Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Course Profile

Course # and Title: ML510 Preaching and Trauma: Out of the Depths
Instructor: Kimberly Wagner
Semester/Year: Spring 2020

Course Rationale and Description
(Why do we offer this course? Which of LSTC’s degree program learning outcomes does it address?):

This course aims to help students grow in their preaching development while also encouraging students to think both theologically and homiletically about the experience of trauma and its impact on congregations. First, students will be invited to think theoretically and theologically about how the experience of trauma challenges, shapes, or reinforces theological conversations around eschatology, creation, evil, and theologies of the cross. Students will continue to work with these theological constructs as they encounter and are asked to preach in the contexts of different kinds of trauma (i.e. catastrophic trauma, historical trauma, traumatic death or illness, etc.). Second, students will be asked to think homiletically about both sermon content and form when preaching in a congregation experiencing trauma. This will include thinking about the role of the preacher, the selection of preaching texts, sermon form, sermon content, and delivery. Finally, students will have opportunities to grow as practitioners of preaching. Students will construct, preach, and reflect upon three contextually unique sermons appropriate to a variety of traumatic incidents. Students will have the opportunity to engage in conversation around theology and trauma as well as offer feedback on colleagues’ sermons. Through the design of the course, students will integrate doctrinal and theoretical work with the realities of practical, lived experience.

As a 500-level preaching course, students should meet the Exemplary/Excellent Competencies in Preaching:
- Demonstrate clarity in claiming preaching as call from God through the church that evokes joy and awe. Preaching as spiritual discipline/form of prayer
- Demonstrate the ability to interpret scripture in ways that generate new insights into text and context. Sermon express gospel as good news that addresses people’s lives in timely, particular ways; assembly motivated to act and experience Christ as present and active
- Demonstrate the ability to preach a unified message that builds anticipation in hearers; in imaginatively constructed; in which image and metaphor are used artistically.
- Demonstrate the ability to employ diverse methods of delivery.

In addition to these specific competencies for preaching, students should also achieve additional competencies in History and Theology as well as Cultural Context. In relation to History and Theology, students should “strengthen their faith formation, theological identity, and vocational clarity by learning and teaching, [and] preaching...in ways that creatively relate foundational theological texts, traditions and practices of the Christian faith to exigent questions and issues in contemporary contexts.” Likewise, students should grow in their understanding of cultural context as they “critically analyze and assesses social locations and cultural/religious contexts” as well as
“speak theologically and pastorally about structural inequalities present in society” while “striv[ing] to engage difference with understanding.”

Course Learning Outcomes ( Learners will be able to):
(What difference will this course make to students’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices?)

By the conclusion of this course, students should be equipped to:

- think reflectively about how to lead in a community that is coping with trauma
- reflect critically and insightfully on their own preaching and the preaching of their peers
- articulate their theological convictions in the context of varied kinds of trauma
- articulate what they believe to be the role of the preacher and congregational leader in the midst of catastrophic, historical, and illness/death-related traumas
- understand their vocation as a pastor and theologian in the public church and the broader communities in which they serve, especially in the wake of trauma.
- examine, assess, and critique a broad variety of theological doctrines or constructs in light of the experience of individual and communal trauma
- construct their own theology in light of a deeper understanding of trauma and in conversation with a diversity of scholars and the biblical text.
- preach faithful, engaging, biblically grounded, and theologically rich sermons appropriate to a variety of traumatic situations and traumatized communities
- analyze and appreciate preaching from a diversity of preaching contexts and preachers
- explore the ways the various types of trauma (i.e. abuse, historical trauma, oppression, violence, etc.) uniquely impact different cultural, racial, ethnic and religious communities in the United States (and the world) and thus require unique homiletical responses
- further develop their preaching beyond the Introduction to Preaching course, including honing their sermon content, sermon form, biblical exegesis, congregational exegesis, sermon development, and sermon delivery.

Strategies for Learning:
(How shall we go about achieving these outcomes?)

Students will achieve the above learning outcomes through full participation in:

- Weekly reading assignments
- Theological study paper and presentation
- In-class Sermon
- Video Sermon
- Final Sermon Assignment and Reflection Paper
- Offering thoughtful, encouraging, and constructive feedback to preaching colleagues
- Class participation in conversation and small group work

Assessment:
(How shall we know if we—students and instructors—have been successful in achieving the outcomes?)

Students will be offered verbal feedback from preaching colleagues as well as verbal and written feedback from the professor on the in-class sermon. The student and professor will also meet individually to discuss students’ video sermons. Finally, the student will receive written feedback on their final sermon. This feedback allows students to continually grow, experiment, and develop as preachers. Additionally,
students will be offering a paper and presentation on a theological topic and author, thinking about particular theological viewpoints in light of trauma.
Students will be asked to purchase or acquire one book for which they sign up to present upon on the first day of class. All other reading materials will be posted on the course site.