I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

With input from readings, theological statements, and plenary lectures, MINgroups address professional identity formation (including spiritual formation and Christian identity formation) through covenantal community.

II. TEXTBOOKS:

Required Reading:


Suggested Readings:


**III. GOALS:**

This is a core course that provides students with advanced opportunities and models within which to develop skills for their calling into leadership in Christian ministry. It integrates classroom, contextual-site, and narrative learning to develop awareness of spiritual development characterized by mature self-acceptance and self-direction. MIN groups help students develop the perspectives and skills necessary for leadership in the formation of disciples. This is accomplished through covenantal companionship, peaceable encounter with self and others, conflict identification and resolution, and critical theological reflection. The aim of the coursework in its entirety is Christian leadership recognized by:

1. A rooted self-confidence, rooted not in the self
2. Self-awareness through differentiation toward self-acceptance, witnessed in expressive delight
3. Healthy bounded relationships with others, those served and serving
4. A practiced willingness to sustain healthy conflict and navigate ambiguity with love
5. A particular faith identity (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindi, Buddhist, etc.) heightened by a deep participatory listening, willingness to be shaped by others
6. An ability to articulate learning and to discover new questions
7. A supple theological vision founded in hope and lived within Spirit

*Artisanal Theology*, p. 8
IV. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

In order for participants to develop spiritually, characterized by mature self-acceptance and self-direction, and in order to develop the perspectives and skills necessary for leadership in the formation of disciples, students will be expected:

• To discover connections between one’s spiritual autobiography, lived experience, and classical theological writings in order to nuance further one’s operative understanding(s) of pastoral leadership
• To document new questions and areas for life-long learning, rooted in classical theological heritage and experience of peer-group
• To synthesize learning from one’s creation and sharing of a spiritual autobiography, case-studies, and theological questions (amidst other degree coursework as well) into a theological statement for ministry appropriate to the pursuit of identified vocational goals
• To reflect upon and enter into further critical theological reflection in a spirit of grace amidst a diverse peer setting so that God’s grace becomes manifest in commonality and difference.

V. LEARNING/TEACHING STRATEGIES:

1. Attendance/participation in online plenary sessions, MINgroup postings, shared spiritual practices, and all elements of the Formation Retreat.
2. Weekly reflection reports that serve as opportunities to reflect confidentially with your facilitator and to receive confidential feedback. If desired, you may share them with your mentor as well.
3. A theological statement for ministry.
4. Presentation of Spiritual Disciplines assignment.
5. Service in contextual site 10-20 hours/week.
6. Regular meetings with mentor (on-site/near-site) at least 4 hours/month.

VI. DESCRIPTION OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Weekly Reflection Reports

Description: Each student will submit a weekly reflection report to the group facilitator. The report will comprise a reflection on their personal, professional and spiritual journey for the week. While there is no prescribed format, each student is encouraged to create a format that allows for intentional reflection on one’s journey. Each report must be 1-2 pages, single-spaced. The student may also share these reflections with the site mentor if desired.

Due Date[s]: Reports are due each Friday at 11:59 pm EST starting with week two and ending the week of May 3-9. There will be nine reports submitted.

2. Theological Statements

Description: Use Appendix D from Artisanal Theology (Summarized in the following Guidelines) to create a working draft of your theological statement for ministry.

GUIDELINES

A theological statement for ministry is an opportunity for integrative thinking and careful articulation of your theological formation up to this moment. It is simply a working document, not (as often
popularly conceived) the culmination of your profession of faith or understanding of God and God’s mission within this world. Such a statement is required:

- to articulate a critically, theologically informed stance on God, World, Church, Mission, and Leadership (ordained and lay)
- to identify the theological tradition in which you have been formed and/or are being formed - denominational (for Board or certification purposes, toward ordained ministry) - descriptive (Reformed, process, liberationist, et al) - declared/defined (conceptual coherence and clarity of important themes)
- to be 12-15 pages in length, 12-pt font, double-spaced, 1” margins

Process Highlights:
A. The theological seed work in Fall semester offers opportunity to reflect somewhat systematically on the function of scripture, reason, tradition, and experience in your beginning critical theological understanding. Revisit your beginning articulation there, attentive to comments and resources suggested.

