RS-661 WOMEN, RELIGION AND THE FUTURE OF CHURCHES

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Course Description and Objectives:

Women are the majority – of most persons attending worship Christian services, but the minority of the those in top church leadership positions. Over the last couple of centuries, women have shown they can be as capable as men in guiding a congregation spiritually, as well as in developing or directing programs and providing oversight on financial and staffing decisions. By the second decade of the 21st century, women have been recognized as having these capacities.

Particularly in the Mainline Protestant denominations, many more women are sole and senior pastors, regional and national denominational leaders now. In more conservative congregations, women are often just as actively involved and essential to church vitality life, but seldom or never accorded official leadership. The course materials focus mainly on women in USA Christian churches, with some reading and comparisons with American Muslim women. Parallels with women's experience in non-Christian religious traditions and countries other than the USA will be very welcomed in students' on-line responses to lecture questions and papers.

After an introduction, the course is divided in three sections:
Section I, "Head Start for the Mostly Mainline: Protestant Women in Predominantly White Churches," discuses factors in how women emerged more visibly as leaders of Christian congregations and denominations from the early 19th to the late 20th century America and challenges they still face in the 21st century.
Section II, "Catching the Spirit and Divisions Among American Women Outside the Mainline," describes women situation and aspirations who belong to Roman Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, Muslim, Black, Hispanic or Asian congregations.

ALL reading assigned is available ON-LINE. No purchase of books is required. Reading assigned is primarily for students to gain understanding of themes and trends (not historical details or specific numbers).

Course Requirements:

Weekly: doing all of the assigned reading, answering one of the questions posed by the instructor with each lecture, and commenting on at least one other student's answers. Weekly participation on the discussion course site is expected. Missing more than two weekly discussions will lower your final grade. 40% of final grade.

Mid-term proposal for final essay: 500-1000 words on describing the final paper planned about the extent of women's participation in your choice of faith-related community over the last 10-20 years, with references to assigned reading done. 20% of final grade.

Final essay: About 1500-2000 at words on what the recent history indicates as the future of women's participation and leadership in your choice of faith-related community, and the outcomes you see for the future vitality of this faith community— AND WHY (using, assigned & other readings, discussions, and insights.) 40% of final grade.
WEEK 1  Introduction to Women’s Place in World Religions

1. **Reading:** Only the on-line lecture introduction.
2. **Students:** Introduce themselves one line, given some information about their religious backgrounds, and what their particular interests are in this course.

SECTION I  THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN AS CHURCH LEADERS:
PROTESTANT WOMEN IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE CONGREGATIONS

WEEK 2  Women’s Leadership in USA Churches in 18th- early 19th Centuries
Reading for themes, similarities and differences Reading


WEEK 3  Moving Into and through the 20th Century: Women Seek Recognition in the Church.
Reading for themes, similarities and differences:


WEEK 4  Denominations’ Strategies to Facilitate/Block Ordination of Women
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 5  Ordained Women as Leaders of Protestant Congregations
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


SECTION 2: CATCHING THE SPIRIT FOR CHANGE AMONG WOMEN OUTSIDE THE MAINLINE PROTESTANT CHURCHES

WEEK 6: Roman Catholic Women Leadership, Feminism, and Divisions
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 7: Women’s Roles and Negotiations in Conservative Evangelical Protestant and Muslim Communities of Faith
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 8 Women of Color in Racial-Ethic Congregations: A Different Situation?
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 9 Women Taking Leadership in Racial-Ethic Congregations: A Similar Journey?
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 10 Week of Reading/Writing Catch-up: Proposals for Final Essay Due No other assignments

SECTION III: UNDERLYING ISSUES, NEW CHANCES AND THE FUTURE

WEEK 11 The Nature-Nurture-Opportunity Debates: Are Women More Religiously Inclined than Men, and if so Why?
Reading for themes, similarities and differences


WEEK 12  Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Congregations  
Reading for themes, trends, differences  

WEEK 13  The Future of Women in Church Leadership  
Reading for themes, similarities and differences  

WEEK 14  Final Lecture  
NO Reading Assigned: There will be discussion questions.

WEEK 15  Final Essays Due  
Each student is asked to write an essay of 1500-2000+ words on what you see as the future of women’ s leadership and congregational strength in your denomination, faith tradition, OR on your interest in the role of women in faith communities – using your scholarly reflections, your responses to the lecture questions, your insights, fantasies, and definitely drawing on the assigned reading!