

Course Number: MN294 W

Course Title: Revisioning and Reforming Mission for Sustainability and Vitality in Rural Contexts

Instructor: Mark Yackel-Juleen

Semester and Year: Fall 2024

Fulfills: Rural Requirement, Mission Development & Redevelopment Concentration

Open to all students, 1 Credit Hour, Credit/No Credit only

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Many small town and rural congregations and communities are facing significant changes and challenges in their context. Their leaders realize that their congregations need to adapt their mission to respond to these challenges in ways that support sustainability and promote vitality. Yet they often struggle in discerning what God is calling them to do and how to practically implement new visions and forms that emerge. Students will learn and develop skills for entering a congregation and leading a discernment process. Students will learn how to concretely implement a vision for new strategies or forms for mission aimed at sustaining and revitalizing congregational ministry. Students will be offered methods, tools, and processes to assess the congregation's current situation using hard data as well as the congregation's energy and spirit. This course highlights numerous possible missional formations as well as other creative adaptations and the methodology to bring them to reality.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Through this course, participants will:

1. Learn to use tools and methods to identify factors in the local congregation and community that impact ministry sustainability today and into the future;
2. Learn and practice techniques and processes to guide congregations in discerning future options for their mission and ministry;
3. Gain awareness of various congregational missional forms and adaptations and their particular benefits and challenges;
4. Learn and practice implementation techniques and tools to put those forms and adaptations in place; and
5. Engage biblical, theological, and sociological concepts which scaffold the endeavor of discerning and implementing God's vision for missional sustainability and vitality.

PROCEDURE:

- The class will meet for one hour synchronously on Friday morning. Participants will be required to view the online presentations for each week prior to class time. The class times will be devoted to discussion and Q & A. Please inform the instructor if you need to be absent from class in any given week.
- **Writing Style Guidelines & Plagiarism:** Please see the Style Sheet (found on MyWTS) for information about style guidelines for academic writing. *Writing Center:* If you need writing help, contact the Graduate Writing Center Coordinator Jennifer Agee at jagee@wartburgseminary.edu.
- **Inclusive Language:** It is expected that all Wartburg Theological Seminary students use inclusive and expansive language for humankind and for God in classroom discussion and written assignments. It is appropriate for all members of the Wartburg community—students, staff, and faculty alike—to remind each other of our commitment to the use of inclusive language. For more information regarding Wartburg's policy on inclusive language, please consult the Student and Community Life Handbook.
- **Learning Disabilities Accommodations Policy:** It is Seminary policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have medically documented disability conditions that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Any student who feels they may need a learning accommodation should contact the Academic Dean and complete the Accommodations Request Form. Students are responsible for informing their instructor of any documented disability by the end of the first week of class or upon subsequent diagnosis. For more information regarding Wartburg's policy on Learning Accommodations, please consult the Student and Community Life Handbook.

- ***Title IX – Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and Misconduct:*** Wartburg Theological Seminary is committed to ensuring a safe environment free of discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual misconduct and harassment. If you have experienced any incident of sex or gender-based discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct, we encourage you to report it. Wartburg faculty and staff are required to report incidents of sex- or gender-based discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct of which they are aware. The Director of Community Life and Candidacy, Deacon Kellie Lisi, is the designated Title IX Coordinator. Students may address complaints and grievances related to Title IX to the Title IX coordinator. Reports may be made in person, via email or phone, or via the [Incident Reporting Form \(IRF\)](#). For more information about Wartburg’s Title IX policy, please consult the Student and Community Life Handbook.
- ***Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:*** Members of the Wartburg Theological Seminary community are expected to conduct themselves responsibly and honestly in academic matters. The seminary defines plagiarism as the copying or use of another person’s work in any form without acknowledgement. The act of Plagiarism refers not only to the citation of books and articles but also to personal interviews, the Internet, and all other sources of information. Students are expected to submit their own original work for all assignments. Students shall neither represent the work of another as their own nor in any way misrepresent either their own work or the work of another. For more information regarding Wartburg’s policy on plagiarism, please consult the Student and Community Life Handbook.
- ***Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement:*** Creating Beloved Community and a learning environment of mutual respect is hard and ongoing work. We are a diverse community seeking greater diversity, and this diversity is paramount in the beauty of God’s good creation and even the Trinity itself. Diversity can refer to multiple ways that we identify ourselves, including but not limited to race, national origin, languages, sex, ability, body type, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, gender identity, ancestry, veteran status, culture, or genetic information. These diversities and more contribute to the perspectives and excellence we bring into the classroom and beyond and will be affirmed.

Personally, I acknowledge that by virtue of the reality that I am white and male I have been afforded unfair privilege in our society. I am in an ongoing process of deconstructing how that privilege has shaped my perceptions, viewpoints, and attitudes and created blind spots in my understanding. I am still learning how to best celebrate multiple perspectives; please let me know ways to celebrate your identities, pronouns to use, and/or when something said/assumed in class concerns you. Research and resources specifically related to my field of rural ministry are limited to begin with. What material is available is predominately from a white male perspective. The broader field of rural sociology which provides significant conceptual background to my discipline engages more diversity of voice. I will seek to identify materials from diverse perspectives when they can be found. In our common work, your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. How can I improve the effectiveness of this course for you personally and for future students?

Topics covered in seminary are often difficult on various planes. When we embrace diverse perspectives, we embrace healthful disagreement—a mark of deep and true community. Please engage in discussion with care and empathy for yourself and others. In this class we endeavor to embrace the uncomfortable as we critically examine some of our most basic assumptions, values, and beliefs. As you work to bring good courage to this course, I will work to ensure an environment that supports your full participation and risk taking.

EVALUATION:

- Complete required course readings and attendance—30% of grade.
- Participation in class discussion, completion of assignments, and/or required postings—30% of grade.

- A final project demonstrating learnings from the course—40% of grade.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Required:

Bridges, William, and Bridges, Susan. *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. Da Capo Lifelong Books (Special Edition), 2017.

Sellon, Mary, Smith, Dan, and Grossman, Gail. *Redeveloping the Congregation: A How to for Lasting Change*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2002

Recommended:

Mann, Alice. *Can Our Church Survive?* Lanham, MD: Rothman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000.