

## MS 3P1050 Pastoral Theology of Preaching SYLLABUS

*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**  
**Phil C. Zylla, D.Th.**  
**Office #: 215 - by appointment**  
**Specializations: PS, CC, BS**  
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**Term: Fall 2026**

**Course Delivery:** In Person/Livestream  
**Class Sessions:** Wednesday 4:00-5:50 p.m.

### **Bio:**

Dr. Phil Zylla is *Professor of Pastoral Theology* at McMaster Divinity College. He also holds the *George Franklin Hurlburt Chair of Preaching*. His research interests include congregational studies, Christian spirituality, pastoral theology, and preaching. Dr. Zylla was preaching pastor of three congregations over 17 years and draws on his experience in the pulpit for this course. He lives in Ancaster with his wife Melodie.

### **Course Description:**

The ministry of preaching in contemporary society demands a carefully developed framework of pastoral theological imagination. This course identifies dimensions of cultural engagement, discernment of pastoral needs, practices of creative and artful communication, and attention to the contours of spiritual development of congregations. Proclamation practices that facilitate meaning, purpose, and Christian identity will be established to develop a critical framework for contemporary preaching. Finding one's voice, articulating a spiritual vision, and thinking theologically about spiritual formation through preaching will be animated dimensions of this course. The course will offer guidance for both experienced and novice preachers, with the aim of strengthening a mature framework for contemporary pastoral theology of preaching. As a practice-based course, participants will be engaged in preparing and delivering sermons and developing their particular approach to proclamation ministry.

### **Course Objectives:**

#### ***Knowing***

1. Participants will expand their knowledge of the dynamics contemporary preaching.
2. Participants will learn to think theologically about the practices of communicating the gospel and articulating a deeper Christian spirituality.
3. Participants will gain insight into the complexities of preaching in a postmodern context.

#### ***Being***

4. Participants will deepen their commitment to authenticity in the ministry of preaching.
5. Participants will refresh their own spiritual practices of communion with God.

#### ***Doing***

6. Participants will craft and deliver effective sermons with creativity, depth, and integration.

### **Required Course Textbooks:**

Hogan, Lucy Lind. *Graceful Speech: An Invitation to Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006

Ward, David B. *Practicing the Preaching Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019.

Westerhoff, John H. *Spiritual Life: The Foundation for Preaching and Teaching*. Louisville.: Westminster John Knox, 1994.

### **Recommended Textbooks:**

Brown, Teresa L. Fry. *Delivering the Sermon*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Francis, L. J. and Andrew Village. *Preaching with All our Souls*. London: Continuum, 2008.

## **COURSE OUTLINE and TOPICS**

September 16            ***Course Introduction***

***What Makes a Great Sermon?***

September 23            ***Second Naivete and the Art of Attention***

***Proclamation as Formation***

September 30            ***Theopoetic Preaching: Imagination, Punctuation, and Surprise***  
***Finding Your Voice in Preaching***

October 7                ***Preaching Lab – Sermons A***  
***Sermon Delivery (in person/synchronous) by 3 course participants***  
***20 min. sermon; 10 min. feedback and response***

### ***Session Schedule:***

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>Zylla 4:00-4:10</i>
<i>Sermon 1</i>	<i>4:10-4:30</i>
<i>Response</i>	<i>4:30-4:40</i>
<i>Sermon 2</i>	<i>4:40-5:00</i>
<i>Response</i>	<i>5:00-5:10</i>
<i>Sermon 3</i>	<i>5:10-5:30</i>
<i>Response</i>	<i>5:30-5:40</i>
<i>Closing Remarks</i>	<i>Zylla 5:40-5:50</i>

October 14            **no class – Reading Week**

October 21            ***Preaching Lab – Sermons A***  
***Sermon Delivery (in person/synchronous) by 3 course participants***  
***20 min. sermon; 10 min. feedback and response***

**Session Schedule:**

Introduction	Zylla 4:00-4:10
Sermon 4	4:10-4:30
Response	4:30-4:40
Sermon 5	4:40-5:00
Response	5:00-5:10
Sermon 6	5:10-5:30
Response	5:30-5:40
Closing Remarks	Zylla 5:40-5:50

October 28 **Preaching Lab – Sermons A**

**Sermon Delivery (in person/synchronous) by 3 course participants  
20 min. sermon; 10 min. feedback and response**

**Session Schedule:**

Introduction	Zylla 4:00-4:10
Sermon 7	4:10-4:30
Response	4:30-4:40
Sermon 8	4:40-5:00
Response	5:00-5:10
Sermon 9	5:10-5:30
Response	5:30-5:40
Closing Remarks	Zylla 5:40-5:50

