DMin in Biblical Preaching, Core 3
PREACHING AS A CONTEXTUAL WORD

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Course Description
Preaching as a Contextual Word is an exploration of preaching viewed as the word of God crafted to address a particular audience at a particular time and place. Participants reflect on the way sermons offer a reading or interpretation of the sermon’s hearers as much as they offer a reading of a biblical text, so that the message preached might be “seriously imaginable” to its listeners. Attention is paid to the relationship of text and context at each stage of sermon development.

Student Competencies
By the end of this course, students will be able to:
1. ‘Exegete’ their local context, including the dynamics and needs of various populations that constitute their congregations, such as young adults, women, and victims of physical and sexual abuse.
2. Make connections between the theology presented in their preaching and the needs of a wide variety of contemporary hearers.
3. Name the theological commitments that guide the crafting of their sermons.
4. Read Scripture from the lens of a contemporary philosophical paradigm of late-modernity/postmodernity.
5. Craft sermons that are intended to be transformative of either hearer or preacher (or both).

Essential Understandings
By the end of this course, students will be able to engage the following understandings:
1. Christian preaching must have an explicit theological grounding.
2. Christian preaching is a way that Scripture gets translated into contemporary culture.
3. Crafting sermons means thinking theologically about one’s context and God’s participation in that context.
4. The contemporary and local context of Christian proclamation is a valid and necessary conversation partner in theological and homiletic reflection.

Key Questions
1. What is the specific character of our contemporary time and place (in North America)?
2. Which theological themes, building blocks, and commitments are necessary to effectively proclaim in our contemporary context?

**Assumptions**
1. Language about humanity is gender inclusive.
2. God is not a white male.
3. Christian doctrines need to be reinterpreted and transformed by every generation for the sake of the God’s Church.
4. Christian proclamation is effective when the philosophical, spiritual, and conceptual needs of the hearers have been taken into close consideration.
5. No singular articulation of God, doctrine, or Scripture exhausts the possibilities for communicating the love and presence of God in Jesus Christ; a multitude of expression is necessary for Christian proclamation.

**Class Structure**
Mornings will be dedicated to the presentation of ideas and perspectives by the instructors, which will become the fodder for conversation about preaching in our context.

Afternoons will be dedicated to discussion of lecture and texts. Discussion will take the form of a seminar in which students will make presentations on course readings, using these texts as ways into conversation about preaching in their context. Participants will sign up for one of two roles for the afternoon seminars: Presenter/Facilitator and Secretary. Evaluations will be partially based on the fulfillment of these roles.

**Residential Week Class Schedule**

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<th>Day</th>
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| Monday June 3 | 12:00 -2:30 pm | *(Course Overview)*  
The Loss of Authority  
3:00-4:00 pm Seminar  
Text: Karl Barth, “The Need and Promise of Christian Proclamation” and Discussion of individual contexts  
4:00-5:00 Smith, *Lost in Transition* |
| Tuesday June 4 | 8:30-11:00 am | The Loss of Belonging/American Sports as Religion  
1:00-4:00 pm Seminar  
Text: Archer, *Critical Realism* |
| Wednesday June 5 | 8:30-11:00 am | The Pastor Re-Imagined  
1:00-4:00 pm Seminar  
Text: Caputo, *The Weakness of God* |
Thursday June 6 8:30-11:00 am Worship as a Condition of the Fall 1:00-4:00 pm Seminar Text: Boulton, God Against Religion, and Discussion of our individual contexts

Friday June 7 8:30-12:00 am Seminar: Preaching to Survivors of Abuse Text: Brock and Parker, Proverbs of Ashes

Required Work

Pre-residency preparation

1. **Read and take notes on all assigned texts:** All participants are to read and take notes on all required material in course schedule. *Each* student should bring to *each* seminar discussion time a brief essay that has two parts: An exploration of the question: 1) where do I see these cultural and theological issues in my context? 2) what difference do these realities make to how or what I preach? **All essays and daily notes should be uploaded in the MyLutherNet “Submissions” portal.**

2. Prepare to lead one of the afternoon seminar discussions. Participants will be asked to sign up for the role of Presenter/Facilitator or Secretary. The Presenter/Facilitator will be primarily responsible for presenting the key ideas of the text and the structure of the authors’ arguments, facilitating the group’s ideas, interpretations, and questions. The Secretary will take notes both on the presentation and on the questions that arise in the seminar discussion.

3. Prepare a brief summary of your own congregational, neighborhood, and ministry context. We will discuss these briefly on Monday and then revisit them at the end of the week with ways in which our perspectives on our contexts may have changed through the lectures, discussions, and readings. **To be uploaded in the MLN “Submissions” portal.**

4. The Presenter/Facilitator will be responsible for creating an atmosphere which invites all students to converse about the reading, and moves the significance of the reading into our particular contexts, and allows students to share their short written reflections.

During the week of residency

- Attend and participate in all class sessions.
• Facilitate and/or be a Secretary in the afternoon seminar discussions

Post-residency work

• Prepare, preach, and record one sermon for the Sunday of September 15 or 22, taking into special consideration the issues raised in the lectures and reviewed in Andrew Root, *The Promise of Despair*. Your Parish Response Group must meet with you before and after you give this sermon, and then upload a written report in the MyLutherNet portal. See below for the Guidelines on the Parish Response Group (PRG). Professors Marga and Root will give recorded feedback on the content of your sermon.

