

Assignments for Seminar I Preparation

January 5-16, 2008
Dr. Marian McClure
Dr. Debra J. Mumford

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.

At the heart of our work together will be discussions of ministry situations—that is, your context for ministry as well as your sense of who you are in ministry.

We have three types of assignments for preparation:

- 1) Story in Ministry (1 page, due December 29th)
- 2) Reading and Preparing to Lead a Discussion (discussion questions)
- 3) Reflection on Context (brief presentation, artifact/props)

There is plenty of preparation to do, but not a lot of writing for this seminar.

Before you Come – Course Pre-Work

1) Story in Ministry

“Tell me about a time when...”

That’s how we often are invited to tell another person about what matters most to us.

For the seminar we want you to tell a story to the group. We want to hear a true story about a time in ministry, at your present location, when you were faced with a difficult challenge...when your expertise made a difference...when something unexpected happened.

Write the story down. Make it concise (no more than a page and a half).

The experience can span months or be a particular pastoral conversation

Include a description of those involved.

Be clear about the timeline; movement in time forwards and backwards.

Describe the tension related to a quest or a goal.

Identify a key moment or key moments.

Mark decision points.

Note if there was resolution or partial resolution of the tension.

Tell if there was some change in the characters as a result of the experience.

You will present your story to the seminar. Together, we will dig deeper to get a richer story that will add to our reflection of the practice of ministry.

Please send the story to both Marian McClure and Debra Mumford by December 29, 2008

Marian McClure - marian.mcclure@gmail.com
Debra J. Mumford – dmumford@lpts.edu

2) Reading and Preparing to Lead a Discussion

Below are the required readings for our seminar and we ask you to read them before Jan. 5th. (All are available for purchase online.) We have chosen a variety of works to support our seminar conversations and to feed and challenge our theological imaginations, especially in relation to practice.

Avram, Wes. *Anxious about Empire: Theological Essays on the New Global Realities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004.

Boers, Arthur Paul. "What Must a Pastor Know: Reflections on Congregational Studies." Online article can be found at: <http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/essays.aspx>

Haig, Kris. "Discernment: Theological Assumptions and Practical Prerequisites" Online article can be found at: <http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/discernment.pdf>

Sawyer, Mary R. *The Church on the Margins: Living Christian Community*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003.

Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* Fortress Resources for Preaching. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

General. As you read let the following kinds of questions dwell in the back of your mind. These are suggestive of the kinds of conversations we are anticipating:

- *How does the book or author's experience help clarify your own sense of who you are in ministry and the context in which you serve?*
- *How does the content speak to the disciplines and practices, beliefs and convictions that sustain or energize your faith and vocation?*
- *How do the answers to these questions and your experiences affect your discernment and decision-making?*

Specific. Please come prepared not only to participate in, but also to lead, a discussion with the group concerning any/all these readings. We will determine who leads which discussions when you arrive and depending upon the final count of seminar participants, we will pair or triple you up as discussion leaders. Keep preparation simple: we suggest creating a handful of good questions for each work that will lead us to the heart of their core ideas.

3) Reflection on Context

With others, we would like you to reflect upon your context for ministry, either your congregation or other institution or community in which your ministry takes place.

1. Gather your “At Home Learning Group” (described in a separate attachment) for a discussion. We suggest, as background for the discussion, inviting the group to read the online article, “What Must a Pastor Know” (cited above) as a way of reviewing and critiquing the field of “congregational studies.”
2. *Group Reflection.* In light of the article, ask the group to reflect upon strengths and change in your setting.

Strengths. Tell each other stories that convey the strengths of your situation. What do these stories say about: the practices of the community, its uses of power and ways of making decisions, its rituals/patterns of inclusion and belonging, and its care for boundaries.

Change. First, note and talk about any changes in the *surrounding community* of the ministry setting (e.g., shifts in demographics, culture, economy, political structures).

Second, note and discuss changes in the *life of the congregation* in such things as:

1. Changes in lives of the leaders of the organization, either clergy or others, such as family changes—birth, death, illness, marriages or divorces, changes in parents or children of key leaders,
 2. Changes in personnel (hiring/firing/resignation of key leaders)
 3. Rise or resolution of conflict
 4. Restructuring in the organization or governance
(these examples are drawn from Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, Guilford, 1985, pp. 204-205)
3. *Individual Reflection:* What did you learn about the strengths and change in your setting? Be prepared to introduce and summarize your context to the seminar in 15-20 minutes. You may want to prepare a brief handout of key issues (no more than a page). Consider using other aids, such as photos, short video/audio clip of a story told, or a map of the neighborhood, to help us understand your situation more vividly.

We are very excited about our chance to learn together! See you January 5th.