

Break All the Rules: Renewing a Mainline Church

AM 655 – Summer 2019

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Meeting Time: Monday-Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. EDT

Course Description

During the past half-century, volumes have been written about the decline and predicted demise of mainline denominations and congregations. Scholars have performed autopsies and widely discussed the various theories of the causes for this decline. This course is not concerned with that. Rather, two professors who also pastor and consult with congregations defying the predictions of death will explore some of the reasons they believe many, though not most, mainline churches continue to thrive. The hope of this course is that breaking the rule of denominational decline is a skill set that can be learned by contemporary church leaders.

Course Objectives

The course is designed as an overview of best practices in mainline churches that are thriving despite the catastrophic trend of congregations with similar brands closing. The course will explore the theology, philosophy, and pragmatics of breaking the rules of decline. The key to this course's success will be students understanding and being able to implement changes that will enable their church to experience revitalization.

Identified Seminary Learning Outcomes

Master of Arts in Religious Studies

1. To demonstrate foundational and critical knowledge of one's own religion by identifying factors that are conducive to renewal and growth.
2. To demonstrate the knowledge, capacities, and willingness to respectfully engage other religions and world views by crafting truly welcoming and inclusive worship.
3. To demonstrate knowledge of the practices of one's own religious tradition and the capacity to appreciate the practices of other religious traditions by developing an understanding of cultural practices other than one's own.
4. To demonstrate knowledge and skills for dialogical and constructive engagement with diversity

5. To demonstrate the ability to relate theory and practice of congregational revitalization in the social contexts in which a religion's communities exist.

Master of Arts in Transformative Leadership and Spirituality

1. To demonstrate a foundational knowledge of congregational dynamics and explain how they are redefining our understanding of reality.
2. To express the transformative possibilities in a renewing congregation and their implications for religion and spirituality.
3. To be able to articulate how the renewal of a congregation is beneficial to the wider world.

Doctor of Ministry

1. To demonstrate knowledge of the larger social and cultural dynamics affecting religious life and organizations in the 21st century and their implications for ministry setting.
2. To demonstrate the ability to assess with concrete evidence the local contextual, identity, process dynamics and to formulate new approaches.
3. To demonstrate the knowledge, capacities, and willingness to respectfully engage the religious pluralism of contemporary American society through exposure to the teachings of other faiths and those who practice those faiths.
4. To demonstrate reflective and intentional critical assessment of their style of ministry in effecting change of their ministry setting

Required Texts & Readings

- *The Other 80 Percent: Turning Your Church's Spectators Into Active Participants* by Scott Thumma and Warren Bird. Jousey-Bass
- *Altar Call: Inviting Response to the Gospel* by Donna Schaper; Abingdon Press
- *Vital Vintage Church* by Michael Piazza; Kindle Direct
- *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary* by Isa Aron Steven M. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman (This is only required for Jewish Students and may be read in the place of *Vital Vintage Church*.)

Recommended Reading:

- *Claiming Resurrection in the Dying Church; Freedom beyond Survival* by Anna B. Olson; Westminster John Knox
- *For a New Generation: A Practical Guide for Revitalizing Your Church* by Lee D. Kricher; Zondervan
- *Facing Decline, Finding Hope; New Possibilities for Faithful Churches* by Jeffrey D. Jones; Rowman & Littlefield
- *Weird Church: Welcome to the Twenty-First Century* by Beth Ann Estock and Paul Nixon; Pilgrim Press

- *Real Good Church: How Our Church Came Back from the Dead, and Yours Can, Too* by Molly Baskette; Pilgrim Press

Course Assignments:

1. Class participation: Please bring to the first class two copies of a 1-2 page description of your setting, your background, and your goals for your congregation.
2. Please select a book from the recommended reading list or another text that contributes to the objectives of the course. Each person will be given 5-10 minutes to teach the class what they have learned from the supplementary reading.
3. Read at least two of the required textbooks and write reflection papers. These papers are not book reports (We all will have read them.), but reflections on the wisdom the reading evoked in you. What principles would apply in your setting, and how might they make a difference? What changes will be required? What additional resources? Each paper should be 2-3 pages in length and are due by the end of the last day the class meets.
4. The final project is to develop a strategic plan for energizing and transforming your congregation. This plan should include the application of principles learned in this class. The project should cover a 12-36 month period. This is due within two weeks of the end of the class

Course Schedule

Monday: After a brief time for each person to introduce themselves and describe their setting, we will spend a couple hours exploring the challenges for mainline churches in America. While we do not wish to focus on the reasons for decline, there are insights to be gained by exploring these challenges that may not be what we believe or prognosticators have always identified.

