

MS 3P1300 SYLLABUS
The Ministry of Pastoral Care

*The mission of McMaster Divinity College is to develop effective evangelical Christian leaders
for the Church, academy, and society
through graduate-level education, spiritual development, and vocational formation.*

McMaster Divinity College
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Fall Term 2026
Monday 4:00pm-5:50pm

Specializations: PS, CS

Biography:

Dr. Phil Zylla is *Professor of Pastoral Theology* at McMaster Divinity College and holds the *George Franklin Hurlburt Chair of Preaching*. Dr. Zylla has an abiding interest in pastoral care and is a contributing scholar in the field of pastoral theology. His research interests include the theology of suffering, virtue ethics and pastoral care, and disability theology. He is married to Melodie and lives in Ancaster, Ontario.

Course Description:

Pastoral care involves shaping human values, cultivating authentic spiritual community and alleviating human suffering. Pastoral theologian C.W. Brister suggests that such work requires “theological wisdom, moral clarity and personal courage.” The search for such wisdom, clarity and courage will guide the aims of this course. The practices of pastoral care in a variety of ministry contexts will be explored in depth. Participants will be invited to explore their own framework for moral vision, to articulate a vision of pastoral care for their own ministry context, and to prepare themselves for a deeper participation in the care of others. Compassion is a countercultural and spiritual skill of entering into the anguishing situations of others. The course explores the skill-set, the life orientation, and the sustainable practices that support such compassion. The course further explores the balance of personal involvement/availability and community structures that support the ministry of care.

Course Objectives:

KNOWING

1. To explore the foundational theological themes of compassion, hope and communion as a framework for the ministry of pastoral care.
2. To acquire a heightened understanding of pastoral care in various situations.
3. To widen the horizons of pastoral concern to include the social dimensions of care.

BEING

4. To grow in spiritual vision and compassion for others.
5. To gain confidence in one’s own capacity for pastoral intervention in crisis situations.

DOING

6. To formulate a paradigm for sustained pastoral care with those in need.
7. To practice intervention strategies in common situations requiring pastoral care.
8. To grow in skills of empathy, listening, and consolation.

Required Course Textbooks:

Capps, Donald. *The Decades of Life: A Guide to Human Development*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Doehring, Carrie. *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006.

Dykstra, Robert C. *Images of Pastoral Care*. St. Louis, Chalice Press.

Lester, Andrew D. *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

Nouwen, Henri J.M. *Can You Drink the Cup?* Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1996.

COURSE OUTLINE	Mondays 4:00 p.m. – 5:50 p.m.
September 14, 2026	Themes and Metaphors of Pastoral Care
September 21, 2026	Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling
September 28, 2026	Cultivating a Caring Community
October 5, 2026	Narrating Life Stories
October 12, 2026	<i>Reading Week – no class</i>
October 19, 2026	Chapel: Can You Drink the Cup Poems Inhabiting Compassion
October 26, 2026	Spirituality of Pastoral Care
November 2, 2026	Pastoral Care Emergencies
November 9, 2026	Pastoral Care in Grief
November 16, 2026	Life Stages and Pastoral Care (Part I)
November 23, 2026	Life Stages and Pastoral Care (Part II)
November 30, 2026	Pastoral Care in Illness

December 7, 2026

**Spiritual Crisis and Anxiety
Final Chapel and Course Poems**

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

The course design is collegial and interactive. Participants are expected to attend all class sessions, engage in meaningful discussions in small groups, to interact in the various opportunities of the course, and to complete all reading, written and participatory assignments.

1. Pastoral Care Case Sessions (20 marks)

The course will be divided into work groups for analysis and reflection of case studies, films and written stories. Each person will lead a session in their work group in a creative exercise meant to strengthen participant's capacity to enact pastoral care in complex situations. This will involve role play, investigation, situational analysis and will facilitate responses to various media. The session will be peer-evaluated and graded by the professor. **Sign-up on the first day of class for a date** to lead your peer group.

2. Textbook Review (6-8 pages): (15 marks)

The book reviews are intended to draw out the questions of the participants as they engage the theme of this course. Select one of the core textbooks (excluding - *Can You Drink the Cup?*)

- a. Summarize the way this book helps you to frame your understanding of the ministry of pastoral care.
- b. Name and explore the key questions that this book raises for you and the guiding insights gained.
- c. What is(are) the primary premise(s) of the book? How do these inform your vision of care ministry?
- d. Demonstrate how you would apply the insights of this volume in the ministry of pastoral care.
- e. How does this volume relate specifically to your specialization and what questions does it raise?

