Course of Study School of Ohio at MTSO
COS 524
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: PRACTICE OF MINISTRY
Online Summer 2025
11-12 July & 1-2 August
Dr. Glen Alton Messer, II
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About this Course

Course Description (as stated in the COS curriculum):

This course is the capstone to the student's basic course of study. Its focus is the integration of the biblical, theological, and practical aspects of ministry.

Students will be able to:

- *Articulate a Trinitarian theology for the practice of ministry.*

- *State clearly the nature and mission of the church and its relation to pastoral ministry.*

- *Demonstrate the ability to think theologically.*

- *Develop a plan for life-long theological reading, reflection, and growth.*

Course Overview: This course focuses upon interactive exploration of the spiritual and intellectual discipline of theological reflection. We will learn with, and from, one another as we draw together the many resources from the courses taken and practical experiences gained in ministry. An important aspect of a Wesleyan theological frame is the emphasis upon relationship: Between God and self, self and other humans, self and Creation, and even self in relation to self. We will contemplate situations and circumstances through the lens of our various relationships in order to see the manifold ways in which God is active in the lives of God's creatures. Likewise, we will consider the ways in which our response to God's love and grace and creativity is an essential component of a faithful life and ministry. The aim is for us to develop and deepen a vibrant practice of discipleship through the dynamic partnership of ministry and theological reflection.

Course Components and Due Dates

Spiritual Autobiography & Plan (3000-3300 words)	DUE 1 July 2025 by 11.59 pm	Instructor comments; no grade until final version
Weekend One Discussion Board Writing (word count required stated at the end of each question)	DUE 8 July 2025 by 11.59 pm	15 percent of course grade
Weekend One Class Conversation (Zoom)	In-class contributions	10 percent of course grade
Spiritual Autobiography & Plan (Revised) (3000-3300 words)	DUE 22 July 2025 by 11.59 pm	25 percent of course grade
Weekend Two Discussion Board Writing (word count required stated at the end of each question)	DUE 29 July 2025 by 11.59 pm	15 percent of course grade
Weekend Two Class Conversation (Zoom)	In-class contributions	10 percent of course grade
Written Reflection Upon Ministry Setting (3000-3300 words)	DUE 12 August 2025 by 11.59 pm	25 percent of course grade

About the Instructor: Dr. Glen Alton Messer, II is a native of southern West Virginia and currently resides near Ann Arbor, Michigan. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Eastern Michigan University, a Master of Divinity from Boston University, and a Doctor of Theology degree in the history of Christianity from Boston University. His academic specialty is the history of Trans-Atlantic Methodism and Pietism with a dissertation focusing upon the introduction of Methodism into New England, Holiness, and the Anti-Slavery Struggle (ca. 1789-1845). He has taught Methodist Studies and Modern Church History at Boston University, Methodist Studies at Yale Divinity School, and various subjects at the Course of Study School of Ohio at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. He was also a member of the denomination's ecumenical and interreligious staff in New York City from 2010-2016. Dr. Messer has assorted academic publications on historical, theological, ecclesiological, and ecumenical topics.

Required Texts (these texts are available in both hardcopy and electronic versions):

- Charles Wood and Ellen Blue. *Attentive to God: Thinking Theologically in Ministry.*
- Will Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry.* Please note: **Be sure to get the revised edition**.

Class Schedule

Zoom Class Sessions	
11 July, Friday **(TWO Sessions)**	4.00-6.00 pm
	7.00-9.00 pm
12 July, Saturday	1.30-3.30 pm
1 August, Friday	7.00-9.00 pm
2 August, Saturday (**TWO Sessions**)	9.00-11.00 am
	1.30-3.30 pm

Online sessions will consist of materials designed to help students and the instructor engage with one another in relation to the topics to be covered for each day of instruction. These will include both content produced by the instructor (video/audio/written materials), and discussions. The course will have six two-hour Zoom class sessions (please see schedule above) for students and the instructor to talk and learn together.

Please see the course Populi site for the materials for each online session and for instructions regarding discussions, chats, etc.

Student contributions to Discussion Boards include: 1) giving a written response to each and every question posed by the instructor, 2) making sure that written responses engage course materials, 3) keeping written responses to questions within the word count parameters for each question (the word count range is stated at the end of each instructor question on the discussion board), and, 4) abide by the Golden Rule in all that you write (i.e., speak to your reader with the respect and kindness you would want shown to yourself by others). You may also respond to posts by one another in addition to your own posts.

Student participation in In-Class Discussions includes: 1) fully reviewing course content for each Zoom session, 2) making substantive and helpful contributions to class conversation (this includes asking relevant questions).

Every bit of effort the student puts into learning — even having the courage to risk making mistakes! — counts to the student's advantage in the assessment of course participation. **Participation is about the student's faithful engagement of the pursuit of learning AND of encouraging and helping others in that effort as well.**

Guides for Writing

The course website includes five video guides to writing assignments for this class:
        AI – Use of Artificial Intelligence in this Class
        W1 – Overview for Writing Assignments
        W2 – Proper Citations and Bibliographies
        W3 – Guide for Writing Your Spiritual Biography & Plan
        W4 – Guide for Writing Your Reflection Upon Ministerial Setting

Please be sure to view the AI and W1-W3 before writing anything for this class. Please view W4 before writing your Reflection Upon Ministerial Setting. These guides are designed to help you write successful and academically sound papers. They also make clear the standards that will be utilized in the assessment of your work. If you find you have questions after viewing these videos, please email the instructor for clarification and assistance <u>before</u> writing your paper.

