develop a better understanding of the challenges and possibilities for ministry in a contemporary context; 
b. To explore contemporary research on social and religious trends in order more accurately to understand one’s own congregation and community;  
c. To engage in a sustained reflection on leadership practices and ways to approach change within one’s own congregation and community;  
e. To deepen skills for critical thinking and theological reflection that are essential in the D.Min. program, including the diverse collegial relationships that enhance that program.  
f. To assist the student in ascertaining and articulating the theology with which he/she does ministry given the rapidly changing contemporary context.

**Procedure:**
The course alternates between five class sessions (see “Schedule”) and the intervening periods for individual exploration and online engagement by students of the readings and their interpretive value in their respective settings. The class sessions rely on group discussions and ones reading summary to deepen and concretize the readings, instructor presentations, and guest presentations/trips to innovative congregations who are creatively addressing social and religious changes. The intervening periods rely on engagement with the readings as well as theological reflection and writing posted to the course website. A final paper provides an occasion to integrate work from the entire semester by reflecting on the national social and religious trends in relation to one’s proposed project and theological convictions.

All reading assignments must be completed in advance of the class session for which they are assigned and a short reading summary produced that highlights the key relevant points from the readings as they relate to your ministry setting.
Each week, beginning promptly at 9:45 AM, we will check in with each other, discuss the readings in some depth related to their implications for the students’ ministry context. The reading summary should be used in class and then handed in at the end of class. In the afternoon we will continue this discussion and may either visit a ministry that is taking an innovation approach to the contemporary context, invite a guest in to talk about their efforts or address a case study that shows a successful ministry adaptation. Following each class, you will be asked to write a reflection on that session’s topic, reflecting on what you read and hear/saw in the class and how you might understand these social patterns or dynamics within your theological framework and what it might imply for possible ministerial action strategies in your context.

In order to satisfy the 45 contact hours for this course, a total of ten contact hours will be conducted online, evenly divided in the four periods between these class sessions. The online assignment will be to post your reflection, and then to read those of your colleagues in the class and substantively comment on at least one of these prior to the next meeting time.

**Required reading:**
The required texts will be the basis for our class discussions throughout the semester and for the reflection papers.

**Grades:**
Throughout this course, grades are reported on an HP / P / LP basis. These grades mean:
HP Exceptional in several or most ways; such work completes all tasks, is creative and even original in content, and displays mastery of expression.
P Adequate in all basic ways; parts of the task are slighted, the content has minor weaknesses, and expression is competent yet not consistently compelling.
LP Inadequate in some ways; does not address significant tasks, shows weak or erroneous content, and expression sometimes obstructs understanding.

*Class participation 35% of grade*
Attendance at and active participation in every class session is expected of all students. Exceptions are only allowed if advance permission has been granted by the instructor, and only for unavoidable absences. In all cases, failure to be in attendance at more than one class session automatically precludes successful completion of the course. The participation grade includes active familiarity with all readings and completion of online contact hours.

*Reading Summary and Post-topic reflection – Key points and implications for your ministry 30% of grade*

*Final paper 35% of grade*
The final paper integrates the central insights and readings from the semester. This paper will describe an actual challenge to the student’s ministry context and then analyze this in relation to social and cultural patterns, organizational theory and leadership strategies from the semester. Details for the final paper, including focus and format, will be provided at the 4th class session. Final papers must be sent by e-mail to the instructor by 12 Jan. 2015.

**Course extensions:**
Past experience has shown that timely completion of all assignments and the entire course is essential to successful completion of the overall D.Min. program. As a result, late writing assignments are strongly discouraged and course extensions are not permitted.

**Plagiarism warning:**
Plagiarism is the failure to give proper credit for the words or ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, and is strictly prohibited. Credit will not be given for written work in this course containing plagiarism, and plagiarism may result in a failing grade for the entire course.

**Process Expectations:**
- Timely and regular attendance. If an emergency comes up (and they do), call or email me or call the main seminary number (860/509-9500) and leave word. The seminary’s policy is: Two absences in a semester constitute withdrawal from the course.
- Prepared and active participation in class presentations and discussions (in a sense, this course is a peer learning group with the instructor as coach)
- Commitment to dialogical engagement of one’s colleagues:
  - Open sharing of one’s own perspectives and respectful probing of other’s perspectives
  - Appreciative understanding of other’s perspective/argument before offering suggestions for further consideration (a DMin project is a “constructive” effort; therefore constructive suggestions are most helpful)
  - Appreciative consideration of other’s suggestions.
- What is said in the group stays in the group!

**Schedule:**

The topics we will address for the five class meetings include:

**Sunday Conversation** – Please bring a 2-page at least description of your ministry setting and 8 copies to share with your colleagues. Describe your setting and then highlight current challenges to your efforts in this setting.

1) **The State of American Religion** – The challenges and also opportunities.

*American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* by Robert Putnam and David Campbell
Read the Entire Book
*Reading Summary – Key points of the reading and the implications from it for your ministry*

** readings for sessions 2-5 may change during the semester **

2) **Changing Organizational Landscape** – New models of religious congregations and the ways people are getting their spiritual needs met.

Mark Chaves “All Creatures Great and Small” *Review of Religious Research* 2006 47:335 SonisWeb
Surratt, Ligon and Bird. *The Multi-Site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations* p. 9-42 SonisWeb
Reading Summary – Key points of the reading and the implications from it for your ministry

3) An Increasingly Diverse Population – Migration, multiculturalism, religious pluralism and the loss of a moral consensus.


Reading Summary – Key points of the reading and the implications from it for your ministry

4) Generational Differences, Individualism & Consuming Faith – Shopping for faith, an individualist approach to community and religiosity


Scott Thumma, Leadership section in *The Other 80%*. On SonisWeb but Entire Book if you want to purchase it

Reading Summary – Key points of the reading and the implications from it for your ministry

5) Religion in the Increasingly Secular Society – Secularism, the Nones and the challenge all religious communities are facing into the future.
Entire Book


Scott Thumma, “Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations
http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/technology-Internet-use.html

*Reading Summary – Key points of the reading and the implications from it for your ministry*