B. Helpful structure for your reflections can be found in both the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. Read each of these through several times, noting structure and phrases that resonate and those that you struggle to understand or profess in contemporary language.


D. Return to your introduction to theology texts and resources, or other theological-historical contributions to your current understanding. Begin to jot down the various questions you’ve wrestled with or heard in your coursework hours of theological education. Make a list of scriptural books and/or letters (not verses! Proof-texting is an uncritical, non-theological activity) that have spoken to you in your journey through formal seminary coursework.

E. Write your first draft, however you write best—outline, jump in and rely on stream-of-consciousness flow, write summary paragraphs of your understanding of God, World, Church, Mission, Leadership, etc. Included in those paragraphs or sections should be at least a paragraph on each of the following, for professional ministry pursuits/callings:
   - Trinity-God
   - Creation-Christology-Pneumatology
   - Baptism and/or the Sacraments
   - Justification/Sanctification
   - Reign of God
F. The preliminary finished draft for presentation to your MINgroup must also weave supportive and challenging commentary from other scriptural and theological voices you have encountered. At least 10-15 citations from the biblical witness (both that support your stance and that contradict/challenge your point of view—showing your awareness of complexity and need for critical interpretation of sources), and from authors from historical and contemporary theological discourse (Paul, Church Fathers and Mothers, mystics or visionaries, Reformers such as Calvin, Luther, or Zwingli, Wesley or Knox, contemporary voices such as Ty Inbody, Daniel Migliore, Serene Jones, William Placher, Wendy Farley, Catherine LaCugna—just to name a few). These must be properly cited (see Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology Zondervan, 2001; pp. 7-13, 32-39, 62-81) and the document properly formatted (1” margins, 12-point font, double-spaced, page numbers top right; use of titles and headings is helpful, so recommended).

G. Your presentation of this theological statement for ministry will require (1) copies provided for each peer and your facilitator, and (2) your choosing 3 sections about which you would like commentary or contribution from your peers and facilitator. Choose sections which you feel least prepared on, in order to receive most benefit. Read through these sections aloud and then participate in the supervisory discernment conversation. Edit and revise the statement afterwards, as per contributions gained.

H. A final copy of your theological statement for ministry is due into the Office of Contextual Ministries by the last day of class. Keep one copy for your own portfolio, in preparation for review conversations with your advisor, facilitator, and/or mentor.

Due Date[s]: The three sections (see F and G above) are due the day you present to the group during the Formation Retreat. Bring with you enough copies for each group member on the day you share. You will add to these 3 foci throughout the semester. Your final document must be uploaded to the Course shell and emailed to Rev. Dan Gildner by 11:59 pm on May 22.

3. Spiritual Disciplines Work

Description: Using Ruth Haley Barton’s Sacred Rhythms, students will write a 3-5-page paper (double spaced, 12 pt. font, 1” margins) that covers the following:

- Re-read your spiritual autobiography from Formation. How has God made God’s self known to you? Are there similarities in the disciplines or experiences? Share some responses to this in your paper.
- Using your Rule of Life grid from Macchia’s book from Formation 2, offer a reflection on how you did and did not live into its practice this year. Include in this reflection wisdom gained along the way.
- Using Barton’s guide (162-166), update your Rule of Life for your life’s next season. Keep the Macchia’s grid format or create a more organic one that fits your life. You might want to reference weekly reflections from previous semesters and wisdom gained through four semesters of MINgroup.
- Make sure your paper includes a description of the obstacles you anticipate rising to the surface as you continue practicing your Rule of Life.
- Conclude your paper with an original (to you) prayer that you might say as you begin each day in your pattern for life.

Each student will present their Rule of Life to their MINgroup.

Due Date[s]: May 2, 11:59 pm.
4. Insights and Learnings Report

**Description:** Integration students are responsible for thinking critically about their insights and learning in their theological studies, life experience and practice of ministry. This report will contain reflections about ministry, gifts, accountability on learning goals and your calling.