November 4 **Spirituality of Preaching and Self-Disclosure**

November 11 **Assessing the Spiritual Needs of a Congregation**

**Cultural Horizons of Contemporary Preaching**

November 18 **Preaching Lab – Sermons B**

**Sermon Delivery (in person/synchronous) by 3 course participants**

Introduction	Zylla 4:00-4:10
Sermon 10	4:10-4:40
Response	4:30-4:40
Sermon 11	4:40-5:00
Response	5:00-5:10
Sermon 12	5:10-5:30
Response	5:30-5:40
Closing Remarks	Zylla 5:40-5:50

November 25 **Preaching Lab – Sermons B**

**Sermon Delivery (in person/synchronous) by 3 course participants  
20 min. sermon; 10 min. feedback and response**

**Session Schedule:**

Introduction	Zylla 4:00-4:10
Sermon 13	4:10-4:30
Response	4:30-4:40

<i>Sermon 14</i>	4:40-5:00
<i>Response</i>	5:00-5:10
<i>Sermon 15</i>	5:10-5:30
<i>Response</i>	5:30-5:40
<i>Closing Remarks</i>	Zylla 5:40-5:50

December 2            **Preaching Lab – Sermons B**  
***Sermon Delivery (in person/synchronous) by 3 course participants***  
***20 min. sermon; 10 min. feedback and response***

***Session Schedule:***

<i>Introduction</i>	Zylla 4:00-4:10
<i>Sermon 16</i>	4:10-4:30
<i>Response</i>	4:30-4:40
<i>Sermon 17</i>	4:40-5:00
<i>Response</i>	5:00-5:10
<i>Sermon 18</i>	5:10-5:30
<i>Response</i>	5:30-5:40
<i>Closing Remarks</i>	Zylla 5:40-5:50

December 9            ***Preaching Panel: Contemporary Ministry of Proclamation***

December 16          ***Pastoral Theology of Preaching***  
***Guest Presentations: DPT Students***

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

**Assignment # 1:**

**Sermon A Summary (4-5 pages) + presented sermon 20 min.            25%**

**Written Summary Part I:**

- a. Selection of either an OT or NT pericope (n.b. whichever is chosen, the second sermon for this course will be the opposite) with an explanation of the context and theological importance of that passage. (1.5 pages)
- b. A clear paragraph describing the ‘core’ message of the pericope. (1 page)
- c. Some analysis describing how this text can be culturally appropriated today. (1.5 pages)
- d. Other significant framing of the sermon (1 page)

**\*\*Turn this summary in to Avenue to Learn Assignment Dropbox. n.b. You do NOT need to submit a manuscript of the sermon for review (it will be recorded); submit only the written summary.\*\***

**Sermon Presentation Part II:**

The sermon will be presented in person/synchronously to be evaluated by your peers using these criteria:

- Creativity and engagement of the audience
- Contemporary relevance of themes
- Theological insight of the text
- Exposition and development of the primary pericope
- Effectiveness of delivery
- Articulation and Voice (*see Sermon Evaluation form at end of syllabus*)

Length: The delivered sermon should be 20 mins. in length.

**Due Date for Summary: October 7, 2026**

**\*\*Sign up in course for presentation days\*\***

**Assignment # 2:**

**Textbook Review 5 pages**

**20%**

Select one of the course textbooks OR another key volume on the pastoral theology of preaching (by permission) for review. Engage in a meaningful interaction with how this book shapes your vision of contemporary preaching. What are the critical insights that shape your approach to the preaching task? What fundamental adjustments will you make in respect to your own ministry of proclamation? What notable insights can you interact with as to how they impact your vision for preaching ministry. The review should include:

- a. A summary of the primary arguments of the author.
- b. A description of the homiletical insights gained from reading this text.
- c. An examination of how the critical insights of this volume will be applied in your preaching.
- d. A one page vision statement about your renewed perspective on preaching gained from reading this text.

**Due Date: October 22, 2026**

**Assignment # 3**

**Sermon B Summary (4-5 pages) + presented sermon 20 min.**

**25%**

Sermons will be **presented in online/asynchronous format for interaction with your peer group**. The assignment has both a preliminary summary and the recorded online sermon for review by your peer group.