In the afternoon, we will examine the theology and strategy behind the most significant shift that must be made in your congregation: from being consumers of church to producers, guests to hosts. We will explore the theology of hospitality so that you will be better equipped to explore it with your congregation. Then we will look at specific strategies for transformation of attitudes and approaches to being the church rather than attending the church.

Tuesday: We will explore how to identify the congregation's unique identity and shape a compelling vision, mission, and brand. These steps precede discovering how to do social media marketing and creating a virtual presence. How does 21st-century evangelism work? What "hells" are we seeking to offer people respite and shelter from?

Wednesday: How do we widen the welcome of our congregation and make "welcome" an active verb? We will explore how our churches can become more diverse and authentic communities. What kind of community of faith would attract Millennials and the "nones" and "dones"?

Thursday: Our buildings are a curse and a blessing. They often define congregations in constricting ways, but they also can be leveraged to be a great asset. Today we explore the dynamics of "bricks and mortals" and the greatest advantage mainline churches don't know they have.

Friday: We will explore how we can remove the pews so we can dance. How do we create worship that is compelling and transformational? One of the major reasons people give for leaving church is that it is boring, but it doesn't have to be. We can craft an experience that can be healing, hopeful, motivating, and transforming. What mainline churches are doing isn't working, but how do you change it without becoming a martyr?

Grades

- Class participation: 33%
- Assigned Work: 33%
- Completing assigned work in a manner suitable to a graduate program: 33% This means it should be appropriately proofed, grammatically reasonable, substantive, culturally and theologically sensitive, and inclusive. [Instructor's strong bias: It is expected that you will use inclusive language.]
- Extra credit, up to 10%, may be given for creativity and initiative.

Course Expectations and Classroom Policies

Attendance Policy: Active attendance in class is required. If you know you will be unable to attend a class session please inform the professor in advance. Because this is an intensive, all classes must be attended, and missing more than two hours of a day will

result in a an automatic lowering of your final grade by 10%. Three to four or more hours of absences, without a serious reason, should be an automatic failure.

Written assignment policy

The student handbook states:

*A paper submitted for credit in one course cannot be submitted for credit in another course without the prior permission of both instructors. Hartford Seminary strictly adheres to the Plagiarism Policy. Written papers and theses must be typed and should conform to the styles and format for footnotes and acknowledgments announced by the course instructor. For additional information on format, proper footnotes, acknowledgments, etc., students are directed to consult the Hartford Seminary General Guidelines for a Research Paper. These guidelines can be picked up in the student forms center or downloaded from our website at: <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/>. Students may also consult Kate L. Turabian's, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, (6th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1996), upon which the guidelines are based. Seminary research paper guide <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/>*

Seminary Grading Scale

- A (95-100) Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
- A- (90-94) Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
- B+(87-89) Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
- B (83-86) Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.
- B-(80-82) Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
- C+(77-79) Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
- C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
- F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

- Grades range from A to C and F; A+'s and C-'s are not part of the grading system.
- On a 4.0 GPA scale -- A(4.00), A-(3.66), B+(3.33), B(3.00), B-(2.66), C+(2.33), C(2.00) and F(0.00). A grade point average of no less than B- (2.66) is required to maintain good standing. The minimum G.P.A. required for graduation is 2.75.

The DMin grade scale is different! Any DMin student should be graded on fail, low-pass, pass, high-pass. High Pass(95-100), Pass (83-94), Low Pass(70-82), and Fail(below 70)

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: Academic honesty and integrity are expected of all students. Plagiarism exists when: a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by anyone other than the one submitting the work, b) parts of the work, whether direct quotations, ideas, or data, are taken from another source without acknowledgement, c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source], or d) significant portions of one's own previous work used in another course. See "Plagiarism" at <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/>.

Appropriate Classroom etiquette and use of technology: In order to respect the community within the classroom: 1) Mute all cell phones during class; 2) Utilize laptops for the sole purpose of taking class notes. Please do not surf the web, email, or other programs during class time. Such use of the computer during class is disrespectful of the class and professor, and may result in lowering your participation grade.

Inclusive Language:

Hartford Seminary is committed to a policy of inclusion in its academic life and mission. All members of the community are expected to communicate in language that reflects the equality of genders, openness to diverse cultural and theological perspectives, and sensitivity to one another's images of God.

Extensions: Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructor.

Official Handbooks: For all other questions you might have regarding policies or procedures, please check the student handbook <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-handbook/> and seminary policies at Academic policies are listed at <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/>