Instructions and Requirements for Written Papers

The videos mentioned above are an aid to writing your assignments in this course. The assignment instructions written below constitute the authoritative guidelines and parameters. Please read these carefully. Most problems in written assignments arise out of instructions not being followed in full.

Please submit written papers via *Populi*. <u>No hardcopy papers will be accepted.</u>

Spiritual Autobiography & Plan: This paper will give an overview of your life; illustrating the active relationship between God and yourself. Questions you may consider when writing your autobiography can include: How was God working through others and circumstances in my life? How did I respond to God's actions and love? What important questions motivated me at various times and in various situations? What were my joys and disappointments that were of particular significance? This constitutes the main of the paper and the narrative chronology should be divided into the following sections: 1) early life, 2) ten years ago to five years ago, 3) five years ago to the present, and 4) the present time in my life. These sections together will constitute Part One of your paper. Each section of Part One should be at least 400 words in length. In Part Two of your paper, please discuss your plan for further discipleship: what spiritual practices do you intend to employ?, what approach(es) to prayer?, what activities in your personal life?, etc. In other words, how do you plan to deepen and/or broaden your life of faith? Part Two should be at least 400 words in length. **The word count range for the entire paper is 3000-3300 words.** No more and no less. This paper must include cited references to readings, in-class discussions, biblical passages, etc. **<u>Papers must also include a bibliography.</u>**

Reflection Upon Ministry Setting: In this paper you will write a theological reflection upon an event, or circumstance that you have encountered (or are currently encountering) in your ministry context. Drawing upon methods of theological reflection touched upon in course materials and discussions: give a detailed description of the event or circumstance upon which you will be reflecting. Then write a detailed theological reflection. The description of the event or circumstance should be at least 1000 words in length. **The word count range for the entire paper is 3000-3300 words.** No more and no less. This paper must include cited references to readings, in-class discussions, biblical passages, etc. **<u>Papers must also include a bibliography.</u>**

COURSE OUTLINE

Readings to be completed <u>before the first weekend Discussion Board contributions</u> are due:
- Charles Wood and Ellen Blue. *Attentive to God* (whole book)
- Will Willimon. *Pastor* (whole book)

PAPER: Spiritual Autobiography & Plan (please see above for due date)

July Session Discussion Boards (please see above for due date)

11-12 July Zoom Sessions

PAPER: Spiritual Autobiography & Plan (Revised) (please see above for due date)

August Session Discussion Boards (please see above for due date)

1-2 August Zoom Sessions

PAPER: Reflection Upon Ministerial Setting (please see above for due date)

Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (for example, ChatGPT, Apple Intelligence, and others) is becoming increasingly integrated into our technology and daily lives. It is new enough that its possible benefits and detriments are a matter for discovery. We are all in largely uncharted waters – just as we were when the Internet first entered our lives a few decades ago. Ignoring this change in our lives will not make its opportunities or challenges go away. It will take us all some time to learn how to use AI well.

As we learn to live our lives with the presence of AI we must hold fast to the moral and ethical compass that should guide all Christians and honest people of every sort. We should not cheat, steal, misrepresent, nor debase ourselves intellectually. We must make every effort to engage AI – and all technology – in such a way that our learning and our lives are enhanced and not diminished. We must employ AI so that we can do more as humans than was possible before this human creation entered our lives. AI challenges us to grow smarter – not lazier.

To that end, you are encouraged to experiment with AI in your brainstorming and research. If you choose to make use of AI, you must be completely transparent with your instructor about when and how you use it.

Students using AI must:

1) Understand that the use of AI in this course is a privilege granted by the instructor. It is not a right. AI may be employed by students in accordance with the guidelines set forth in this syllabus. The instructor may, at any time and for any reason, disallow the use of AI for this class.

2) State at the beginning of papers that AI was utilized, if such is the case.

3) Employ AI for **only** the following: a) brainstorming ideas, or, b) doing research (like that you would typically perform in your Internet search engine queries. When using AI for 3.b, be sure to ask the AI for the sources. Go to those sources, read them for yourself, and cite them in your paper if you utilize them.

4) **USE OF AI FOR EDITING YOUR PAPERS IS NOT PERMITTED IN THIS CLASS.** Do not have AI generate a paper for you. Do not run your paper through AI for spelling or grammar checks. (Word processing applications like MS Word, Apple Pages, GoogleDocs, etc. have built-in spell-checking and grammar-checking tools that you can utilize). Do not ask AI to improve your writing or make suggestions for changes. I have observed that AI is too intrusive as an editing tool (at least as it does so now). Please, if you need assistance with your writing, make use of COSS's writing tutors.

5) Document your use of AI (as permitted above) by collating all queries and responses into an Appendix to be placed at the end of your paper. Include: ALL queries and responses – those used and those not used. Anything you feed into AI for one of your papers must be shared with your instructor (as a condition for the exercise of the privilege of using AI in this class).

6) **AI may not, in any way, be used to assist you with discussion board posts.** I want those to be spontaneous representations of your thought and writing. Also, I do not want to burden you – or me – with the necessity of documenting AI usage for each and every discussion board post.

7) Contact the instructor with any questions they may have regarding how AI may be used in this class.

PLEASE NOTE: Failure to comply with the **Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)** guidelines in this class will be considered an act of plagiarism.

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 it 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 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.

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 class sessions 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 and unpaid registration fees are still due if withdrawing past the registration deadline. 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.