PURPOSE:

This course is a topical study of the book of Ecclesiastes. We will read Ecclesiastes as a reflection on the joys, difficulties, and frustrations of daily life. After considering, on the first day, how the book reflects on communal and individual experiences in ancient Israel, we will then turn to three case studies: the ethics of work, enjoyment in times of empires, and death and dying. On the final day, we will gather the various strands of these discussions by thinking together about faith in a time of social dislocation. The overall aim is to create a conversation between the biblical text and issues that face us in everyday life. The purpose is not to find an ‘answer’ to Ecclesiastes, a final statement about what the book is about. Instead we will draw from its complex and puzzling words suggestions for how to live well in a troubling and often chaotic world.

EXPECTATIONS AND COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify and discuss major interpretive cruxes in Ecclesiastes
- Use close reading and exegesis to interpret the text of Ecclesiastes
- Apply their interpretations of Ecclesiastes to contemporary pastoral issues

REQUIRED READINGS:

The main text for this course is Ecclesiastes itself. **Before class begins, read it in its entirely several times through.** Please come to the first day having either:

1) read the NRSV translation of Ecclesiastes several times through. If possible, read it out loud, preferably in a group or with a partner.

2) read Ecclesiastes in several translations, one of which should be the NRSV. We will work from the NRSV in class, but reading several translations will give you a sense of some of the major interpretive cruxes of the book. If possible, read at least one translation out loud, preferably in a group or with a partner.

Required Books:


**Note:** only the section on Ecclesiastes (pp. 159-228) is required reading.


**Note:** Only Chapter II, “Breast Cancer: A Black Lesbian Feminist Experience,” is required reading, though the book is short (79), and rewarding in its entirety.

*Note:* Read the book in its entirety.

**Required Articles:**


Bowler, Kate. “Death, the Prosperity Gospel and Me,” *New York Times,* February 13, 2016. [Will be emailed to students]


**ASSIGNMENTS**

**Reading and Class Participation:**

All Students including auditors are expected to do all the required readings and participate in class discussions. 100% attendance is required of Certificate and Degree students.

**Written Assignments:**

1. **Certificate students** will respond to one of the provided case studies in a 5-6 page. The paper should apply a close reading of Ecclesiastes or section of Ecclesiastes to the pastoral situation presented in the case study. Students can either write a reflection based on the case study (what are the major issues present in the case study, how might Ecclesiastes speak to these) or a script of a conversation between the characters in the case study. If you choose the latter, use footnotes to tie the specifics of the conversation to the course material, that is, to the text of Ecclesiastes itself and to secondary readings.

2. **Basic degree students** (Diploma; MA; M.Div) will respond to one of the provided case studies in a 6-8 page (1500-1875 words). The paper should apply a close reading of Ecclesiastes or section of Ecclesiastes to the pastoral situation presented in the case study. Students can either write a reflection based on the case study (what are the major issues present in the case study, how might Ecclesiastes speak to these) or a script of a conversation between the characters in the case study. If you choose the latter, use footnotes to tie the specifics of the conversation to the course material, that is, to the text of Ecclesiastes itself and to secondary readings.

3. **Advanced degree students** (Th.M) have two options:
   a. You may either choose one of the case studies and submit a two-part paper, totaling 15-17 pages (3750-4250 words). The first part should be a script of a conversation between the characters in the case study. Use footnotes to tie the specifics of the conversation to the course material, that is, to the text of Ecclesiastes itself and to secondary readings. The second part should be a commentary on a pertinent short passage from Ecclesiastes (no more than a chapter; I would recommend 12-15
The commentary need not have a thesis, but should include discussion of literary devices, themes, the context of the passage, etc. The two parts of the paper should support each other; the conversation in the first part should arise out of the commentary in the second, and the passage should be chosen for its ability to cast light on the topics of the conversation. You may choose the length of each part, but neither should be shorter than 5 pages.

b. You may submit a research paper on a topic of your choice related to the course. The paper should support a thesis and be 15-17 pages (3750-4250 words).

Further details about assignments will be provided on the course syllabus, handed out in class.

4. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


