

HC 131 The Church and Social Justice
Fall 2004

Instructor: Cynthia Milsap
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Class meeting time: Wednesdays 6 p.m. – 9 p.m.
Competencies: A3X, H4, H2X, H1X

Course description: Recognizing the impact of religious teaching and religious organizations in the development of individual and social moral values, this course seeks to look at the role of religious organizations, primarily Christian, and how they influence and shape social values. The course will also look at the interplay of culture and religion and how different cultural and social positions shape religious faith and social action. This includes a discussion of the impact of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation and how these identities are defined by one's religious beliefs. We will look at the role of the church via its activities, role models, and teachings on personal and communal responsibility. The course will explore the points of conflict where religious institutions with the same general faith take opposing positions on political and social issues such as Civil Rights or housing.

Students will actively explore the role of the church as a community resource. They will participate in class discussions, readings, and a group case study that will help them see how religious organizations serve as a source of personal spiritual and moral development, social services, social justice, political advocacy, community organizing, and community economic development. We will also take an historical look at the role of the church in the city, reflecting upon its changing role as it seeks to spread the social gospel and to be responsive to the communities it serves. Additionally, we will discuss how churches, at the local and denominational levels, are partnering with other religious, interfaith, government, and/or nonprofit agencies to address community social and economic needs.

Learning Objectives: 1) To assist students in learning about and becoming more competent in developing programs that foster good church and community relations; 2) To increase student understanding different religious and cultural histories and perspectives; 3) to expose students to the varied roles that religious institutions play in individual and community development; 4) to discuss how one's cultural context influences his or her social justice values; and 5) to reveal how faith can be used to build communities and to organize people politically, so that they can advocate for changes that improve the quality of life for themselves and/or others, and 6) to increase one's awareness of his or her own cultural and religious perspectives, biases, and limitations, and awareness of how faith influences one's personal concept of social justice and community involvement.

Class Books

- 1) Green, Clifford. (1996) *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States, 1945-1985*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. ISBN # 0-8028-4208-9
- 2) Jacobsen, Dennis A. (2001) *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. ISBN # 0-8006-3244-3
- 3) Harper, Niles (1999) *Urban Churches, Vital Signs: Beyond Charity Toward Justice*. Grand Rapids MI: Wm B.Eerdmans Publishing co.
- 4) Perkins, John M. (1993) *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development*. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books.

General topic areas/weekly class discussion focus

Week 1 Introduction to the Church and Social Justice

*What or who is the church, and what is its role in society?
What is the impact of the city on the church and vice-versa?*

Week 2 Race and Social Justice

*What is the church's role in addressing racism?
Discussion of Dr. Martin L. King Jr.'s letter from a Birmingham Jail*

Week 3 Housing, Education, and Economics

Spiritual or Social: Where should the church's focus be?

Week 4 Politics and Community Organizations: Mobilizing for change

*Whose community and interests are we fighting for?
Who is the community?*

Week 5 Health and Human Services

What is the church's role in providing social/health services?

Week 6 Legal Rights: Immigration, criminal justice, and due process

Is there a separation of church and state? Where does the church stand on matters of law and public policy when it impacts human rights?

Week 7 Women's Rights and Sexual Orientation issues

*What role do women play in the church and community?
Does the gospel include or exclude GLBTQ members of our community?*

Week 8 Class Presentations

Week 9 Class Presentations

Week 10 Final Class/Wrap-up Discussion

**A detailed list of course readings will be provided on the first night of class.*

Grading and Course Assignments

1) Group project	35 percent
2) Class Participation	
Attendance and Discussion	20 percent
Feedback papers	10 percent
Personal Journaling	10 percent
3) Final Paper	25 percent

1) Group project. Students will select a church or church-related organization and do a case study on that organization and its approach to social justice. Students will work in groups of 2 to 3 persons, depending on class size, and will visit a church or organization of their choice and gather the following information: Organizational history; social justice issues identified by the church/organization; information on the organization's method of addressing social issues and needs via programs, advocacy, etc.; an analysis of the organizational programs and recommendations for change or expansion to meet community needs; demographics of the community served by the organization; if a church, demographics of its membership v. that of immediate neighborhood surrounding the church.

The selection of church or organization can be based on community location or community issues that the group would like to investigate (i.e. housing, racial reconciliation, education, job development, healthcare, arts/recreation, community economic development, etc.). The group will have 45 minutes to present their findings to the class. All members of the group must participate in the church or organizational visit, the compilation of information for the presentation, and the class presentation. Students will receive a group grade for the case study.

2) Class Participation

- **Attendance and Discussion** - All students are expected to attend class per SNL attendance rules and to inform the instructor if there are situations such as job travel which may require absence(s). Students receive class participation points for being present and participating in class discussions. Feedback papers and personal journaling are considered a part of the overall the Class participation grade.
- **Feedback papers** -- Students will be assigned occasional in-class or take-home feedback or opinion papers where they are asked to respond to a general question that asks them to reflect on a topic related to the day's discussions or readings. These 1 to 2 page papers are designed to give the instructor feedback on how students are processing readings or discussions. They are not graded or judged, but are counted toward the student's participation grade.
- **Personal journaling** - Students are encouraged to journal their learning and reflections weekly. These journals will not be graded, but will be discussed as part of class activities.

3) Final paper - Each student will write a 7 to 10 page (typed double-spaced) final paper according to MLA style w/reference page. Persons with two competences will write one paper, but will have to select a topic, which incorporates both competences. Paper topics will deal with analysis of individual, institutional, and community change and power relations issues and will vary according to competencies. All topics must be discussed with and approved by the instructor. Final Papers are due one week after the final class session.

Faculty: Cynthia R. Milsap has served as a Visiting professor at DePaul University's School for nine years. She teaches courses on the African American Church, Women in leadership, and the role of the Church in the struggle for Social Justice. She has served as Executive Director for The Night Ministry, a faith-based nonprofit organization that serves the health, housing, pastoral counseling, and social service needs of homeless and at-risk youth and adults throughout Chicago's diverse neighborhoods. She has also served as coordinator of Faith-based research and training at DePaul's Egan Urban Center and is a co-author of *The Black Churches of West Humboldt Park (1999)*, a report on the role of small congregations in community development. She also teaches courses to ministers and lay leaders involved in multi-cultural and urban ministry through the SCUPE (the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education). She is currently providing development services for Matthew House, a homeless agency. She is completing her doctoral work at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, IL, where her dissertation research focuses on the educational process of ministers engaged in urban ministry and community leadership. She also provides consulting services to other religious or nonprofit organizations engaged in homeless services, social services, or community development.