

Instructor: Rev. Mary Nichol
Director of Theological Field Education
Vancouver School of Theology
Email: mnichol@vst.edu Phone/Text: 778-980-1374
You can book an appointment via [Calendly](#) for onsite (Room 418) or zoom

PRACTICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP: LEADING IN CONTEXT PT505
Spring 2026

Course Outline
A Syllabus will be posted in Populi

PURPOSE:

Building on the skills and understanding of *Theological and Spiritual Foundations for Pastoral and Public Leadership* (PT500), *Leading in Context* will provide method and opportunity to explore potential practicum sites that combine leadership challenges, ministry possibilities and offer excellent learning opportunities in pastoral and public ministry. To be effective in ministry practice and leadership in the public sphere, it is critical to understand the field and its demands, expectations, and possibilities. Preparation for practice of ministry is not introduced simply as skill development but rather as the formation of leaders who will understand and respond to the continually changing landscape of contemporary ministry and navigate communities in the art of resourced and adaptive change.

PT505 (*Leading in Context*) runs concurrently with Theological Field Education – Exploration (TFE-E), which is required for all students in the MDiv and MA-PPL degrees. During this Spring Term course, students explore potential field sites where they might follow up on their vocational interests expressed in the work of PT 500. They interview potential mentors, conduct site analysis, consider their learning styles, explore different models of leadership and theological reflection and reflect on the ethical requirements of research with human subjects. The work in PT505 is assessed APPROVED/NOT APPROVED or INCOMPLETE.

At the end of PT505, students prepare a Project Proposal that will be suitable to the requirements of *TFE-P: Leadership in Practice* and PT651/652 (The Studio) or *TFE-FC: Leadership in Faith Community*. (The determination of which TFE program the student moves into will be made in discussion with the Director.) Successful presentation of the Project Proposal, which contains a description and analysis of the proposed learning site, an introduction to the proposed mentor and the project proposal, marks the completion of TFE - Exploration. This approval admits the student to TFE-P: Leadership in Practice (TFE-P1 and P2) and PT651/652 (The Studio) or TFE-FC: Leadership in Faith Community. If the student

is not planning to proceed with either TFE program in the following term, it is possible to delay the Proposal Presentation (withdrawing from TFE-E: Exploration) upon approval of the TFE Director.

For more information, see the Theological Field Education *Handbook*, pp. 9-12 and the diagram on p. 13.

PREREQUISITES: PT 500 *Introduction to Practical Theology: Spiritual and Theological Foundations for Public and Pastoral Leadership*.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

Demonstrated ability in the following:

- **contextual analysis** of church and community contexts (e.g. demographics, socioeconomic realities, history, mission and how it was shaped, ethos, ethnography, beliefs, theological orientation).
- **cross-sectoral analysis:** development of the skills and knowledge necessary to critically analyze leadership situations across various dimensions, including ecclesial/social agency governance and policy issues.
- **learning for leading:**
 - **learning styles and self-understanding:** developing and implementing knowledge of one's own preferred style of learning; increased awareness of one's own gifts and weaknesses as a leader to maximize growth and integration in articulating spiritual vocation as related to leadership.
 - **learning goals and learning opportunities:** the establishment of personal learning goals and discernment of learning opportunities in faith or community organizations as they seek to respond to their context: pandemic, changing church, changing realities and needs in society.
- **research with human subjects:** demonstrated understanding of the requirements of research with human subjects and program implementation.
- **theological reflection:** discernment of, and theological reflection upon, the *missio Dei* of potential practicum sites.

6015 WALTER GAGE ROAD
VANCOUVER, BC V6T 1Z1
CANADA

1-866-822-9031
INFO@VST.EDU

FORMAT AND CONTENT:

Seminar Format: Ten 3-hour seminars plus one presentation session **on April 8, 2026, 9am to 12pm**. This presentation session may last for an extended time depending on the number of students in the class.

This course is synchronous, hybrid, and there is no asynchronous participation.

Course work will include:

- Direct observation in the field in a variety of contexts
- Interviewing on site – staff, constituency, parish/agency committees, small groups

- Researching history and tradition and contexts of a community
- Practice of theological reflection
- Documentation of site exploration
- Clarification of personal approaches to learning
- Development of Learning Goals and Learning Covenants

TEXTS:

Students are not required to purchase any texts. Specific brief readings will be assigned on the syllabus, posted on Populi, and will be taken from among these and other sources:

Peter Block. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2004).