**Due Date(s):** May 16, 11:59 pm EST.

5. Collaborative Inquiry

**Description:** Each student must complete the Collaborative Inquiry Questions, offering three areas of reflection for you to consider: 1) your sense of self in your peer group, 2) your sense of each peer in your group, and 3) your sense of your group’s facilitator. Each member in the group—including the facilitator—will be reflecting on these three areas. The invitation is to be honest—and gentle. The process is aided by the use of “I” statements rather than “you” statements. It is also aided by the use of observations rather than evaluations. Each participant in the group will share responses in MINgroup.

**Due Date(s):** The week of May 10-16. Each group can determine best practices to share these. A written document is not required if a Google hangout is shared.

6. Evaluation of Site & Mentor by Student/Evaluation of Student by Mentor

**Description:** Each student must assess both the Site and the Contextual Ministries Mentor. The document becomes part of the student’s personal contextual ministry file. The Mentor must also submit an evaluation of the student to be placed in the file. We encourage both of these documents to be discussed in a face-to-face meeting with the student and the Mentor. Students are responsible for both files being signed and submitted.

**Due Date(s):** May 22, 11:59 pm EST. Submit to the dropbox and email to Rev. Dan Gildner.

VII. OTHER EXPECTATIONS

1. **Participation in Group:** Each student will be assigned a grade based on their participation. Each student must participate in the weekly online discussion, chapel and group time. Students who are absent for more than 1/6 of the course will be unable to complete the course with a passing grade. Requests for exceptions must be made directly to the facilitator prior to absences. A student cannot miss more than 6 academic hours for this 3-credit course. In other words, students cannot miss more than 6 hours of the Formation Retreat or miss more than 2 weeks of online posting and still pass the course.

2. **Devotional Leadership:** Each student will be expected to offer a group devotional based on the Psalms of Ascent. The devotional should follow the stated guidelines.

VIII. CALENDAR OF TOPICS AND READINGS

(all times EST)

**Pre-Work**
The course syllabus and online ‘shell’ will be made available to students on January 16. Each student is expected to complete the Theological Statement assignment as stated in the shell.

**Formation Retreat (February 16-17)**
All students must attend the Formation Retreat on February 16-17 at Christ UMC in Kettering Ohio.

- Monday, February 16, 9:00 am-6:00 pm (breakfast served from 8-9)
- Tuesday, February 17, 8:30 am-5:30 pm (breakfast served from 7:30-8:30)

Retreat Contents: Covenant-making, spiritual formation, sharing of Theological Statements, naming expectations for the online semester.

**Week One (February 23-28)**
**Tasks:**
1. Watch opening video “Psalms of Ascent” by Wednesday, 11:59 pm.
2. Sign up to lead a group devotional in the Psalm Devotional forum.
4. Post reflections as directed by the ‘NVC and Group Theology’ forum by Thursday, 11:59 pm. Respond to at least two colleagues’ posts by Saturday, 5 pm.

**Week Two (March 1-7)**
**Tasks:**
1. Participate in the Psalm Devotional forum as directed above.
4. Post in the “Beginning to Think Deliberatively, Theologically” forum at least 200-words by Thursday, 11:59 pm, reflections sharing at least one thing for both Mouw and Ramdas that confirms your sense of Spirit’s leading for theological leaders and one that challenges you/threatens your current understanding. If nothing challenged/threatened your understanding, watch the clips again (and again) until you find one.
5. Respond to at least two colleagues’ postings with at least 100-word posts by Saturday, 5 pm.
6. Write 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.

**DEVOTIONAL GUIDELINES:**
From week three through week ten (with the exception of week six), students are expected to offer a devotional for the rest of the group. Each student is expected to participate as follows:

- **If you are presenting:**
  - Choosing a Psalm of Ascent (120-134) that has not yet been selected and sharing your unique gifts and perspectives, create a 5-minute devotional for your group that can include:
    - A related prayer (original or ‘borrowed’)
    - One song of worship (a YouTube link is preferred)
    - A 2-3 minute original devotional that illumines the chosen Psalm.
    - A reflection question that will bless your colleagues.
  - The devotion must be uploaded by Tuesday at 11:59 pm in the Psalm Devotional forum. The format can be text (use pdf format), video (both YouTube links and recorded videos in usable formats), or audio (please use a usable format).

