

UNIVERSITY OF DUBUQUE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

MN643: The Liturgical Year

Fall 2025 (Distance and Residential: Monday, 1:00–2:50PM)

Instructor: Timothy M. Slemmons

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3 Credits; Letter grade or Pass/Fail

Prerequisites: MN501 Leading Christian Worship (may be waived with permission of the instructor)

Course Description

This course seeks to (1) retrace and expose key historical and theological developments in the evolution of the Christian Year, including its roots in the feasts of Israel; (2) give thematic consideration to the major seasons of the liturgical year; (3) critically evaluate the strengths and liabilities of using the Revised Common Lectionary for worship planning and preaching; (4) explore fruitful avenues of supplementing the limited scriptural diet of lectionary-based churches with a view to the spiritual formation of congregations; and (5) restore the entirety of the scriptural canon and the theological encyclopedia to full functionality in the planning of prophetic, programmatic preaching and vital, eschatological worship, mitigating the effect of vain repetition and merely temporal observances (Gal 3:10) that undermine the church's spiritual vitality, witness, and mission.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- recognize and select among the available approaches for selecting texts for worship and preaching;
- analyze and describe in the student's specific denominational and congregational context, particular areas of deficiency in biblical literacy, theological knowledge, and spiritual practice, that give rise to the most pressing problems and pathologies in the church;
- apply principles acquired in this course in order to ensure the congregation hears from fullness of scripture over time;
- develop a programmatic approach to preaching and worship that aims to address these areas of deficiency, beginning with those that align with needs identified in their contextual analysis;
- design and explain a particular worship service in which they bring the richness of the biblical canon, theological tradition, and spiritual disciplines, to bear with the aim of liberating worship from an overemphasis on the times and seasons of the *temporale* calendar and orienting it toward a properly Trinitarian (missiological and eschatological) framework.

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M.Div. Curricular Goals

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 M.Div. program, in that it will enable students to:

- nurture habits and disciplines of study, prayer and reflection that increase their love of God and neighbor and shape their personal and professional lives
- be formed by, live in, and minister out of scripture and the historical and theological tradition of the church
- lead worship and administer the sacraments with theological integrity and to the glory of God
- engage contemporary theological and ethical issues with insight and humility
- educate and equip individuals and congregations to live and minister joyfully and faithfully as part of their own denomination and the ecumenical church
- integrate theology and practice in all areas of life and ministry

The Ministry Division seeks to help students develop a capacity to comprehend theories for the practice of ministry, a capacity to develop skills necessary for pastoral tasks, and the capacity to integrate these two. In this way, students begin to devise and articulate a pastoral theology. This course contributes to the following goals in the Ministry Division:

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

Course Requirements

- Faithful and conscientious class attendance [NB: two absences will be allowed before a reduction in grade will be assessed].
- Active and respectful participation in class discussions
- Mid-term quiz

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- Timely completion of all written assignments:
 - + A diagnostic paper on “the state of the church,” articulating the student’s assessment of the condition of the *ecclesia* both from a global perspective and with a view to the student’s specific denominational or congregational contexts: Where is the church struggling? What biblical, theological, and spiritual nutrients are lacking in its diet?
 - + A long-term “local” preaching and worship plan, with rationale, that seeks to address the deficiencies identified in the diagnostic paper on the state of the church (see above). This may include the use of, but may also depart from, in a significant way, the Revised Common Lectionary, either by means of adaptation of the lectionary to local use, *lectio continua*, confessional or catechetical preaching, or other biblical or doctrinal themes.
 - + One detailed order of worship (with all liturgical elements, including musical selections and texts, as well as the sermon) based on texts that fall outside the present three-year cycle of the *Revised Common Lectionary*.

Evaluation

The final grade will be determined as follows:

- Attendance and participation (10%)
- Written assignments (90% total):
 - + A diagnostic paper on “the state of the church” (20%)
 - + Mid-term quiz (10%)
 - + A long-term “local” preaching and worship plan, with rationale (30%)
 - + One detailed order of worship and sermon (30%)

Grading Scale: See *UDTS Catalog*.

Required Texts:

The Consultation on Common Texts, *The Revised Common Lectionary, 20th Anniversary Annotated Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012) ISBN-13: 978-1451436037

Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts, and Seasons in Early Christianity* (Pueblo Books, 2011) ISBN-13: 978-0814662441

Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Vol. 3: The Medieval Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) ISBN-13: 978-0802846198

Laurence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) ISBN-13: 978-0687011360

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Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004) ISBN-13: 978-0801091759

Recommended Texts:

David Ackerman, *Beyond the Lectionary: A Year of Alternatives to the Revised Common Lectionary* (Alresford, UK: Circle Books, 2013) ISBN-13: 978-1780998572

Timothy Matthew Slemmons, *Year D: A Quadrennial Supplement to the Revised Common Lectionary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012) ISBN-13: 978-1610973120