

**Syllabus**  
**Church Conflict Utilization:**  
**Systemic Assessment and Intervention for Congregations**  
CM 420 3 Credit hours  
**Spring Semester, 2008**

*This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.*

**Course Description**

Handling conflict in the church is one of the more difficult tasks for the pastor. This course is designed to introduce students to a practical theological method of assessing the congregation as a complex human system and to provide skills and practice in joining the system, building a hypothesis, and planning interventions based on the congregation's inner wisdom and desire for health. The systemic approach will be compared with other approaches to church conflict utilization.

**Objectives**

- Students will be able to use theological and family systems theories to reflect on conflict in congregations as complex human systems.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to examine the structures, stories and symptoms of the congregation to discern where God may be at work and where God's work may be frustrated in the renewal and transformation of the congregation.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to assess the relative health of a congregation's structures, stories and symptoms, and the inner wisdom of health of the congregation.
- Students will to write hopeful systemic hypotheses to identify the positive function of conflict in that system.
- Students will demonstrate Increased self-awareness in the midst of conflict through mature, wise leadership.
- Students will demonstrate skills in identifying and practicing systemic intervention strategies in congregations.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to recognize and critically reflect on the place of systems approaches to the overall field of church conflict utilization.

**Requirements**

- Students will attend all classes. Participation in class accounts for 25% of the grade.
- Students will prepare a personal genogram annotated with regard to their family's patterns of utilizing conflict. The genogram accounts for 10% of the grade.
- Students will create case studies and prepare in teams to play roles in live practice of conflict intervention. Students' improvement in practical theological reflection and self-awareness in the live practice will account for 25% of the grade.
- Students will write a 15 page paper describing their theoretical approach to a particular conflict situation, indicating what theological and system concepts they would select to join, assess, build hypotheses, plan interventions, and evaluate progress. The paper accounts for 40% of the grade.
- Advanced Degree Students will read all of the additional material on other models of conflict, do additional bibliographic research on resources, and their paper will include a critical

evaluation of the systemic method in comparison with at least one other method of conflict utilization in the church.

### **Use of Inclusive Language**

Learning is fundamentally concerned with communication, self-expression, and personal and social transformation. Learning respects individuals, their feelings, their value and worth, and their particular potential for contribution to common knowledge and community virtue. Learning is fundamentally and intentionally inclusive.

Since all learning is inherently ethical and political, and theological discourse traditionally has been patriarchal and gender exclusive, the Seminary has established a policy, in the interest of constructing an inclusive and egalitarian community, that the language (symbols, metaphors) used in our class discussions and written work shall be gender inclusive and respectful of all persons and groups as valued human creatures of God.

### **Guard Against Plagiarism**

Every student and writer recognizes the risk in including the words or ideas of another writer in a paper or report without properly citing the source. In fact it is important to guard against two kinds of plagiarism: blatant dishonesty and unintentional or careless use of sources.

See Turabian (*A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 2007, 7.9) for fuller information. Plagiarism extends to the use of free materials found on the internet. To guard against inadvertent plagiarism, Turabian suggests these practices:

- "Signal every quotation, even when you cite its source"
- "Don't paraphrase too closely"
- "Usually cite a source for ideas that are not your own"
- "Don't plead ignorance, misunderstanding, or innocent intentions."

If you are not sure whether you are at risk for a particular practice, check with the professor or the Academic Support Center.

### **Accessibility Issues**

Any student who has issues of access, various learning abilities, or environmental sensitivities is invited to speak to the professor early in the term.

### **Class Attendance**

Students are expected to attend all scheduled meetings of the course, except for illness or other valid reasons.

### **Bibliography and References**

Readings on Blackboard Noted with #

Optional readings noted with asterisk\*

Cobb, John B. *Reclaiming the Church: Where the Mainline Church Went Wrong and What to Do About It*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997, ISBN 0664257208.

\*Cosgrove, Charles H. and Hatfield, Dennis D. *Church Conflict: the hidden system behind the fights*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1994. ISBN 0-687-08142-1.

\*Everest, Norma Cook. *Church Conflict*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004.

\*Hugh Halverstadt. *Managing Church Conflict*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. 0-664-25185-4

- \*Johnson, Barry. *Polarity Management*. Amherst, Mass.: Human Resource Development Press, 1992, **ISBN: 0874251761**
- \*Lott, David B., ed. *Conflict Management in Congregations*. Washington: Alban, 2001. ISBNs 1-566-99243-5
- #Luepnitz, Deborah Anna. *The Family Interpreted: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Family Therapy*, New York: Basic books, 1992, **ISBN: 0465023517**
- #McGoldrick, Monica, Randy Gerson and Sylvia Shellenberger. *Genograms: Assessment and Intervention*. New York: W.W. New York: Norton & Company; 2nd edition (March 1999) Paperback: 234 pages ISBN: 0393702944.
- #Minuchin, Salvador, and Fishman, H. Charles. *Family Therapy Techniques*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981. ISBN 0-674-29410-6,
- Sawyer, David R. *Hope in Conflict: Discovering Wisdom in Congregational Turmoil*, Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007.
- #Selvini Palazzoli, Mara, et. al., *The Hidden Games of Organizations*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. ISBN 0-394-54315-7
- Thomas, Frank A. *Spiritual Maturity: Preserving Congregational Health and Balance*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002. ISBN 0800630866.

**Class Schedule**  
**Friday evenings 6:30-9 p.m**  
**Saturday Mornings 9 a.m to noon**  
**alternating weekends.**  
**Schlegel Hall**

**Friday**  
**February 8**      Introductions, course overview, beginning to map our own conflict situations  
Practical theology, reflecting on systems theories and process theology to understand the congregation as a complex human system  
Discussion of assignments: genograms, case studies, conflict teams, papers.  
Read for today: Sawyer, Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2

**Saturday**  
**February 9**      Selecting family systems techniques to work in congregational conflict,  
Joining the System, Minuchin Tape  
Read for today: Minuchin and Fishman, Chs. 2, 3, 5.  
and Luepnitz, Chapter 5

**Friday**  
**February 22**      Elements of systemic work in congregational conflict  
Looking at Structures  
Read for today: Sawyer Chapter 3

**Saturday February 23**    Listening To Stories, Learning from Symptoms  
Read for Today Sawyer Chapters 4-5

**Friday**  
**March 7**      Building a Positive Systemic Hypothesis  
Read for today: Sawyer Chapter 6  
and Leupnitz, Chapter 9

**Saturday March 8**      **Challenging the system for Hope**  
Interventions  
More work on hypotheses  
Interventions  
Read for today: Selvini-Palazzoli, Chs. 5, 6, 8.  
Sawyer Chapter 7

**Friday April 11**      Wise, Mature Leadership in Conflict  
Self-Differentiation, Anxiety, Reactivity, Clarity, Decisiveness, Courage  
Discuss Genograms  
Read for today: Thomas, McGoldrick, Chs 1-2, Sawyer, Chapter 8  
and Leupnitz, Chapter 3.

**Saturday**  
**Apr 12**      Live Practice of Conflict Interventions

**Friday**  
**Apr 25**      The Inner Wisdom of Conflict  
Change, transformation, and system symptoms.

Process theology and Henry Nelson Wieman  
Read for today: Cobb, Chs. 2, 3.

**Saturday April 26**      Live Practice

**Friday**                      Measuring Progress and Tapping Health  
**May 9**                      Critiquing the structural and strategic approach  
Read for today: Sawyer Chapter 9, Conclusion

**Saturday**                  Live Practice  
May 10                      Wrap Up