

MS 3P1020 *Disability, Ministry and the Church*
SYLLABUS

Phil C. Zylla, D.Th.
Office #: 215 – by appointment
Specializations: PS, CC, CW

Term: Fall 2024
Class Sessions: Tuesday 11:00 a.m. – 12:50 p.m.
Course Delivery: In Person/Livestreaming

Bio:

Dr. Phil Zylla is *Professor of Pastoral Theology* at McMaster Divinity College where he has taught since 2007. He also holds the *J. Gordon and Margaret Warnock Jones Chair in Church and Ministry*. His research interests include congregational studies, Christian spirituality, pastoral theology and theology of disability. Dr. Zylla has been founding member of the *Deeper Communion Network* which is a grass roots organization promoting the engagement of the church with issues of disability across Canada. *Deeper Communion* hosts an annual conference which seeks to contribute to advancement of inclusion, caring, and mutuality in our churches and in society.

Course Description:

The contemporary church is growing in its awareness of the importance of cultivating a spiritual community that includes all of God's people, regardless of ability or disability. The vital functioning of our communities of faith require critical adjustment to our vision and our shared practices. This course seeks to help churches to deepen their welcome and inclusion of all persons; to heighten strategies for care of all persons regardless of ability; and to foster an authentic witness to the love of Christ as a community with an altered moral imagination. While the shape of an inclusive Christian ministry may change in various contexts some fundamental aspects of person-centered ministry, a collaborative approach to shared ministry, and authentic welcome to persons of all abilities will be explored. The course will probe pastoral theological aspects of inclusive ministry, and will offer practical guidance for reimagining Christian ministry that facilitates *vulnerable communion*. The deeper aim of this course will be to enable a catalytic moral transformation of the church as *a community of compassion* and to explore various ways of being the church in contemporary society.

Course Objectives:

Knowing

1. To gain an informed perspective on current literature in theology, disability and the church.
2. To create an anthropological/theological framework for pastoral interaction with persons with disabilities.

Being

3. To become more compassionate and just in our dealings with those who are marginalized.
4. To deepen in the spiritual quality of acceptance.

Doing

5. To create a template for integration and mutuality in Christian ministry with those who are disabled.
6. To practice hospitality and justice with all persons, especially those with disabilities.

Course Textbooks:

Carter, Erik W. *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 2007.

Draper, Andrew T. with Jody Michele, and Andrea Mae. *Disabling Leadership: A Practical Theology for the Broken Body of Christ*. Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2023.

Gaventa, William C. *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018.

Swinton, John. *Walking with Jesus in Strange Places*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022.

Course Outline:

September 10 ***Naming and Defining Disability***
Read: Gaventa, Chapters 1, 2

September 17 ***Confronting Finitude: A Pastoral Theology of Disability***

September 24 ***Spirituality and Disability***
Read: Gaventa, Chapter 3, 4

October 1 ***A Theology of Leadership and Disability***
Read: *Disabling Leadership*, 1-48.

October 8 ***Creating an Accessible Community***
Read: *Disabling Leadership*, 108-157

October 15 **Reading Week – no class**

October 22 ***Welcoming, Including and Connecting***
Read: Carter, Chapter 3

October 29 ***Barriers to Authentic Community***
Read: Carter, Chapter 2

- November 5 ***Interviews: Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion***
Read: *Disabling Leadership*, Chapter 2
- November 12 ***Recovering the Spiritual Dimensions of Friendship***
Read: Gaventa, Chapter 12
- November 19 **ETS/SBL conferences – no class**
- November 26 ***The Other Six Days: Supporting Families on a Disability Journey***
Read: Carter, Chapter 5.
- December 3 ***Moving Toward Belonging***
Read: Gaventa, Chapter 14
- December 10 ***Moving to the Margins***
Read: Swinton, *Walking with Jesus*

Assignments:

Assignment # 1

Disability Interview 5-7 pages

Identify a person in your church community that is living with a disability. Interview them to understand their experiences of inclusion/exclusion, their perspective on disability and the church, and their general outlook on how churches could strengthen their attention and support of persons with disabilities. Use Eric Carter’s “belonging” grid: needed, loved, present, invited, welcomed, supported, accepted, befriended, cared for and known to assess the person’s experience of belonging/exclusion. Write a 5-7 page reflection on what you learned and relate this to the themes of the course. How has this interview impacted your views? Shaped your moral vision? Enabled your practices of hospitality?