Due Date: November 2, 2026

3. Poems: (5 marks for each poem)

Two chapel times are scheduled during the course. Participants will be invited to present a theo-poetic poem in each of these integrative sessions. Criteria used to mark these assignments are:

- a. personal integration
- b. biblical/theological congruity
- c. creativity
- d. engagement of core themes in the course
- e. moral vision

Due Dates: Poem # 1 October 19, 2026

Poem # 2 December 7, 2026

4. Literature Review (25 marks)

Choose seven (7) books for review from the selected course bibliography for exploration of the themes of the ministry of care. These ***books should reflect your specialization*** (PS,SC). [Other volumes can be used by permission of the professor.] Develop a one page summary for each book that includes:

- a. Information about the author.

- b. Key insights and quotes from the volume.
- c. Ideas about the application of the book for the ministry of care.
- d. Identification of questions that this book raises for further exploration.
- e. Application to one's own ministry context.

Due Date: November 16, 2026

5. Final Essay: 15 pages (30 marks)

Participants are invited to write a 12-15 page essay that summarizes your own reflections on the ministry of pastoral care and ***that fits with your area of specialization***. It is expected that participants will draw on the course textbooks and at least eight other sources (books or journal articles) that are ***specific to one's own specialization*** for this essay.

Essay topics include:

For Pastoral Studies (PS) Specialization:

- Cultivating a Caring Community
- Crisis Intervention in Pastoral Care
- Spirituality for Pastoral Care
- Pastoral Care in the Church
- Women and Pastoral Care
- Intercultural Pastoral Care
- Other topics – by permission

For Spiritual Care and Counseling (CS) Specialization:

- Spirituality for Pastoral Care
- Pastoral Care and the Life Cycle
- Crisis Intervention in Pastoral Care
- Sustaining Care in Professional Context
- Women and Pastoral Care
- Intercultural Pastoral Intervention
- Other topics – by permission

The essays will be graded with the following criteria in mind:

- *interaction with primary textbooks and course bibliography
- *theological reflection and perspective
- *depth of insight and theoretical integration
- *intellectual and spiritual honesty
- *writing style and conformity to the MDC Styleguide

Essay Due: December 7, 2026

MS 5P1300 DPT Syllabus Supplement:

DPT students who wish to take this course for five-unit credit must contact the professor to obtain the DPT syllabus supplement. This supplement involves additional reading requirements

and assignments appropriate to the doctoral level study of the subject. Contact:

zyllap@mcmaster.ca to request the syllabus supplement.

Late Papers: Late papers will be docked 1% each day late. (Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances such as extended illness, etc.).

Spacing: All assignments are to be double-spaced.

College Style for Submission of Written Work:

All written work is to be submitted in accordance with the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guide for Essays and Theses*, available on the McMaster Divinity College web-site. Students are expected to learn and adhere to the MDC Styleguide.

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, including Generative AI) 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 Generative AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work for you. Using AI to produce content for you and then submitting that content as if you produced 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. Additionally, although there may be value in using an AI tool to correct mistakes in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, Generative AI is not to be used for translating from your native language to English. All degree programs at MDC are taught in English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.

GuardMe Statement

Students at McMaster Divinity College have access to the GuardMe Student Support Program (GMSSP), which offers free, confidential mental health and wellness support 24/7. Through the program, students can connect with counsellors, access helpful tools and resources, and receive support anytime, from anywhere. Support is available by phone (1-844-451-9700) or visit gmssp.org to download the Student Support App.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), McMaster Divinity College (MDC) is committed to supporting a learning environment that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Students who require academic accommodations to participate fully in this course must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) (<https://sas.mcmaster.ca/>) of McMaster University. SAS will work directly with the MDC Registrar to ensure reasonably appropriate accommodations are in place. Students with accommodations must use the SAS portal to activate the accommodations relevant to each course at the start of each term they are enrolled in. This will generate a notification to course instructors outlining the activated accommodations for the student in their course. Please note that accommodations must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation. Accommodations will be implemented once the faculty member has been notified. Accommodations are not retroactive and will not be applied to coursework or activities that have already concluded.

Contact Information:

- **Student Accessibility Services General Inquiries:** sas@mcmaster.ca
- **Roksana Sobota (SAS Representative for MDC):** sobotar@mcmaster.ca
- **MDC Registrar:** mdcreg@mcmaster.ca

Policy on Illness

Every effort should be made to attend and participate in every class. In person participants should make a request to participate via livestreaming if they are not feeling well enough to attend class. All sessions of the course are recorded and posted on A2L for review. If a class has been missed, it is required that the student review the posted material from that week. If the professor is ill, the course GA or a suitable colleague will conduct activities for the session; presentations will continue uninterrupted.

