



# McMaster Divinity College

## Critical Understandings in Ministry Leadership

MS 3P1540/MS 5P1490

Fall 2025

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Office # 237

Class Begins Thursday, Sept. 11 at 4:00 pm ET and meets weekly throughout the semester at that same time except during the week of Oct. 13-17 (reading week). This is a hybrid course that gathers in person and on-line.

### Instructor Biography

Dr. Lee Beach is the Associate Professor of Christian Ministry, the Garbutt F. Smith Chair in Ministry Formation and the Director of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario. He teaches courses on the church in culture, pastoral ministry and Christian spirituality. Prior to coming to MDC Lee pastored for over 20 years with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada serving churches in Peterborough, Cobourg and Scarborough, Ontario. He is currently involved his local church in Ancaster, Ontario where he lives with his family. He is the author of the book, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope after Christendom* and co-author (With Dr. Franklin Pyles) of the book *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Experiencing the Four-Fold Gospel Today*.

### Course Description

Defining effective leadership in ministry is ever evolving as contexts and expectations constantly change. This has been true since the inception of the church. However, there are critical issues in every context that effective ministry leadership must understand and address. This course will address a number of foundational and contextual issues that effective ministry leadership must grapple with in the contemporary North American context. Also, the course will consider how leaders in the past also faced the critical issues of their time. By understanding historical models as well as reflecting on our own contextual challenges the course will explore

ways in which we can develop an understanding of what it means to lead effectively in the particular ministry context that we find ourselves in.

## **Learning Goals:**

### **Knowing:**

1. Upon completion of this course students will be able to articulate a basic understanding of key church leadership competencies for contemporary ministry.
2. Upon completion of this course students will be able to clearly state what the specific challenges are in contemporary ministry and how reflective leadership is crucial to addressing these challenges.

### **Being**

1. Upon completion of this course students will be able to determine their own cultural situatedness and describe how this impacts their approach to Christian ministry.
2. Upon completion of this course students will have new knowledge of how their work in ministry is a response to the questions and needs of their time and context and how living into this reality is part of the ministerial calling.

### **Doing**

1. Upon completion of this course students will be able to identify specific cultural and contextual issues that affect their practice of ministry and how to develop effective responses to them.

## **Working together as a learning community**

A core value of our class is that it is a “learning community,” designed to be a place where each member of the community can grow through positive affirmation and constructive input. We should all come to the community as people in process, open to be deconstructed and formed through our mutual learning experience.

As a responsible member of our learning community you will be expected to commit yourself to the class throughout the semester that we are together. This means that in our class interactions you will endeavor to treat all members of our class with respect and dignity. Your presence is necessary for our community (that is our class) to function at an optimal level, therefore it is expected that each student will attend classes faithfully and be “present” in each class session.

Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order as an attachment to an email sent to the professor. Assignments should be sent in on or before the due date specified in this syllabus.

All assignments handed in after the due date may be subject to a penalty of 3% for each day (including weekends) that they are late.

### **Instructor's role and availability**

As professor it is my responsibility to empower each class member as a learner by treating each student with respect and dignity. I come to position myself as a fellow learner in the community and to offer information, reflection, experience and questions for us to reflect on together.

Further, it is my responsibility to give good evaluation and feedback to your thinking, both as you offer it to the class in our discussions and through written work so that your growth through this class can be maximized as a result of our collaboration.

I will do my best to answer any email enquiries within 24 hours during weekdays (Mon.-Fri). I do not generally answer emails Saturdays or Sunday during the day. If an email is sent later in the afternoon on a Friday it will probably not be answered until Sunday evening or Monday morning. I will do my very best to grade assignments within three weeks of submission.

I am not only available but also welcome and enjoy connections with each of you outside formal class time. If you would like to meet together via zoom or in person, please feel free to make an appointment with me for a time that works for both of us.

### **Required Reading**

Root, Andrew. *Churches and the Crises of Decline: A Hopeful Practical Ecclesiology for a Secular Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022.

Harari, Yuval Noah. *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York, NY: Spiegel and Grau, 2018.

### **Assignments**

#### **1. Paper: Learning from the Practices of a Historic Christian Leader**

All ministry is contextual and all effective ministry must be a response to the context in which it happens. This is true today and has been true in the church since its inception. This assignment will ask each student to choose a historic Christian leader from the past and write a paper that reflects on how that leader was shaped by and was responsive to their ministry context. The paper should offer a brief overview of the leader's work, describe the external factors that drove their work, how their work was influenced by their context, how their work was a response to the needs of the church and society in their time and what lessons contemporary leaders can learn from them. As a research paper the paper should reflect interaction with at least 7 academically credible sources. The goal of this assignment is to help students understand how these important figures in Christian history were people whose ministries and theological interests were all directed by their experience within a particular social and ecclesial context. Students must clear their proposed historic figure with the instructor no

later than Sept. 25, 2025. Please email the instructor by Sept. 25 with the person you propose to study to get clearance for your project. This paper is designed to address learning goals “knowing” #2, “being” #2 and doing #1.

