



McMaster Divinity College

Foundations For Christian Ministry

MS 3P1160/MS 5P1140

Winter 2027

Specializations: CC/CW/PS

***DPT (or PhD) students who want to take this course as an advanced elective should consult with the student records office for direction as to how to proceed with registration and the development of a supplemental syllabus in consultation with the course instructor.**

Instructor: Dr. Lee Beach

beachl@mcmaster.ca

Office # 237

Class Time: Mondays, 11:00 am-12:50 pm ET

Room: TBA.

Schedule: This class is an in person and live streamed class. The first class meets Jan. 11th, there is no class Feb. 15 (reading week), the last class meets Apr. 12th.

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 a new church initiative 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* (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 will explore some essential foundations of Christian ministry such as the call to ministry, the importance of understanding our context, the essential content of Christian ministry and the challenge of the ongoing cultivation of our practice of Christian ministry. Chapters 3 and 4 in the gospel of Matthew as it depicts Jesus' own development for ministry will serve as a foundation for the course as it unpacks each of these themes. We will explore the inner challenges of ministry life as well as the outer ones that must be addressed if we are to serve Christ faithfully in our given context. The goal of the course is to help orient students to some of the foundational internal, external and theological factors that anchor ministry as we also consider their connection to the actual practice of ministry.

Learning Goals:

Knowing:

1. Upon completion of this course students will understand a number of key experiences and practices that contribute to personal formation for ministry.
2. Upon completion of this course students will gain insight into the integrative nature of experience and knowledge in ministry formation.
3. Upon completion of this course students will be able to identify many of the key challenges in the ongoing practice of Christian ministry.

Being

1. As a result of this course students will have reflected on their ongoing life experience as a way to consider how they are being formed for ministry.
2. As a result of this course students will consider their present needs in their ongoing development in ministry formation.

Doing

1. Upon completion of this course students will have developed a personal philosophy for ministry formation.

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 each Wednesday.

Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order as an email attachment sent to the instructor (More detail on this will be given in our first class meeting). 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 week days (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 Monday. 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

Peterson, Eugene. *The Pastor: A Memoir*. New York: Harper One, 2011.

Root, Andrew. *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019.

Assignments

1. Paper: What is my "Calling?"

The concept of "calling" is something that is often referred to in the discussion around vocational Christian ministry. It is a complex topic to consider. Is calling something that only

certain people experience because God has set them apart for vocational ministry? Is calling something that everyone experiences in one way or another, whether it is to vocational ministry or some other vocation or life path? Is calling a wrong way to understand things? Is the concept of calling a false impulse that some people place a misguided emphasis on and others wrestle with because they do not feel any clear sense of “calling?” This paper asks you to consider the concept of “calling” from a theological and personal perspective. What are the biblical and historical foundations for the idea of “calling to ministry?” How do contemporary understandings of choosing a vocation inform how someone seeking to be faithful to God’s will for their lives inform how to decide on a life path? How does one discern their sense of calling? Is there a unique call to vocational ministry? Is the idea of “calling” a concept that no longer has any currency and should be done away with in our vocabulary when contemplating how we can best serve God’s purposes in our lives? These, and other, questions should inform the paper. It is designed to be an open opportunity to explore an understanding of “calling” to ministry and how you understand it as a concept and as a personal experience. It is a reflection paper that also expects some interaction with relevant sources (at least six) especially the course text *The Pastor*. The paper should offer some consideration of the biblical idea of some people being called to specific ministries, the historic testimony of many men and women who would say they were “called” to specific ministries and the contemporary realities of a less hierarchical view of Christian ministry that does not delineate the distinction of the sacred and the secular so clearly when it comes to the potential of every vocation or life path to be considered “ministry” in its give context. The paper should conclude with some preliminary (aprox. 1pg) of reflection on the implications of your study on your own life and sense of “calling.”

This paper should be 8-10 pages in length (double spaced) in length and is due Feb. 8, 2027. It will constitute 25% of the course grade.

2. Paper and Presentation: Learning from Someone who has Gone Before Us.

This assignment is designed to invite you to study the life of a veteran ministry practitioner and cull lessons from their lives in order to inform your own development as a ministering person. Andrew Root, in our course text *The Pastor in a Secular Age* looks at a number of ancient and contemporary leaders for this purpose, in this assignment you will choose a past or present ministry leader of note (i.e. someone on whom things have been written, but not any of the figures that Root covers in the course textbook) and study their lives with a particular view to discerning the primary elements that have been part of their development and formation in ministry. What experiences, learnings, and ongoing development were crucial to their formation as a ministering person? How intentional were they in their growth? Did they have any blind spots or weaknesses that were left unaddressed?, etc. The person can be anyone from church history or contemporary ministry. You should refer to at least five sources as the foundation for your research on the person that you choose. Your research will be presented in two formats. First, it will be submitted to the course instructor

in written form as a paper. Second, it will be offered to the class as an oral presentation. A presentation schedule will be determined on the first day of class. Presentations should be no longer than 12 minutes in length (going over this limit will have an adverse affect on your grade) and will be followed by 5 minutes of class Q+A. Presentations will be graded based upon the depth of research evidenced, the quality of insights into the persons development offered, helpfulness of your response to the questions offered by the class, the creativity of the presentation itself and adherence to the time limit. All presentations will take place on Mar. 15, 22 and if necessary, depending on class size, Mar. 29.

