

Course of Study School at MTSO
COS 424: Ethics
Summer 2026 on zoom

Zoom Class Meeting Times:

Friday July 10 3-5 pm
Saturday July 11 9-11 am and 1-3 pm
Friday July 31 3-5 pm
Saturday August 1 9-11 am and 1-3 pm

Instructor: Dr. Sarah Werner
sarah@mcusacdc.org

Course Objectives

This course introduces the biblical and theological bases for Christian behavior, emphasizing the pastoral skills needed for moral leadership in the congregation and community.

Students will be able to:

1. Articulate a biblical and theological basis for ethical thinking and moral behavior, and distinguish major approaches to ethical reasoning.
2. Comprehend the relationship between their personal stories, pastoral vocation, local contexts, and responsibility as moral leaders.
3. Develop a Christian framework for moral reason and action, and apply it to the use of power and the setting of boundaries in ministry.
4. Demonstrate familiarity with and make use of the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church as a resource for ethical reflection and action.

Required Reading

- *Introduction to Christian Ethics: Conflict, Faith, and Human Life* by Ellen Ott Marshall (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018)
- *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*, Edited by Patricia Beattie Jung and Darryl W. Stephens (Minneapolis, 2013)
- *United Methodist Social Principles* (2024), Online resource:
<https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/what-we-believe/our-social-positions>

Course Expectations

In order to foster a creative and effective learning community, you are expected to engage with the course material and participate in all class discussions. Please come to class having read the material and completed the pre-class written assignment for each session, and be ready to share your reflections with the class. **Class participation counts for 20% of your final grade.** All written assignments should be emailed to Dr. Werner at sarah@mcusacdc.org by the date and time outlined in each assignment.

Assignments:

Class participation: 20%

First session pre-class writing assignment: 20%

Second session pre-class writing assignment: 20%

Populi Discussion Posts and Responses: 20 %

Post-class reflection assignment: 20%

A Note on Writing and Promptness

Please write in clear and effective prose. Be mindful of spelling and grammatical issues. Also, be mindful to turn your assignments in on time. If a situation arises that will cause you to complete an assignment late, please alert Dr. Werner before the due date. Failure to do so will incur a late penalty. Please submit all work via the Populi course website.

Academic Honor Policy

The Course of Study School of Ohio requires that all material submitted by a student in fulfilling his or her academic requirements be the original work of the student.

Violations of academic honor include any action by a student indicating dishonesty or lack of integrity in academic ethics. Violations in this category include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly passing off work of another as one's own.

Cheating includes seeking, acquiring, receiving or passing on information about the content of an examination prior to its authorized release or during its administration.

Cheating also includes seeking, using, giving or obtaining unauthorized assistance in any academic assignment or examination.

Plagiarism is the act of presenting as one's own work with the work of another whether published or unpublished (including online resources and the work of another student). A writer's work should be regarded as his or her own property. Any person who knowingly uses a writer's distinctive work without proper acknowledgement is guilty of plagiarism.

A student found guilty of a violation of the academic honor code, after a review of the case, may be subject to one or more of the following sanctions:

- (1) warning;
- (2) failing grade for the assignment and/or course;
- (3) probation;
- (4) suspension;
- (5) dismissal from the Course of Study School of Ohio.

In severe or repeat cases (regardless of the sanctions) a letter will be sent to the student's District Superintendent and Board of Ordained Ministry representative.

Course Schedule & Assignments

Weekend 1: The Basics of Christian Ethics

Read: *Introduction to Christian Ethics: Conflict, Faith and Human Life*
UM Social Principals (link on Populi course page)

Write: Pre-class reflection paper

Due: Friday, July 10 by 8:00 am via Populi course site

Draw on your pastoral experience to identify an ethical question or moral issue that you've had to deal with in your role as pastor. This could be a question, issue, or reality with which your congregation was faced and to which it needed to respond; it could be a situation that a parishioner brought to you seeking your pastoral insight; it could be a conflict between members of your church; or it might be a more personal situation you had to deal with that in some way touched on your professional identity as a pastor. Note: the reflection part of this paper will require to you to first read Ellen Ott Marshall's *Introduction to Christian Ethics*.

Write a 1,000-1,500 word reflection paper comprised of the following sections:

1. Description of situation: What was the issue or situation? What choices were you faced with? How did you deal with it? (300-500 words)
2. Analysis: How did you go about discerning your response? Here you might describe the ways you engaged the Wesleyan sources of moral authority (scripture, reason, tradition, experience), as well as other sources of insight you consulted or practices you engaged (like prayer, meditation, spiritual direction, exercise, fasting, therapy, etc.) as you decided how to respond. (300-500 words)
3. Reflection: In *Introduction to Christian Ethics*, Ellen Ott Marshall argues that the basic question in doing Christian ethics is how to live well in the midst of conflict that is the nature of both the Christian life and human life more broadly (16). She proposes four strategies: 1. Take responsibility for the impact of our actions on others 2. Don't be afraid 3. Maintain awareness of relatedness 4. Discern possibilities. What insights are revealed to you as you reflect on both on how you *did* respond in/to this situation, as well as other ways you *could have* responded to the situation, in light of Marshall's four strategies? How might you draw on and use these strategies in the future as you face ethical issues in ministry? (300-500 words)

Friday afternoon

Introduction to Class

Intro to Christian Ethics, chapter 1

Saturday morning

Participating in Conflict and Living an Ethical Life

Intro to Christian Ethics, chapters 2-4

Saturday afternoon

Conflicts in the Pastorate

Intro to Christian Ethics, chapters 5-7

Online Portion of the Course on Populi

Between our two live course sessions, you will engage in discussion with the class community online via Populi. Each week there will be assigned reading as well as a discussion question. Please provide a thoughtful response to the question each week (at least 500 words) by Wednesday evening, and respond to two other students' discussion posts (at least 200 words) by Sunday evening each week.

