

COS 323: CONGREGATIONAL CARE

Course of Study School of Ohio at MTSO
Syllabus · Winter 2026

Reggie Abraham, Ph.D.
United Theological Seminary
4501 Denlinger Road
Dayton, OH 45430
Email: rabraham@united.edu
Office hours: WebEx by appointment

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to practices of congregational care and pastoral responsibilities related to caregiving.

Students will be able to:

1. Organize ministries of care within the congregation.
2. Discern and implement appropriate boundaries regarding counseling interactions, referral, and information sharing.
3. Reflect on and practice skills of sensitive caregiving.

II. TEXTBOOKS

Required reading:

1. Larry Webb, *Crisis Counseling in the Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).
2. Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress Press, 1996).

III. GOALS

This course provides students with an introduction to the ministries of pastoral care and counseling in the congregational context. Students will develop or deepen their understanding of pastoral care ministry through critical self-reflection, engagement with Scripture, consideration of their ministry context, and study of pastoral care texts. In exploring issues of ministerial concern, students will exegete the social and cultural dimensions of care including concerns related to geography, gender/sexuality, class, and race.

IV. TEACHING STRATEGIES

1. Lectures
2. Reading assigned texts
3. Online group discussions/postings
4. Viewing online videos

V. ACADEMIC HONESTY

The Course of Study School of Ohio requires that all material submitted by a student in fulfilling academic requirements must be the original work of the student. Violations of academic honor include any action by a student indicating lack of integrity in academic ethics. Violations include, but are not limited to, cheating and plagiarism. 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 Plagiarism is the act of presenting the published or unpublished words or ideas of another [including online or AI resources] as if it were one's own work. A writer's work should be regarded as his or her own property. Any person who knowingly (whether intentionally or unintentionally) uses a writer's distinctive work without proper acknowledgement is guilty of plagiarism. A student found guilty of a violation of the academic honor policy, after a review of the case, may be subject to one or more of the following actions:

1. Warning
2. Receive a failing grade (F) for the course
3. Probation
4. Suspension for the remainder of the course
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.

VI. ASSIGNMENTS & DUE DATES

- 1) Pre-course reading assignment: Complete by **Sunday, Feb. 8.**
 - Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996).
- 2) Project 1: Book chapter review. Due **Friday, Feb. 27.**
 - Submit a 500-word paper based on your pre-course reading in Richardson. Select one chapter from the book and describe the main points in that chapter. Describe how

concepts in the chapter challenged or disturbed you, piqued your interest, or affirmed your experience as a Christian minister.

- Detailed requirements will be distributed prior to the first Zoom session.

3) In-course reading assignment: Complete according to the **weekly schedule** (below).

- Larry E. Webb, *Crisis Counseling in the Congregation* (Nashville: Abington, 2011).

4) In-course discussion posts: Complete according to the **weekly schedule** (below).

- Discussion prompts will be posted on Populi. Please respond to the prompts in paragraph format (1-3 paragraphs).

5) Project 2: Reflection paper. Due **Friday, March 20**.

- Students will prepare a 2,000-word reflection paper on a subject that has emerged as a topic of interest to them from either the reading or lectures in the course.
- This will be a *reflection* paper in which the student will first introduce the topic of interest, state what they learned about that topic in the course, and then present their personal thoughts, feelings, and insights related to that topic in relation to practical ministry service.
- Detailed requirements will be distributed prior to the first Zoom session.

VII. SCHEDULE

Week 1 · Week of Feb. 9

- Read Webb, Chapters 1, 2, 3
- Watch Video: “Support Teams – Four Basic Principles”
 - Link will be posted on Populi:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8UVYWkpD2Q>

Synchronous Gathering #1: ZOOM

- Feb. 13: Friday (3-5pm)
 - Topic 1: Introduction to Pastoral Care
 - Topic 2: Ministering in Multiple Spaces
- Feb. 14: Saturday (9-11am)
 - Topic 3: The Pastor as Caregiver
 - Topic 4: The Pastor as Reader (of “Living Human Documents”)
- Feb. 14: Saturday WORSHIP (11:15—noon)
- Feb. 14: Saturday (1-3pm)
 - Topic 5: The Ministry of Presence
 - Topic 6: The Ministry of Hope

Week 2 · Week of Feb. 16

- Read Webb, Chapters 4, 5, 6
- Group discussion (respond to discussion questions → Posted on Populi)

Week 3 · Week of Feb. 23

- Read Webb, Chapters 7, 8, 9
- Group discussion (respond to discussion questions → Posted on Populi)
- Project #1: Due Feb. 27.

Week 4 · Week of Mar. 2

- Read Webb, Chapter 10
- Group discussion (respond to discussion questions → Posted on Populi)

Week 5 · Week of Mar.9

Synchronous Gathering #2: ZOOM

- Mar. 13: Friday (3-5 pm)
 - Topic 1: Family Systems and Congregational Systems
 - Topic 2: Anxiety in the Congregational System
- Mar. 14: Saturday (9-11am)
 - Topic 3: Individuality/Unity, Closeness/Distance
 - Topic 4: The Reactive Church Leader
- Mar. 14: Saturday WORSHIP (11:15-noon)
- Mar. 14: Saturday (1—3pm)
 - Topic 5: Four Styles of Congregational Life
 - Topic 6: Assessing the Congregation's Emotional System

Project #2: Due Mar. 20

VIII. EVALUATION

Method of determining grades:

- Attendance: 25%
- Discussion Group Participation: 25%
- Project 1: Book chapter review: 25%
- Project 2: Reflection Paper: 25%

IX. 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.

X. REFERENCES:

Anton T. Boisen, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience* (New York: Harper, 1960).

Michael J. Bradley, *The Heart and Soul of the Next Generation* (Gig Harbor, WA: Harbor Press, 2007).

- Brian Brock, *Disability: Living Into the Diversity of Christ's Body* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021).
- Donald Capps, *Pastoral Care: A Thematic Approach* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1979/2003).
- Donald Capps, *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).
- William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994).
- Howard Clinebell and Bridget Clare McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing & Growth, Updated Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).
- James E. Dittes, *Pastoral Counseling: The Basics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999).
- Toinette Eugene and James Newton Poling, *Balm for Gilead: Pastoral Care for African American Families Experiencing Abuse* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).
- Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule* (Yonkers: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2007).
- Nicholas Grier, *Care for the Mental and Spiritual Health of Black Men: Hope to Keep Going* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).
- Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theory of Shepherding* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958).
- James L. Killen, Jr., *Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005).
- Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Karen B. Montagno (Ed.'s), *Injustice and the Care of Souls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).
- Emmanuel Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006).
- David Lowry, *Released Outward: Liberating Congregations To Do Justice, Love Mercy, and Live Faithfully* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2018).
- Helen Orchard (Ed.), *Spirituality in Health Care Contexts* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001).
- Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).
- Bernard Schlager and David Kundtz, *Ministry Among God's Queer Folk, 2nd Ed.: LGBTQ Pastoral Care* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019).
- David Switzer, *Pastoral Care Emergencies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

Adam D. Tietje, *Toward a Pastoral Theology of Holy Saturday: Providing Pastoral Care for War Wounded Souls* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2018).

Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, *Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015).

Jean Vanier and John Swinton, *Mental Health: The Inclusive Church Resource* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2014).

Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014).

Edward Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008).