

UNIVERSITY OF DUBUQUE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
MN616 01, The Use of the Psalms in Christian Worship
Spring 2025

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3 Credits; Letter grade

Prerequisites: MN501 Foundations of Christian Worship, or with permission of the instructor

Course Description

This residential course explores the full breadth of the psalms in their various genres and functions; the history of their liturgical use in ancient Israel, and in the early, medieval, Reformation and modern eras; and the practical possibilities for using the psalms more broadly and effectively in worship today, including preaching the psalms.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- recognize and use the language of the psalms, and classify them according to their function;
- analyze and discover in the full range of the psalms expressions of the totality of human experience;
- reconstruct and summarize the rich history of psalmody in worship;
- select, interpret, employ, and explain the psalms in worship and preaching, and develop new repertoires and resources for congregations.

Program Learning Objectives

In order to serve the one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and prepare women and men for faithful, compassionate, and effective pastoral ministry, this course contributes to the following curricular goals of the Master of Divinity (MDiv) program, in that it will enable students to:

- be formed by, live in, and minister out of scripture and the historical and theological tradition of the church
- interpret the Christian Scriptures through faithful exegesis and in light of the Christian tradition
- preach the Word of God with faithfulness and clarity
- lead worship and administer the sacraments with theological integrity and to the glory of God
- provide pastoral care for individuals and congregations in daily life and moment of transition and crisis

This course also contributes to the following learning objectives of the **Master of Arts in Reformed Theology (MART)** curriculum, by enabling students to:

- Identify and articulate the core commitments of the Christian tradition with a focus on the Reformed tradition

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- Analyze how key theological terms and concepts emerged and function within the Christian tradition and, more specifically, the Reformed tradition
- Explain how key theological terms and concepts have been understood and applied in Christian congregations of various times and places, and, more specifically, congregations of the Reformed tradition

... and to the program learning objectives of the **Master of Arts in Ministry (MAM)** curriculum, by enabling students to:

- Articulate and interpret key themes from the Christian scriptures in conversation with contemporary and ecclesial contexts
- Develop pastoral and practical theological methods and strategies for cultivating renewed and transformative ministry contexts
- Apply key practices for personal, communal, and ministerial flourishing and compose a coherent plan for life and ministry

Ministry Division

The Ministry division seeks to help students develop a capacity to comprehend theories for the practice of ministry, develop skills necessary for pastoral tasks, and the integration of these. In this way, students begin to devise and articulate a pastoral theology.

The goals included in the successful completion of the required ministry courses for the degree programs are:

- To provide knowledge and experiences of the worship and prayer of the people of God
- To provide knowledge of, and significant practice in, the ministry of proclamation
- To provide skills and capabilities in the discipling, evangelistic, pastoral and governance dimensions of the church's task
- To help future pastors develop sensitivity to the contexts in which they are leading congregations

Methods of Assessment

- Faithful attendance, active and respectful participation in class discussions (10%)
- Mid-term quiz on the content of the Psalms (20%)
- Timely completion of all written assignments:
 - + A paper on the individual psalms of lament, explaining their function and exploring whether and in what ways they may be best used in public worship (20%)
 - + A 50-day journal or "travelogue" through the Psalms, using the skip-fifty reading plan (three psalms per day), modeled in *Sitometrion*. This "daily" journal should record the psalms you read each day, and consist of at least twelve (12) substantive entries containing (a) your original prayers, devotionals, or other worship elements inspired by the psalms; (b) your notes of connections

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between the psalms and other parts of the canon; (c) sermon ideas or draft lesson plans for teaching the psalms; (d) at least one metrical paraphrase of a psalm to be sung (with meter indicated and possible tune[s] suggested for singing); (e) any other insights and inspirations that occur to you from your engagement with the Psalms. You may wish to decide in advance whether your reflections will focus on a particular season (for the sake of liturgical writing); e.g., the Sundays after Epiphany, the Sundays of Lent, the Sundays of Easter, or with the prospect of preaching *lectio continua* through a specific book of the Bible (30%)
+ A sermon based on a selected psalm (20%)

Grading Scale:

94—100	A	90—93	A—
87—89	B+	84—86	B
80—83	B—	77—79	C+
74—76	C	70—73	C—
67—69	D+	64—66	D
60—63	D—	0—59	F

Bibliography

Required Texts:

- Sally A. Brown, Patrick D. Miller, eds., *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)
Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984)
William Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993)
J. Clinton McCann, Jr., and James C. Howell, *Preaching the Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001)
Timothy Matthew Slemmons, *Elaborations of the Psalms (1—50)* (Independently published, 2020)
John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction & Guide to Resources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007)

Recommended Texts:

- Eliot Young, *Sitometrion* (Independently published, 2020)

PRECOURSE READING: [It is recommended that you begin, on Christmas Day, 2024, if at all possible, reading *Sitometrion* (with Psalms 1, 51, 101) and Slemmons ("Introduction," pp. xi-xvi, and Psalms 1—20, pp. 1-70) each daily. If you have not done so before the first day of class, then your 50-day cycle of daily Psalm readings can begin on January 14, 2025 with Psalms 21, 71, 121, and likewise, Slemmons, with Psalm 21.]