- **If you are not presenting:**
  - The devotions are designed to bless the group. Read it. Reflect upon it. Offer reflections and discussion as the Spirit leads. There is no expectation that all members would offer discussion each week. Feel free to use the devotional as a conversation piece in your Reflection Reports.
Week Three (March 8-14)
Tasks:
1. Participate in the Psalm Devotional forum as directed above.
2. Watch Father Thomas Keating, "Oneness & the Heart of the World" by Thursday, 11:59 pm.
3. Post in the "Practice, the Heart, and God" forum at least 200-words by Friday, 11:59 pm reflections sharing at least one thing Keating urges that confirms your sense of Spirit’s leading for theological leaders and one that challenges you/threatens your current understanding. If nothing challenged/threatened your understanding, watch the clips again (and again) until you find one.
4. Respond to at least two colleagues’s postings with at least 100-word posts by Saturday, 5 pm.
5. Write 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.

Week Four (March 15-21)
Tasks:
1. Participate in the Psalm Devotional forum as directed above.
2. Read Artisanal Theology, 68-100; Appendix D, 117-119.
3. Revisit your list of theological topics or foci for this semester’s Theological Statement. Choose a new focus (not one of the ones presented at the Retreat) to write on. Using the syllabus guidelines, write 300-400 words as a first draft on that topic. Post your draft in the ‘Topic 4 Draft 1’ forum by Thursday, 11:59 pm. Substantially respond (150 words minimum) to at least two others by Saturday, 5 pm.
4. Write 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.

Week Five (March 22-28)
Tasks:
1. Participate in the Psalm Devotional forum as directed above.
2. Choose a fifth focus from your list to begin writing about. Using the syllabus guidelines, write 300-400 words as a first draft on that topic. Post your draft in the ‘Topic 5 Draft 1’ forum by Thursday, 11:59 pm. Substantially respond (150 words minimum) to at least two others by Saturday, 5 pm.
3. Write 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.

HOLY WEEK – March 29-April 4

Week Six (April 5-11)
Tasks:
1. Watch this video Leadership, Theology and Self. Include answers to the questions posed in the video in your weekly reflection.
2. Choose a sixth focus from your list to begin writing about. Using the syllabus guidelines, write 300-400 words as a first draft on that topic. Post your draft in the ‘Topic 6 Draft 1’ forum by Thursday, 11:59 pm. Substantially respond (150 words minimum) to at least two others by Saturday, 5 pm.
3. Write 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.

Week Seven (April 12-18)
Tasks:
1. Participate in the Psalm Devotional forum as directed above.
2. Choose a seventh focus from your list to begin writing about. Using the syllabus guidelines, write 300-400 words as a first draft on that topic. Post your draft in the ‘Topic 7 Draft 1’ forum by Thursday, 11:59 pm. Substantially respond (150 words minimum) to at least two others by
Saturday, 5 pm. This will be the final official group discussion on your theological statement but feel free to resource one another until the final draft is due.

3. Write 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.

Week Eight (April 19-25)
Tasks:
1. Participate in the Psalm Devotional forum as directed above.
2. Watch the video ‘Doubt.’ Post at least 300 words in the ‘Doubt’ forum answering the questions: How does mystery, doubt, and unknowing intersect with faith, assurance and knowledge? As one who is about to complete the contextual ministries requirements, how specifically has your theology been affected by your experience? Post by Wednesday at 11:59 pm. Respond to three others by Saturday, 5 pm.
3. Re-read Sacred Rhythms, 146-166.
4. Write 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.

Week Nine (April 26-May 2)
Tasks:
1. Participate in the Psalm Devotional forum as directed above.
2. Post in the Disciplines Reviewed forum a 150-word response to each of the following questions by Wednesday, 11:59 pm. Respond to at least two others by Saturday, 5 pm:
   a. Review your Spiritual Formation texts/papers from your previous 3 semesters (Foster, Barton and Macchia). Comment on how your progress on integrating spiritual disciplines into your life. What’s working/not working?
   b. What other disciplines have emerged as formative or challenging?
   c. What have you learned about yourself since you wrote your Rule of Life last year and what do you hope will be different with your new, edited Rule of Life?
3. Write 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.
4. Spiritual Disciplines (Rule of Life) paper is due May 2, 11:59 pm.

