

Syllabus

Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World

West Virginia South District Center for Ministry Formation

Location of the Course:

Davis Creek Church of the Nazarene
102 Nazarene Dr.
South Charleston, WV

Course Dates:

Saturdays 10 am to 1 pm
January 14-February 11, 2023

Name of the Instructor:

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Module Vision Statement:

Christian discipleship and ministry in a world marked by diversity of world religions is not new for the church. Many of the early Christians had "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming" (1 Thess 1:9-10). But a postmodern, pluralistic ideology is new, at least two centuries in the making. The ideology of religious pluralism claims that not only are there many religions but also that the diversity represents the way things "ought to be." There exists no single religious perception of reality that is universally applicable and binding. No religion can legitimately claim to proclaim the truth for all persons. There is no *metanarrative*, no overarching story. There are many narratives, all of which are "true" to the extent they satisfactorily provide meaning for all persons and communities who participate in them. Religious narratives are as diverse and "true" as there are narrative communities.

Pluralism may, but need not, rest upon the notion that behind the various narratives lies a *single divine reality* variously and legitimately expressed in humankind's many cultures and communities. According

to the postmodern ideology of religious pluralism, any religion that claims to have “the narrative” for all persons, and that tries to proselytize accordingly, ought to be judged as oppressive. This is because by so doing, it spreads injury in the world. It tyrannizes the human conscience and overwhelms human freedom. According to the ideology of religious pluralism, orthodox Christian doctrine as expressed in the New Testament and the church’s creeds is a holdover from the long night of human ignorance and oppression. Christianity either needs to be made a participating and respectful member of the human community, or it needs to be abandoned.

That is part of the atmosphere in which the Christian faith exists. Religious pluralism presents its own set of challenges and opportunities.

Paradoxically, religious pluralism exists in a world also marked by resurgent religious fundamentalism and extremism. Where these dominate a society and state, religious pluralism does not exist. Particularly in many Muslim countries, the powers of state are used to prevent religious diversity, and even more so the ideology of religious pluralism.

In its broader sense, *pluralism* refers to more than just “religious pluralism.” We also speak of moral, cultural and political pluralism. The various “pluralisms” depend on the notion that “meaning” is contextual. “Right” and “wrong” are dependent on a community’s—or one’s own—preferences and the “story” by which a community lives. The “moral” depends upon the values a community cherishes, nurtures, and transmits. The traditional notion that moral values must submit to judgment by some universal or transcendent norm is rejected. That discredited standard reveals an ignorance of how communities and values are actually formed.

In this module we will concentrate on religious pluralism. How is one to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world? More specifically, how is one to do this from within a Wesleyan perspective? Those are the questions this module addresses. If one were to be satisfied with ignoring the pluralistic context in which we live, the content of this module would be unnecessary. But choosing this option would thereby limit the range of the Church’s ministry. It would deny the power of the gospel, and it would not adequately represent the Wesleyan tradition. To proclaim the gospel in a way that pays attention to the context in which we speak, we must take seriously the pluralism that so extensively characterizes our age.

A minister in the Church of the Nazarene cannot adequately serve the church's mission if he or she chooses not to be cognizant of pluralism's importance and profile. Our commitment to an informed ministry will not permit it. In our Articles of Faith we affirm orthodox Christian theology. This affirmation puts the denomination at odds with the pluralistic spirit. Because we embrace the "scandal of the Cross and Resurrection" we reject the ideology of religious pluralism.

In keeping with historic Christian faith, we proclaim Jesus Christ to be the definitive revelation of the Triune God. We believe that in Jesus Christ the universal reign of God has begun, is advancing by the Spirit, and will be consummated in God's own time. We make these affirmations in ways that distinctly who the influence of the Wesleyan theological tradition. In the Wesleyan tradition—when communicating the gospel—we rely upon the persuasive Holy Spirit, not upon any form of intellectual, political, or social coercion.

The purpose of this module is to help prepare Christian ministers in the Church of the Nazarene—the Wesleyan tradition—for ministry in a religiously pluralistic world.

Program Outcomes

This module contributes to the development of the following abilities as defined in the *U.S. Sourcebook for Ministerial Development*.

- CN 22 Ability to articulate the distinctive characteristics of Wesleyan theology
- CP 15 Ability to think globally and engage cross-culturally for the purpose of mission
- CP 16 Ability to preach evangelistically and to be engaged with and equip others in personal and congregational evangelism
- CX 1 Ability to discover sociological dynamics and trends and to apply that information to specific ministry settings
- CX 8 Ability to place the ministry context in light of the large schemes of world and national history
- CX 9 Ability to apply historical analysis to the life of a local congregation in order to describe its historical and cultural context
- CX 10 Ability to understand and articulate the biblical, historical, and theological bases for Christian mission

Course Requirements

1. Attendance & Participation: More than one class session missed (3 contact hours) will require either significant make up work or dropping the class without refund.

2. Reading: *With Cords of Love-A Wesleyan Response to Religious Pluralism*. Al Truesdale, Keri Mitchell, Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Available from Amazon and www.thefoundrypublishing.com.

There are other smaller reading assignments throughout the course that are required as well. These are found in the MCOS Student Guide at the beginning of each lesson.

3. Book Report: on *With Cords of Love...* (see the book report form) Due on **December 4** at the beginning of the class session.

4. Final Project: Due on **February 11** at the beginning of the class session. Write a *Credo*... Toward the end of the module each student will write a three- to five-page (typewritten) or 1500-2500 word (handwritten) *credo*—affirmation—regarding how he or she intends to minister as an orthodox Christian and Wesleyan in a religiously pluralistic world. If time allows, each student will orally present their *credo* to the class during the last session on February 11th.

Other requirements:

- a. Come prepared to discuss scheduled topics (review correlating chapters in text and additional reading found in the Student Guide prior to each class session).
- b. Bring texts and Bible to each class session.
- c. Download and have available the Student Guide from USA/Canada website: <https://nubo.nazarene.org/index.php/s/JQYbcM8o8LjaMNq> (You are NOT required to do the Homework assignments found in the Student Syllabus from USA/Canada).

Course Outline and Schedule

The class will meet for 15 hours (3 hours x 5 days) according to the following schedule, which basically corresponds to the noted chapters in the text (dates are approximate and may vary based on depth of topic and time spent in discussion):

1. (1/14) Introduction to class and review of syllabus/expectations
2. (1/14) The various meanings of Pluralism (ch 1)

3. (1/14) A brief history of religious pluralism (ch 2)
4. (1/21) The influence of the modern era on religious pluralism (ch 3)
5. (1/21) The influence of Postmodernity on religious pluralism (ch 3)
6. (1/21) Responses to religious pluralism among Christians (ch 4)
7. (1/21) The New Testament and religious pluralism (ch 5 & 6)
8. (1/28) The Wesleyan way of salvation: prevenient grace, the gift of faith, justification (ch 8)
9. (1/28) The Wesleyan way of salvation: sanctification (ch 8)
10. (2/4) A Wesleyan response to non-Christian religions, part 1 (ch 9)
11. (2/4) A Wesleyan response to non-Christian religions, part 2 (ch 9)
12. (2/11) Communicating the Gospel in a religiously pluralistic world (ch 10)
13. (2/11) Presentation of student "credos"
14. (2/11) Student accountability

Course Evaluation

Attendance – 100 points
Reading – 100 points
Book Report – 100 points
Final Project – 100 points

Pass – 280 and above

Pass with distinction – 372 and above