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. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Online Synchronous Course Policy

Attendance & Participation

- This course meets live online at the scheduled times. Attendance and active participation are required.

- Join the session on time; late arrivals disrupt the class and may affect your participation grade.
- Sessions may be recorded for review, but recordings do not replace live attendance.

Technology Requirements

- Ensure you have a reliable internet connection, a device with audio and video capability, and the course platform installed (e.g., Zoom, Teams).
- Test your connection before class.
- Keep your microphone muted unless speaking to reduce background noise.
- Use headphones when possible for better audio quality.

Webcam & Environment

- Unless otherwise instructed, enable your webcam for the duration of the class session.
- Dress in casual but appropriate attire.
- Minimize distractions in your background. Virtual backgrounds are acceptable if professional.

Netiquette

- Be respectful and courteous in all interactions.
- Use the “Raise Hand” feature before speaking; avoid interrupting others.
- Keep chat messages on-topic; avoid ALL CAPS, sarcasm, or humor that could be misinterpreted.
- Stay focused—do not multitask during class.

Communication

- Check your email and the LMS regularly for updates, schedule changes, and supplementary materials.
- Monitor any additional communication channels used for the course.

Accessibility

- This course is committed to providing an inclusive learning environment. If you require accommodations, please follow the instructions in the Student Handbook.
- Live captions and accessible materials are available upon request.

Privacy

- Class sessions may be recorded for educational purposes and shared only with enrolled students. Recordings must not be distributed outside the course.
- Respect the privacy of peers: do not share images, voices, or contributions outside the class environment.

Academic Integrity & AI Usage

- All work submitted must be your own. Use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.) is prohibited for all assignments, discussions, and assessments unless explicitly authorized by the instructor.
- Violations of this policy will be treated as academic misconduct under institutional guidelines.

Contacting the Instructor: Dr. Phil C. Zylla

E-mail: zyllap@mcmaster.ca

Appointments: email instructor with request for Zoom or in person meeting

Disclaimer: This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up until the first day of class.

The Ministry of Pastoral Care - Selected Bibliography

Anderson, Ray S. *Self Care: A Theology of Personal Empowerment and Spiritual Healing*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1995.

_____. *Spiritual Caregiving as Secular Sacrament: A Practical Theology for Professional Caregivers*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003.

Ayres, Jennifer R. *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013.

Beach, Lee. *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom*.

Beker, J. Christian. *Suffering and Hope: The Biblical Vision and the Human Predicament*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1987.

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R., Tarule, J.M. *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York, Basic Books Inc., 1986.

Benner, David. *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Boff, Leonardo. *Essential Care: An Ethics of Human Nature*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith Community*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.

Borchert, Gerald L., and Andrew D. Lester, eds. *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia: The Westminster, 1985.

Bouma-Prediger, Steven, and Brian J. Walsh. *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Brister, C.W. *Pastoral Care in the Church*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

Browning, Don S. *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1983.

_____. *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.

_____. *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

- Burns, Bob, et al. *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013.
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- Donald Capps. *Agents of Hope: A Pastoral Psychology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
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- _____. *The Decades of Life: A Guide to Human Development*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008.
- _____. *Life Cycle Theory and Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983.
- _____. *Living Stories: Pastoral Counseling in Congregational Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.
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- _____. *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.
- _____. *Pastoral Counseling and Preaching: A Quest for an Integrating Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1990.
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- _____. *The Resourceful Self: And a Little Child Shall Lead Them*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014.
- Crabb, Larry. *Connecting: A Radical New Vision*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997.
- Doehring, Carrie. *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- _____. *Taking Care: Monitoring Power Dynamics and Relational Boundaries in Pastoral Care & Counseling*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995.
- Dunlap, Susan J. *Caring Cultures: How Congregations Respond to the Sick*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009.

- Dykstra, Robert C. ed. *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings*. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2005.
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- Fowler, James W. *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996.
- _____. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
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- _____. *Making Room for Life: Tracing Chaotic Lifestyles for Connected Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
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- _____. *Prophetic Pastoral Practice: A Christian Vision of Life Together*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.
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- Gutierrez, Gustavo. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996.
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- Hart, Archibald, D. *Coping with Depression: In the Ministry and Other Helping Professions*. Waco, TX: Word, 1984.
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- _____. Zylla, P.C., 2017, "Inhabiting Compassion: A Pastoral Theological Paradigm", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(4), a4644. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4644>, 2017.