*Professor’s Note:*

MLN needs Exams-Submissions link for:

Brief Essay uploads from readings  
Summary of Parish Context  
Daily Notes from Residency Week  
Sermon upload  
PRG report upload  
Root/Marga Feedback link
Required Texts


For Further Reading


Parish Response Group (PRG)

Introduction

A major component of this course of study is your work in the concrete ministry situation in which you presently serve. Each course of your residency will be followed up by a contextual assignment: for the Core and Elective courses, this will be a sermon and accompanying materials; for the Colloquy it will be your post-residency project. To accomplish these assignments, you will form a Parish Response Group (PRG) of six-eight persons who will meet with you before and after each of the sermons as well as provide feedback on your annual projects. They will provide you with valuable critical feedback at each step through the program. Beyond that, they will become much better listeners, valued colleagues and lay leaders, and often your supporters and champions as you complete the requirements of the program.

Below are some instructions on what is required of your PRG, followed by several suggestions on how to form and use your group to greatest effect.

Instructions
Group size, purpose, and role of “Convener/Recorder”

The group should be between six-eight persons who are committed to meeting with you at least five times each year for three years to participate in the manner described in these notes. The group should represent a spectrum of the congregation in terms of gender, age, socio-economic level or occupation, and length of time as a member. You will need someone to serve as the Convener of the group, particularly when the group is responding to your sermons; ideally, this person will also serve as the “Recorder” and provide a summary of the group’s two meetings around each of the sermons, copies of which you will send with your other sermon materials to the professor of the course to which the sermon is directed and your adviser.

Frequency and nature of meetings

The PRG should meet with you before and after each sermon (four times) in the fall and at least once in the spring to review your work on your annual project and, in the third year, your final Thesis.

At the meetings before the sermon you will a) provide a brief summary of your learnings from the course to which the sermon is directed and b) lead a study of the preaching texts in light of this discussion. At the meetings after the sermon, you will receive the feedback of the group. It may be helpful to design and distribute some kind of “feedback” sheet to facilitate this discussion. (The Recorder may also find this sheet useful for summarizing the discussion, although you may also choose to design another form for sharing that information.)

In addition, at the first meeting before the second sermon and the spring meeting, you will review the comments of your professor and adviser regarding the previous sermon for the interest and benefit of your PRG. They may want to discuss briefly what they heard and these will often be very interesting discussions.

Suggestions

It will be helpful to have as much variety of viewpoints as one can in a small group. That is, look for diversity of gender, age, stage in life, and experience in the church. Further, you can get even more view points if you ask each member of the group to speak to two or three others about your sermon prior to the “feedback” sessions after each sermon.

Be clear about what you are asking persons to do: a) meet as a group at least five times a year for about 90 minutes, b) listen to you preach regularly but especially on the appointed days for your course work, and c) give you honest feedback about your preaching.

In general, it will help to have the “sermon feedback” meetings as soon as possible after you preach, either immediately after the service (although that may not give you sufficient time to gain some objective distance from the preaching event) or later that afternoon or evening. If that is not convenient, shoot to meet within 48 hours, but under no circumstances more than a week, after you’ve preached.

Your first meeting together will focus on several important issues. Please allow sufficient time for:
Introductions – ask the group questions like: how long they’ve been a part of the church, why they were interested in participating in this group, and to describe one memorable (in a good way or bad) sermon they’ve heard in their life. Don’t rush this; if the group is to be willing to give honest feedback they must trust each other and you.

The expectations of the group. Remind them of sermon dates and PRG meeting dates and times.

The nature of the program you are in. Describe what you will be doing and what you hope to gain from this experience.

A summary of what you learned during the Core course and your sense of how this matters to and impacts your preaching.

A discussion of the preaching texts for your first sermon.

You may find it helpful to bring and review a sermon response form for the group to use in listening and responding to your sermon. Or you may wish to create a sermon response form together.

While the Convener will facilitate discussions on your sermons, you might talk together about several strategies for doing so. For instance, it may be helpful to think about having each person in the group begin (or close) the sermon-response meetings with a statement about something that struck them in the sermon. It may also help to begin with positive remarks and move to comments about what could have been improved. Talking about this ahead of time with the Convener and then the group will help you get more out of your time together.

As soon after the PRG meeting as possible, the Convener/Recorder should summarize the discussion for you, perhaps following the shape of the sermon-response form, and give that to you (preferably in an electronic format) for you to keep as part of your course file and to distribute to your instructor and advisers per the course requirements.

Do not be alarmed if different people hear different things or respond to your sermons in different ways. People hear things differently based on their context, personality, and recent experiences, just to name a few factors, not to mention that the Holy Spirit will do different things with your words!

Try not to feel the need to “defend” your sermon – everyone is there to help you become a better preacher. Trust this about the group, and if you disagree with what someone heard or the way they reacted to something you said, try to understand their perspective so that you may gain from it.

Don’t be alarmed if your group and your instructor hear or respond to your sermon differently. In addition to the various factors mentioned above, your group members and your instructors and adviser will be listening to your sermon with slightly different purposes in mind. Divergences of opinion are opportunities for discussion, not causes for concern.
The obvious – remember to thank your members after every meeting! It is rare to have thoughtful, honest feedback and they are giving of their valuable time to do so.

Feel free to consult with your classmates about their experiences, sermon-response forms, management of their PRGs, etc. You are in this together; use each other!