Week Ten (May 3-9)
Tasks:
1. Write your final 2-page weekly reflection report and submit to facilitator drop-box by Friday 11:59 pm.
2. Participate in the Psalm Devotional forum as directed above. Participation is this week’s forum is mandatory.

Week Eleven (May 10-16)
Tasks:
1. Participate in Collaborative Inquiry via Google Hangout to share self and other reflections. Be sure to post both self-reflections and reflections on others. In the Hangout, one will read from one’s filled-in Collaborative Inquiry Document.
2. Your Insights and Learnings report is due in the dropbox by Saturday, 11:59 pm.

Week Twelve (May 17-22)
Tasks:
1. Offer celebrations and blessings in the Celebration & Blessings forum by Wednesday, 11:59 pm.
2. Your final Theological Statement is due May 22, 11:59 pm. Submit in the dropbox and email to Rev. Dan Gildner.
3. Your Evaluation of Site and Mentor by Student and your Mentor’s Evaluation of Student are both due in the respective dropbox and emailed to Rev. Dan Gildner by Friday, 11:59 pm.
IX. SEMINARY STANDARDS

A. Inclusive Language: United Theological Seminary has an official policy regarding the use of Inclusive Language. The policy may be found in the Seminary Catalog and further explained in the Student Handbook. If you have specific questions, please see the Academic Coordinator.

B. Academic Integrity: Student integrity regarding all work assigned in this class is a basic expectation of the Seminary community. A detailed policy regarding what constitutes a violation of academic integrity can be found in the Student Handbook.

C. Online Confidentiality: One of the highlights of the online classroom is that students can draw from the experiences shared during class discussions and in written work. However, it is imperative that students do not share information that is confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature. In addition, students are expected to honor the privacy and confidentiality of their classmates by not disclosing online conversations with those outside of the classroom.

D. Statement on Disability: Any student who may need accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Registrar’s office.

X. USING ONLINE RESOURCES

Information about how to access United Online and where to find help can be found on the seminary website at http://www.united.edu.

XI. METHOD OF DETERMINING FINAL GRADE:

A. Factors in Evaluation of Student

1. Attendance/participation in ministry group, plenary sessions, Formation Retreat
2. Writing and presentation of a theological statement for ministry
3. Submission of nine (9) weekly reflection reports.
4. Service in an approved contextual ministry site for 10-20 hours/week is a prerequisite for receiving credit in this course
5. Submission of mentor’s evaluation of student and student’s evaluation of mentor
6. Submission of insights and learnings report
7. Writing and presentation of an updated Rule of Life
8. Evaluations of the Contextual Ministry experience by means of Collaborative Inquiry

B. Method of Assigning Grades:

The Ministry Group Facilitator in consultation with the Contextual Ministries Directors in accord with the standardized evaluation sheet will assign grades. The various assignments will be weighted in terms of their value in relation to the whole of the work assigned. The weight given to each part of the work is listed below:

20% Attendance/participation in all online plenary sessions/discussions, online devotions and ALL elements of the Formation Retreat.

20% Presentation of a Theological Statement for Ministry

15% Submission of Nine (9) Weekly Reflection Reports

15% Presentation of Updated Rule of Life

10% Submission of Insights and Learning

10% Submission of Student/Mentor Evaluations

10% Participation in Collaborative Inquiry
The total scores determine the grades assigned according to the following scale:

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<th>Score Range</th>
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<td>94 – 90</td>
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<td>89 – 88</td>
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**Withdrawal** (A student stops attending prior to census- Add/Drop Date)

**Withdrawal** W

**X. COURSE EVALUATION**

It is very important for students to submit a course evaluation toward the end of the semester. Instructors do not see the student evaluations at all until after the instructors have submitted the students' final official grades. Students should feel free to evaluate the course without any negative ramifications.