**The paper should be 12-13 pages (double spaced) in length and is due Oct. 23, 2025, it will constitute 40% of the course grade.**

## **2. Presentation: Contextual Analysis**

Students will choose a cultural artefact that provides insight into the place of Christianity and/or the church in contemporary North American culture. Examples of an artefact could be a current news story, an article, a scene from a movie or t.v. show, lyrics from a song, or even a personal encounter of some sort. The presentation should offer an analysis of how the artefact represents the place of Christian faith in contemporary culture, that is, how does this artefact demonstrate the place of Christianity and/or the church in current culture. It could be an artefact that positively or negatively demonstrates how the church is trying to engage contemporary culture, or it could be an example of how the wider culture perceives the church, or how the place of Christianity is changing within culture, etc. The presentation should clearly articulate how the artefact is particular to the contemporary setting (not something that is applicable universally or that would have been equally as applicable in a different time period). The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes long. Depending on the size of the class the presentation will be in person, during class time, or it will be recorded by the student using a platform that you are familiar with as long as you can provide the instructor with a link so that he can easily access your presentation (if you need help with this just let the instructor know and he will be glad to help you figure it out). The format of the presentation will be determined on the first day of class. The presentation should be clear, creative, well connected to the intention of the assignment and no more than 10 minutes long (going over 10 minutes will adversely affect your grade). This assignment is designed to address learning goals “Being” #1 and “Doing” #1.

**Presentations are due Nov. 6th and will constitute 20% of the course grade.**

## **3. Understanding the Challenge of Contemporary Ministry Leadership**

For this paper the student will choose a specific issue or challenge that the church is facing in contemporary North American culture. The paper will address its topic by exploring the questions that it raises and challenges it presents both theologically and practically. The paper should move in three distinct stages; first, the paper should provide an in-depth exploration of the problem/question as it pertains to the practice of ministry in the particular context that it is situated in. Second, an engagement with the question/problem from both a theological and

practical perspective should be provided, this includes offering analysis that emanates from both secondary analysis (i.e. literature based research) as well as primary analysis (i.e. reflection on your own experience). These two research components should be brought into conversation with each other so that they provide a seamless, rigorous analysis of the problem/question under consideration in the paper. Third, the paper should move to response, providing insight into how the problem/question can be adequately addressed within a contemporary ministry context. As a research paper it is expected that at least 8 academically credible sources be consulted. This assignment is designed to address learning goals This assignment is designed to address learning goals “knowing” #1 &2, “being” #2 and “doing” #1.

**The paper is due Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025 and should be approximately 12-13 pages in length (double spaced) and will constitute 40% of the course grade.**

## **Course Outline**

Week one (Sept. 11): Introduction (syllabus) & Introduction to Ministry leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Week two & Three (S. 18,25): The Canadian/North American context

Week four & five (Oct.2 &9): The Church in Canada/North America, book discussion/lecture

Week six (Oct. 16) Reading Week

Week seven (Oct. 23): Artificial Intelligence

Week eight (Oct. 30) Children and Youth

Nov. 6 – Presentations (or book discussion/lecture)

Week ten (N.13): Inter faith dialogue

Week 11 (N.20): Sexuality and Gender identity

Week 12 (N.27): Racial and Indigenous Reconciliation

Week 13 (D.4): Christian Nationalism

Week 14 (D. 11): Medical Assistance in Dying

## **Additional notes:**

### ***Academic Honesty***

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of

the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

**A special note about AI:** You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

### ***AODA***

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

### ***Gender Inclusive Language***

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

### ***Bookstore***

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at

416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

### **Absence Due to Illness**

If you must miss class due to an illness, you must contact me (via email) as soon as possible to let me know. Likewise, if I should become ill, I will communicate with you via A2L about how we will make up class sessions.

Although much of the course content will be made available via A2L, it would still be a good idea to have a friend take notes for you, if possible.

### **Inclement Weather**

If on a class meeting day MDC closes due to inclement weather, I reserve the right to move the lessons and, where possible, class activities for the week to A2L (asynchronous format). This will help to ensure that we stay on target in the course.