Week 1 (July 13-17): Read *Professional Sexual Ethics*, Introduction and chapters 1-4

Discussion Questions (answer at least one):

1. Review the framework for sexually healthy religious professionals (discussed in the introduction). In what sexuality-related areas might you need more training? How will you seek out resources?
2. Reflect on a situation in your own life when you felt an imbalance of power between yourself and another person. How did this imbalance affect you? How did it affect the other person? Use insights from the contributing authors to inform your reflection.

Week 2 (July 20-24): Read *Professional Sexual Ethics*, chapters 5-8

Discussion Questions (answer at least one):

1. Assumptions about sexuality have changed dramatically since Augustine's time. How must today's church leaders and members think about sexuality differently than Augustine did or could?
2. The wisdom and deeply felt honesty of Paul in his letter to the Romans (discussed at the end of ch. 6) is a possible antidote to the abuse of power. Can you name other possible ways to address this significant problem, using the resources of the Bible?

Week 3 (July 27-31): Read *Professional Sexual Ethics*, chapters 9-15

Discussion Question:

1. In what ways do you experience pastoral care as a place of healing *and* a place that carries the potential for boundary-crossings in ways that may damage others?
2. What are some risks both for adolescents and for ministers in pastoral conversations about sexual concerns? Are there risks inherent in not talking, or not being able to talk, about them?

Weekend 2: Conflict and Sexual Ethics in the Pastorate

Read:

Professional Sexual Ethics, chapters 16-20

United Methodist Social Principles

Write: Pre-class reflection paper

Due: Friday, July 31 at 8:00 am on Populi course site

Write a 1,000-1,500 word reflection paper in which you discuss how this collection of readings contributes to your sexual ethics as a pastor. From the book *Professional Sexual Ethics*, identify a concept, insight, or piece of wisdom from **each of the four major sections** of the books that informs your conception and practice of professional sexual ethics in your own life. Finally, draw on your experiences of the challenges related to practicing sexual ethics in ministry to write 1-2 discussion questions for the class. These questions can be about situations you've faced, questions you have, and/or deal with one or more of the readings. Be brave and creative!

Friday afternoon

Pastor/Parishioner Relationships

Professional Sexual Ethics, chapters 16-17

Saturday morning

Ethics and Power

Professional Sexual Ethics, chapters 18-20

Saturday afternoon

Ministry to Youth and Course Wrap-Up

Post-Class Reflection Paper

Due: Friday August 7 at 8 am via the Populi course website

Write a 1,000 word reflection paper in which you discuss what you learned in this course relevant to your personal conduct and pastoral ministry. Engage at least 3 of the following questions:

- In what areas did you feel affirmed?
- In what areas did you feel most challenged?
- Where are you experiencing personal or professional growth?
- What new concepts or ideas did you encounter?
- What are your major take-aways?
- What new ideas or strategies do you have for ministry?
- How is God speaking to you through the readings and conversations of this course?

Note that while these questions ask for personal reflection, this is an academic paper so make sure your answers draw on (and properly cite) course readings, lectures, and discussions.

COSSO Attendance Policy

National policy from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) states that a student is expected to attend every class session. Unexcused absences may be cause for loss of credit or dismissal from the school. A student missing 20% or more of the classroom work shall not receive credit for the class. In the event of extenuating circumstances which require the student to miss up to 20% of the synchronous course time (whether in-person or on Zoom), the student should contact both the instructor and the Director prior to the start of the class to get approval and discuss make-up work. (Extenuating circumstances include emergency situations, illness, and dire circumstances, for example. Students are to provide back-up coverage at the local church while attending COS classes.)

Students attending online are required to show their faces the entire class time in order to be considered present, unless internet bandwidth issues or emergency circumstances (e.g., a power outage) necessitate turning off one's camera or calling in to class by phone. You are expected to attend class as you would in a face-to-face classroom (e.g, not driving). During asynchronous

class time, faculty may monitor time used in posting and responding to colleagues to track your participation.

Cancellation and Withdrawal: Student must notify the COSSO office if they will be unable to attend class for which they are registered. Although there is no penalty when withdrawing more than two weeks in advance of the beginning of a term, registration fees are nontransferable and nonrefundable. A \$50.00 late withdrawal fee is charged for all withdrawals within two weeks of the start of a class. All tuition and housing payments are applied to a future term.

Students withdrawing after the start of a term will be assigned a grade of AW (Administrative Withdrawal) and will be responsible for the full \$300.00 tuition amount. Any annual conference scholarship applied to the student billing record becomes the student's responsibility and is due by the end of the term. Housing payment is non-refundable.

NO SHOWS: Except in cases of immediate and dire emergencies, if a student misses any class without notifying the COSSO office, tuition and housing fees are due immediately, a \$50.00 no show fee is charged, and the student will receive an "F" in the class.