



McMaster Divinity College

Leadership in the 21st Century: Contextualizing Christian Leadership **MS 3P1360/MS 5P1320**

CC/PS

Winter 2026

Instructor: Dr. Lee Beach

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Office # 237

Class Time: Tuesdays, 9:00 am-10:50 am ET

The Class meets both in person and via. live stream starting January 6.

*There will be no class Feb. 17 (Reading Week)

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 in his local church in Ancaster, Ontario where he lives. He is the author of the book, *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope after Christendom* (IVP) and co-author (With Dr. Franklin Pyles) of the book *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Experiencing the Four-Fold Gospel Today* (Wipf and Stock).

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the theology, philosophy and practice of Christian leadership in the 21st century. The course is meant to help students understand leadership as a concept as well as gain perspective on key developmental issues related to their own leadership lives. The course will examine a number of theories of contemporary leadership and especially focus on the challenges of Christian leadership in today's North American culture as well as consider appropriate strategies for leadership that address these challenges.

Learning Goals:

Knowing:

1. As a result of this course students will understand foundational scriptural and theological principles for leadership in the church in contemporary culture.
2. As a result of this course students will have gained knowledge on a wide range of approaches to leadership in contemporary leadership theory.
3. As a result of this course students will become conversant with some of the particular challenges to Christian leadership in this particular historical moment in North American history and begin to identify ways to address them.

Being:

1. Students will grow in their confidence to lead in their own unique, God given style of leadership.

Doing:

1. Students will develop their own philosophy of leadership and consider how to implement this philosophy in their own leadership context.
2. Students will identify relevant strategies for personal leadership development.

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 join the class meetings and that you will participate in the lectures and discussions. 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 will 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 in person or via Zoom, please feel free to make an appointment with me for a time that works for both of us.

Required Reading

Dugan, John P. *Leadership Theory: Cultivating Critical Perspectives*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2017.

Smith Gordon T. *Wisdom from Babylon: Leadership for the Church in a Secular Age*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2020.

Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2015.

Assignments

1. Paper: Approaches to Contemporary Leadership

This paper is based on the course textbook *Leadership Theory*. Students will write a paper that offers an overview of the development of leadership theories and practices throughout history and into today's context. The paper should demonstrate a comprehension of how approaches to leadership have evolved, shifted and changed. It should identify some key leadership theories that embody the various historic movements in leadership theory and provide a personal reflection on the approach, or approaches to leadership that resonate most deeply with you. The paper should demonstrate a clear engagement with the course text *Leadership Theory* and at least three other sources. This assignment is designed to contribute to the achievement of learning objectives Knowing #2 and Being #1.

The paper should be 8-10 pages (double spaced) in length and is due Feb. 3, 2026. It will constitute 25% of the course grade.

2. Paper and Presentation: The Challenge and Possibilities for Christian Leadership Today

This paper is designed to invite reflection and research on the unique aspects of contemporary North American culture and their effect on leadership in general and Christian leadership in particular. Some guiding questions for the paper include: What are some of the specific

challenges of contemporary culture that affect how a leader leads today? How do these challenges have a unique effect on Christian leadership in the church, a Christian organization or in a secular setting? (you can focus on one of these in particular if you want to, or you can do some reflection on two or three), What are some of the ways that Christian leaders need to think about the practice of leadership today in order to practice leadership effectively? The paper should address these, or these types of questions and reflect a sensitivity to cultural trends and realities that are present in today's North American culture as well as ways that Christian leaders can address these challenges in a way that is theologically rooted and practically oriented. It should draw from the course texts *Wisdom from Babylon* and *Canoeing the Mountains* as well as at least five other sources.

Accompanying the paper a short presentation, based on the paper will be offered to either the class as a whole or in a video presentation that will be submitted to the course instructor. The format of the presentation will be finalized on the first day of class and is dependent on the size of the class. The presentation should be a 10-minute oral summary of your paper that seeks to be both informational but also inspirational to contemporary Christian leaders. Presentations should reflect a desire to communicate your ideas effectively and creatively. They will be evaluated on their content/ideas, engagement with the audience and creativity. Presentations that go over 10 minutes will receive a deduction on the final grade for this assignment. This assignment is designed to contribute to the achievement of learning objectives Knowing #3 and Doing #'s 1 and 2.

The written part of this assignment is due Mar. 10, 2026. The paper should be 8-10 pages (double spaced) in length and will constitute 30% of the final course grade. The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes in length (format, exact due date and further details will be discussed in the first class) the presentation will constitute 10% of the course grade.