Papers should be 10-12 pages in length (double spaced) and are due Mar. 8, 2027. The paper will constitute 30% of the course grade. Presentations are due on the date determined by the class schedule (either Mar. 15, 22 or 29, to be finalized during the first week of class). Presentations will constitute 10% of the course grade.

3. Research/Specialization Paper: Letter to a Young Pastor

This paper invites the student to offer their own philosophy of ministry formation by writing a letter to a young pastor who is newly engaged in vocational ministry. What would you say to him/her about how to think about their development as a ministering person? What are some important things for them to pay attention to? What are some key practices to engage in? What challenges will they face that you would want to alert them to? Etc. This paper should be written in the form of a personal letter but it should also reflect that genuine research has been done to help you develop your ideas (The course text books and at least six other sources should be cited). The paper should ultimately present a philosophy of ministry formation that is applicable to people who are seeking to understand themselves, their calling and the cultivation of that calling, in whatever form it takes, throughout their lives.

Pastoral Studies Specialization

Those taking this course as part of their specialization in Pastoral Studies should include a section in the paper that explicitly focuses on the unique challenges of ministry formation in the pastoral ministry. What are the stress points that need to be recognized? What are the challenges of formation when one is often in the “public eye”? How does pastoral ministry help and sometimes hinder personal formation in ministry? These, and perhaps other, questions should be considered in the paper.

Church in Culture Specialization

Those taking the course as part of their specialization in Church in Culture should include a section that highlights the unique challenges of ministry formation in a post-Christian age. Are there any unique areas that the ministering person should focus on in these days? Does the current age present challenges to the ministering person that were not present in past eras? If so, what are they and how can they be addressed?

Christian Worldview Specialization

Those taking the course as part of their specialization in Christian Worldview should include a section in the paper that highlights the role that vocational ministers play in culture today. In a time of overall decline of Christian faith in the broad culture how does the pastor, chaplain, or para-church leader understand their role and how to best engage in ministry given an increasingly marginalized role in society overall?

The paper is due Apr. 5, 2027, 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: Calling (Jan. 11&18)

- Matt. 3:13-4:11
- What is calling?
- Understanding and living into the call to ministry
- Tension points
- Perseverance

Section Two: Context (Jan. 25 & Feb 1)

- Matt. 4:12-17
- Why context matters
- Knowing your inner context
- Knowing your cultural context
- Knowing your ministry context

Section Three: Content (Feb. 8 & 22)

- Matt. 4:23-25
- Engaging in Christian ministry
- Preaching good news
- Healing the sick
- Confronting the powers of darkness

Section Four: Cultivation (Mar 1, Mar. 8, 15, 22, 29, Apr. 5, 12)

- Matt. 4:18-22
- Growing in ministry through knowledge and experience

Introductory Bibliography

Barton, Ruth Haley. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.

Benner, David G. *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004.

Finn, Nathan A. and Whitfield, Keith S, (editors). *The Spirituality of the Sent: Casting a New Vision for the Missional Church*. Downers Grove, IN: Intervarsity, 2017.

Jenkins, Michael. *Letters to New Pastors*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Lederleitner, Mary T. *Women in God's Mission: Accepting the Invitation to Serve and Lead*. Downers Grove, IN: Intervarsity, 2018.

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

Oden, Thomas. *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983.

Purves, Andrew. *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

Peterson, Eugene H. *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989.

Root, Andrew. *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Churches Obsession with Youthfulness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017.

Willimon, William. *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2002.

Additional Notes:

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresenting the authorship or ownership of written work through deception or other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include copying or using unauthorized aids during tests or examinations; plagiarism, that is, presenting another person's (or generative AI's) words, ideas, data, or creative work as one's own without appropriate

acknowledgement and citation; or submitting work for credit in more than one course without instructor permission.

A special note about Generative AI: Students are expected to do their own thinking and write their own papers and assignments. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work. The use of AI to produce content that is then submitted as though it were the student's own work constitutes plagiarism and is a violation of the Academic Honesty Policy. While AI tools may be used to correct errors in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, Generative AI must not be used to translate assignments from a student's native language into English. All degree programs at MDC are taught in the English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.

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 in which they are enrolled. Please note that accommodations must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation. 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

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 student will use inclusive language in all MDC assignments. When referencing biblical texts, students should preserve the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God while using gender-inclusive language when referring to human beings. Biblical quotations should be taken from a gender-inclusive translation such as: NRSVue (2022), NIV (2011), CEB (2011), NLT (1996), or CEV (1995).

Bookstore

All required and recommended books 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, students 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

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.

College Style for Submission of Written Work [updated July 2, 2026]

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

Online Synchronous Course Policy

Technology Requirements

- A reliable internet connection (tested before class time),
- A device with audio and video capability
- The correct video conferencing platform installed (e.g., Zoom, Teams).

Webcam & Environment

- Students must keep their microphones muted except when speaking to minimize background noise.
- Students must keep their webcams on throughout the class session.
- Students must dress appropriately.
- Students must ensure their surroundings are free from unnecessary distractions. Professional virtual backgrounds are permitted.