PT610: Senior Seminar in Practical Theology and Practice of Ministry
Instructor: Janet Gear
Spring 2016: Five classes of 3hrs (or equivalent; consult timetable for course delivery details)
Email: jgear@vst.edu

PURPOSE
To lead from the heart of a community’s lived faith requires a capacity to read and interpret the theologies operative within a given context. The purpose of this senior seminar is to allow us to practice our skills as practical theologians – as interpreters of the implicit and explicit theologies shaping and expressing the belief and unbelief about God/world/church of those with whom we live, work, and serve.

Everywhere churches are inviting people to “be the new church” – a “Fresh Expression” “church plant,” “intentional Christian community,” or “mission-shaped-ministry.” Experts and consultants in missional strategies and revitalization abound but what theological resources do congregational ministers bring to those conversations? What is the relationship between a congregation’s theologies – its various understandings of who God is and what human life is for – and its plans for the future? Is there one?

Spiritual Care Givers in agencies and institutions are exposed to a plethora of theologies and a/theologies in their everyday encounters with workmates, administrators, patients, clients and their families. Self awareness about one’s own understanding of God/world/self, a capacity to read implicit and explicit theologies operative in the agency/institution, and fluency across theological worldviews is imperative for navigating relationships in this profession.

The task of practical theology is necessarily a task of reflecting critically on the context, including its implicit and explicit beliefs or assumptions about God/world/church. Building on the work begun in previous Pastoral and Public Leadership courses, PT610 will pay continued attention to three core issues affecting the practice of ministry: identity, theology, and context. Students will use methodologies of theological interpretation and reflection to engage emerging issues in the practice of ministry with an eye to learning to lead from the locus of the community’s lived faith. This course will support the foundational integrative work required for preparing the position paper on ministry (PT698). This course may share learning opportunities with IPI501 and PT511 as available.

FORMAT
Situated at the crossroads of theory and practice, and at the threshold of professional ministry, this seminar will draw on students’ experience of ministry, capacity for effective group process, and knowledge of the disciplines of their field. All participants in the seminar, including students, guest practitioners, and instructor are colleagues. We will equip ourselves for teaching and learning together through careful emotional, intellectual and spiritual preparedness for our meetings.

PRE-REQUISITE
This senior seminar is normally taken in the final year of the M.Div (or ministry-focussed MA-PPL) program, after successful completion of one or both terms of the PT651/2 Leadership Studio.
COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES
Assignments are designed to enable students to demonstrate a mature spiritual life, authentic and denominationally grounded pastoral identity, and readiness for public and pastoral leadership through:

- a demonstrated ability to read and respond to the implicit and explicit theologies in a ministry context
- the ability to critically analyse the impact of globalization on the ways in which human dilemmas are diversely experienced in a particular context
- ability to articulate the purpose, call, or mission of communities of faith (within and beyond current congregational models) in this time and place and locate oneself and one’s leadership within that context
- ability to formulate questions which lead to deeper learning (hermeneutic circle) and widen the parameters of collective inquiry
- an ability to situate oneself within one’s denominational ecclesiology and understanding of pastoral authority
- ability to work collaboratively

Students will bring additional desired outcomes to the class based on area of competence in ministry they are keen to explore or refine.

EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA
This class will assume a collaborative learning model in which all are teachers and learners. Because of the participatory nature of the seminar, your attendance and full participation are essential. If you need to be absent, please inform the instructors in advance. Arriving on time for class is a sign of respect for others – this is also expected.

As a course designed to engage practitioners, this class may be delivered in a variety of settings. All arrangements for off-site requirements will be agreed upon in the first class. Good leadership includes preparing well and meeting deadlines. Class sessions will assume that you have done any reading assigned for the day. Grades are lowered for lack of preparation and late assignments.

In addition, as per VST requirements:
1. Attendance as specified in Student Handbook.
2. Adherence to VST’s expectations for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
3. In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are expected when making reference to the divine life.
4. Completion of readings and written assignments as outlined in the syllabus.
5. Full participation in seminars, class discussions and exercises as outlined in syllabus and class covenant.

NOTE: VST is committed to creating safe space and inclusive learning environment. If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical
requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

ASSIGNMENTS:
Assignments will be outlined on the first class. These include:

1. Preparation and presentation of report on theological landscape of ministry context
2. Preparation of CV and participation in mock interview for ministry position
3. Preparation of outline for ministry position paper
4. Presentation of relevant bibliographic resources pertaining to issues raised in class

Details will be provided in the first class.

REQUIRED READINGS:
The required reading in 600 level courses is 75-125 pages per week. Adjustments are made for those for whom English is not a first language.

Students in PT610 are required to select readings of their choice from the bibliography below and be prepared to share acquired knowledge and insights from those readings as invited. These books are on reserve in the library. Articles will be posted on Moodle (within the first two weeks of classes).

As the curriculum for this seminar is built on the desired outcomes of the students, additional readings may be added or suggested.

Students are required to purchase this text:
   Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction* Eerdmans 2008

BIBLIOGRAPHY:


Berryman, Jerome, *Children and the Theologians: Clearing the Way for Grace*, Morehouse 2009

Block, Peter, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Berrett-Koehler 2008


Butler Bass, Diana *Strength for the Journey: A Pilgrimage of Faith in Community*, Jossey-Bass 2004
Butler Bass, Diana *The Practicing Congregation*, Alban Institute 2004


Clark-King, *Theology by Heart*, Epworth 2005

Sedmak, Clemens, *Doing Local Theology* Orbis 2002


Graham, Elaine, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age*, SCM Press, 2013


Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction* Eerdmans 2008

Palmer, Parker, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* Harper One 1993