3. Specialization Paper: My Personal Theology and Philosophy of Leadership

This paper builds off the previous assignment but seeks to go to the deeper foundations of Christian leadership. The paper should offer an introductory biblical and theological foundation for leadership, a personal philosophy of leadership that reflects consideration of various leadership theories and some thoughts on several key leadership practices that you believe are essential to effective leadership in the contemporary church and/or society today as they pertain to your particular specialization (see below for further detail). The paper should demonstrate comprehension of course materials, required texts and pertinent research on the issue of leadership (All course texts should be cited as well as at least 7 other sources). Because of the page limitations for this assignment, it is not expected that this paper will be a comprehensive study of Christian leadership, but the grade will be based on your ability to concisely articulate a clear understanding of leadership and a beginning vision for how you see yourself practicing

leadership in the future. This assignment is designed to contribute to the achievement of learning objectives Knowing #1, Being #1 and Doing #'s 1 and 2.

Pastoral Studies

For the specialization in Pastoral Studies the paper should provide some focus on leadership in a congregational setting. What are the approaches and practices of leadership that are most relevant and needed in the church today? What does it look like for a pastoral leader to employ those practices in their ministry?

Church in Culture

For the specialization in Church in Culture the paper should provide some focus on some of the ways that the church can engage with and model contemporary leadership practice in 21st century North American culture. What are some of the key ways to practice leadership that are contextually appropriate today? How can the church bear witness to the culture in the way that it practices leadership that is theologically Christian and culturally sensitive?

**If you are not taking this course as part of your specialization you are free to choose any one of these three directions for your paper.

The paper is due Apr. 7, 2026, and should be 10-12 pages in length (double spaced) and will constitute 35% of the course grade.

Course Outline *subject to adjustment as necessary

Section One: What is Leadership? (Jan. 6, 13, 20,27)

The class begins meeting Jan 6 for introductions and orientation to the syllabus and course requirements. Also, that day there will be an introductory lecture and discussion on the topic, What is Leadership?

The weeks of Jan. 13, 20 & 27 we will focus on the theology of leadership and the significance of the inner life of the Christian leader.

Student Responsibilities: Join the class meetings each Tuesday. Jan. 6 be prepared to briefly introduce yourself and bring any questions that you have about the course and/or the syllabus. Read the course text *Leadership Theory* and work on your paper “Approaches to Contemporary Leadership.”

Section Two: Contemporary Approaches to Leadership (Feb. 3, 10, 24, Mar. 3) *No class Feb 17 (Reading week)

The class will focus on major trends in leadership theory and practice, particularly ones that are focused on the cultural realities of the Western world in the 21st century.

Student Responsibilities: Join the class gatherings. Hand in your first paper by Feb. 3. Read the course textbook *Wisdom from Babylon*.

Section Three: The Practice of Christian Leadership in a Post-Christian Context (Mar. 10, 17, 24, 31, Apr. 7)

Throughout this section of the course, we will consider a number of key practices for Christian leadership in today's context. The focus of this section of the course will be on practice and formation in personal leadership development.

Student Responsibilities: Hand in your second paper on Mar. 10. Prepare and present your presentation (final detail on format and due date will be finalized during the first week of the semester). Read the course textbook *Canoeing the Mountains*. Prepare and submit your final paper by Apr. 7th.

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: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), 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. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Style

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses, <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Introductory Bibliography

Banks, R and B. Ledbetter. *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.

Barton, Ruth. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Beach, Nancy. *Gifted to Lead: the Art of Leading as a Women in the Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

Bell, Skip (editor). *Servants and Friends: A Biblical Theology of Leadership*, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2014.

Branson, Mark Lau and Juan F. Martinez. *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2011.

Clinton, Robert J. *The Making of a Christian Leader: Recognizing the Lesson sand stages of Leadership Development*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988.

Collins, Jim. *Good to Great*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001.

DePree, Max. *Leadership is an Art*. New York: Dell, 1989.

Friedman, Edwin H. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. New York: Seabury, 2007.

Greenleaf, Robert. *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness (25th Anniversary Edition)*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2002.

Jacobson, Eric O., ed., *The Three Tasks of Leadership: Worldly Wisdom for Pastoral Leaders*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Keel, Tim. *Intuitive Leadership: Embracing a Paradigm of Narrative, Metaphor, and Chaos*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York: Crossroad, 1989.

Roxburgh, Alan J., and Fred Romanuk. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco: Joosey-Bass, 2006.

Wright, Walter C. *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Influence and Service*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

*See also *The Journal of Religious Leadership* at www.arl-jrl.org