Barbara J. Blodgett. *Becoming the Pastor You Hope to Be: Four Practices for Improving Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2011).

Barbara J. Blodgett and Matthew Floding, eds. *Brimming with God: Reflecting Theologically on Cases in Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

Kathleen A. Cahalan. *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

Matthew Floding, ed. *Engage: A Theological Field Education Toolkit* (Lanham, MD, 2017).

Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird. *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013).

Parker Palmer. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2004).

Sung Hee Chang and Matthew Floding, eds. *Enlighten: Formational Learning in Theological Field Education* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

COURSE POLICIES

1. **Attendance** For a weekly course, VST requires at least 80% attendance. For an intensive course, VST requires 100% attendance.

(If course is run both on campus and as distance, it's helpful to specify further for each status; for example: "For **on-campus students**, this means attending class on time with no more than 2 allowable absences for any reason. For **distance students**, this means attending class through Zoom synchronously with class with no more than 2 allowable absences for any reason.")

2. **Reading and assignments** Students are expected to read all required assignments before class and to complete all assignments as outlined in the syllabus within the specified dates of the course and term.
3. **Academic honesty** Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
4. **Inclusive language** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
5. **Assignment and Course Evaluation**
 - Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is "Not Approved") including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.
 - Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write.
 - For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.
6. **Late assignments**
Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course.
7. **Limitation on use of social media**
Ordinarily, the use of electronic devices in the contexts of classrooms or meetings will be to support the learning, formation, or agenda at hand.
8. **Limitation on use of class material and images**
No material from Zoom classes, including screen capture pictures of their fellow students, professors, and CTAs cannot be posted to Facebook or any other social media without the express consent of the affected individuals.
9. **VST is committed to creating safe space and an 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.

CALENDAR

Seminar meeting dates: The following Mondays from 9am to 12pm - January 19, 26, February 2, 9, 23, March 9, 16, 23, 30, April 8*, & 13

***Note:** April 8 is a Wednesday, and we will meet 9am – 12 noon (approximate, depending on the number of presentations) for your TFE Presentations to the students in PT652.

Attendance at each seminar is considered important for successful preparation for Theological Field Education programs.

Details for each seminar will be in the course syllabus posted in Populi.

EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS, AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

Evaluation will be based on:

- Seven short written assignments
For each assignment 500 to 800 words, double spaced.
 - **Assignment #1:** Succinct Theology of Ministry
 - A description of your understanding of theology of ministry. What does it mean for you as a Christian/Faith leader to serve as a minister and how does this leadership intersect with the work of Jesus Christ in the world.
 - **Assignment #2:** Learning Styles and Learning Goals
 - A reflection of your learning style: what works best and what doesn't work for your learning?
 - **Assignment #3:** Theological Reflection Exercise
 - Using one of the exercises explored in class, from the reading, or the TFE Handbook reflect theologically on a recent experience in your community of faith or life context. Please begin with an experience and briefly describe the context. Be sure to describe clearly what method you are using for this theological reflection.
 - **Assignment #4:** Adaptive Leadership
 - Using both readings and class discussion articulate your understanding of adaptive leadership and how do you see it showing up or not in your community of faith or context?
 - **Assignment #5:** Self as Leader
 - Using the Four-Fold practice what do you notice about how you show up in your community of faith, family or another group context?
 - **Assignment #6:** Learning Goals Draft
 - Draft of 3-5 Learning goals as they relate to your TFE Proposal

- **Assignment #7: Theological Reflection Exercise**
 - Using one of the exercises explored in class, from the reading, or the TFE Handbook reflect theologically on a recent experience in your community of faith or life context. Please begin with an experience and briefly describe the context. Be sure to describe clearly what method you are using for this theological reflection.
- Active participation in the seminar.
- A final oral and written TFE Proposal presentation:
 - At the second to final seminar date (April 9) students will provide a seven-minute visual presentation based on their exploration process that artfully and passionately communicates to peers and the instructor their site and field proposal.
 - A written TFE proposal is to be completed using the TFE Proposal template. You are expected to follow the instructions in the proposal template and write in a traditional paper format using citations where appropriate. Include a copy of your visual presentation in this proposal.

The student's evaluation of PT505 will be either *Approved/Not Approved*. Students who receive *Approved* in PT505, and who successfully present their Proposal are allowed to move into either PT651 Public and Pastoral Leadership: The *Studio* and *TFE-P: Leadership in Practice* or *TFE_FC: Leadership in Faith Community*, pending completion of all documents.