Due Date: October 5, 2024 20%

Assignment # 2

Disability Audit 8-10 pages

Using Eric Carter’s “Becoming a Responsive Congregation” (Chapter 3) assess your church’s current state of welcome and belonging. Identify steps that your congregation has taken and still needs to take to reach out to people with disabilities and their families and weave them into the congregation. In the audit consider: a. issues of accessibility and the church’s responsiveness b. issues related to worship and education program adjustment and c. attitudes and barriers to change and orientation and d. perspectives of congregational leadership. The audit should

identify: i) current barriers, ii) emerging plans, iii) identified issues and iv) aspirational aims. Outline practical steps and efforts that your church can make to create a community of welcome and inclusion. Offer a theological perspective on the mission of the church and the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Due Date: October 31, 2024

20%

Assignment # 3

Literature Review, *Disability Theology and the Church* 8-10 pages

Read five (5) significant journal articles and three (3) key books (either from the course bibliography or books approved by the professor) to expand your knowledge of disability theology and the church. Briefly summarize the insights gained from your research. Highlight the impact of this literature in shaping your theological perspective, your moral vision for action, and your personal commitment to inclusion. What are the key insights that will be fruitful for your ongoing engagement with persons with disabilities and the church?

Due Date: November 19, 2024

25%

Assignment # 4

Essay Disability and the Church 12-15 pages

Write an essay about disability and the church that encapsulates your perspective on how the church can become a place of belonging and moral commitment. The paper should include both careful theological reflection on issues of disability (what it means to be human; to belong to the church, etc.) and on the mission of the church (inclusion and acceptance; biblical vision for all persons to belong, etc.). The criteria on which this essay will be assessed include:

- a. Theological perspective and vision
- b. Effective literature review of topic
- c. Concrete action plans and strategic changes/aims
- d. Clarity and depth of argument
- e. Form and style

Due Date: December 10, 2024

35%

MS 5P1030 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 requesting the syllabus supplement.

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

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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 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 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.

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 ***Disability - Christian Theology and Ministry***

- Block, Jennie Weiss. *Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities*. New York: Continuum Publishing, 2002.
- Brock, Brian. *Disability: Living into the Diversity of Christ's Body*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021.
- _____, and John Swinton, eds. *Disability and the Christian Tradition: A Reader*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012.
- Carter, Erik. *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Company, 2007.
- Dow, Keith. *Formed Together: Mystery, Narrative, and Virtue in Christian Caregiving*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021.
- Eisland, Nancy L. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- Fox, Bethany McKinney. *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church*. Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 2019.
- Gaventa, William G. *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018.
- Hardwick, Lamar. *Disability and the Church: A Vision for Diversity and Inclusion*. Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 2021.

- Ladau, Emily. *Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say and How to be an Ally*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2021.
- Macaskill, Grant. *Autism and the Church: Bible, Theology and Community*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021.
- Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008.
- Shurley, Anna Katherine. *Pastoral Care and Intellectual Disability: A Person-Centered Approach*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017.
- Spurrier, Rebecca F. *The Disabled Church: Human Difference and the Art of Communal Worship*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2019.
- Swinton, John. *Becoming Friends of Time: Disability, Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 2016.
- _____. *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.
- _____. *Walking with Jesus in Strange Places*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2022.
- Yong, Amos. *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.
- _____. *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007.