**Written Summary Part I:**

- a. Selection of either an OT or NT pericope (whichever you did not select for Sermon A) with an explanation of the context and theological importance of that passage (1.5 pages)
- b. A clear paragraph describing the 'core' message of the pericope. (1 page)
- c. Some analysis describing how this text can be culturally appropriated today (1.5 pages)
- d. Other key insights into the sermon (1 page)

**\*\*Turn this summary in to Avenue to Learn Assignment Dropbox n.b. You do NOT need to submit a manuscript of the sermon for review; submit only the written summary.\*\***

**Due Date for Summary: November 12, 2026**

**Sermon Presentation Part II:**

The sermon will be presented in person/synchronously to be evaluated by your peers using these criteria:

- Creativity and engagement of the audience
- Contemporary relevance of themes
- Theological insight of the text
- Exposition and development of the primary pericope
- Effectiveness of delivery
- Articulation and Voice (*see Sermon Evaluation form at end of syllabus*)

**\*\*Sign up in course for presentation days\*\***

#### **Assignment # 4**

##### **Preaching Plan**

**30%**

Write a three-month preaching plan for your own congregation or ministry context (ie. youth events, etc. ). [n.b. For those in CC specialization without a primary ministry, focus on presentations to a retreat audience and plan out three retreats – with four themes/messages for each retreat. Imagine an audience of participants from various churches]. [BS specialization students should focus on OT or NT sermon plan appropriate to their specialization.]

The preaching plan should include the following:

- a. General theological themes and motifs with reading list
- b. Outline of the sermon series over the three months.
- c. A description of preparation planning, weekly patterns, and presentation ideas.
- d. Creativity in planning and executing.
- e. Analysis of the setting in which the preaching occurs – congregational analysis, cultural framework, denominational or other identity markers, etc.
- f. A rationale for the sequencing of ideas and the desired outcome.

**Due Date:    December 9, 2026**

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#### **MS 5P1060    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](mailto:zyllap@mcmaster.ca) to request the syllabus supplement.

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

**Spacing:** All assignments are to be double-spaced.

**Contacting the Instructor:** Dr. Phil C. Zylla

**E-mail:** [zyllap@mcmaster.ca](mailto:zyllap@mcmaster.ca)

#### ***College Style for Submission of Written Work:***

All written work—unless informed otherwise by the professor—is to be submitted in accordance with the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guide for Essays and Theses*, available on the McMaster Divinity College website.

#### ***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](https://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](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca)
- **Roksana Sobota (SAS Representative for MDC):** [sobotar@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sobotar@mcmaster.ca)
- **MDC Registrar:** [mdcreg@mcmaster.ca](mailto: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. If a participant is ill on the day of class (especially a presentation day), she/he should make arrangements with the course GA to post their sermon online for review. 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: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

### ***Inclement Weather Policy***

On the rare occasion of inclement weather that prohibits in person gathering, the course will be moved to online synchronous gathering. The decision will follow the College's closure policy and students will be informed 3 hours before class is scheduled to meet.

### ***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.

### ***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.

**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.

## *Selected Bibliography*

Alves, Rubem A. *The Poet, The Warrior, the Prophet*. London: SCM Press, 1990.

Anderson, Kenton C. *Preaching with Conviction: Connecting with Postmodern Listeners*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic Publishing, 2001.

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Arbuckle, Gerald A. *Culture, Inculturation and Theologians: A Postmodern Critique*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2010.

Barnes, M. Craig. *The Pastor as Minor Poet: Texts and Subtexts in the Ministerial Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.

Bartow, Charles L. *The Preaching Moment*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

Bass, Dorothy C., and Kathleen Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, Christian B. Scharen. *Christian Practical Wisdom: What it is and Why it Matters*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2016.

Brown, Teresa L. Fry. *Delivering the Sermon*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010.

Bruner, Jerome. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Buechner, Frederick. *A Room Called Remember: Uncollected Pieces*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984.

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Day, David with Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis. *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*. London: Routledge, 2005. <https://doi-org.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/10.4324/9781315263748>

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- Francis, L. J. and Andrew Village. *Preaching with All our Souls*. London: Continuum, 2008.
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- Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Prayer: The Cry for the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Gustafson, James M. *Christ and the Moral Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
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- Knowles, Michael. *We Preach Not Ourselves: Paul on Proclamation*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Of Seeds and the People of God: Preaching as Parable, Crucifixion, and Testimony*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015.

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### SERMON EVALUATION FORM

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Date: Start time: End Time:

Presenter: Evaluator:

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Text:

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Core theme and main points:

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Did the sermon reveal something about God's nature? Express God's perspective?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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Did the sermon offer deliberate cultural analysis and perspective

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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Was the sermon culturally sensitive and relevant to a pluralistic audience?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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Biblical exegesis and textual analysis How effective was the interpretation of the biblical text?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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How would you rate the creativity and the careful attention to language?

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1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

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How would you rate the clarity of purpose in the sermon?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

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How would you rate the preacher's poise, tone, and sense of presence?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

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What value would you place on the application of core ideas to life?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

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Did the sermon evoke the vocation of the congregation?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

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What made this sermon most effective?

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