

**MISSION IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE**  
**MS P31100/MS P51100**  
**Fall 2024**  
**(CC/CW/PS)**

**Instructor:** Dr. Lee Beach

**Instructor's Contact Information:** Email: [beachl@mcmaster.ca](mailto:beachl@mcmaster.ca)

**Course Times:** Fall semester 2024; In person and live-stream Wednesdays at 9:00 - 10:50 AM (EST). Class starts on September 11. The last class is Dec. 11. Reading week is the week of Oct. 14 thus, our class will not meet on Oct. 16.

**Course Description:** This course provides an introduction to the principles and practice of the church and its mission in contemporary Western culture. The course will seek to help students develop a practical theology of mission by considering its biblical roots, historical practice, the nature of the church, the challenge of doing mission in contemporary culture, and emerging issues and approaches to mission in the current Western cultural milieu. Students will be encouraged to formulate creative approaches to mission and evangelism in their own social contexts as well as begin thinking about mission in other cultural contexts.

**Course Objectives:**

**Knowing:**

1. This course will help students understand foundational scriptural and theological principles for the mission of the Church in contemporary culture.
2. This course will help students to understand key features of contemporary Western culture (Canada in particular) as they relate to issues of spiritual need, and the proclamation of the Christian message.
3. This course will help students to become conversant with strategies for equipping the church for mission and engaging the culture in missional enterprise.

**Being:**

1. To encourage reflection and integration in terms of personal, congregational, and social aspects of Christian identity.
2. To help students develop confidence in their own ability to lead a congregation in missional engagement in their community and world.

**Doing:**

1. To give students the opportunity to develop their own philosophy of mission and evangelism for local church ministry and consider strategies for implementation.
2. To equip students with relevant strategies for personal and congregational mission.

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 attendance is required as your presence is necessary for our community (that is our class) to function at an optimal level. Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order. All late assignments may be docked at the rate of 3% for each day (including weekends) late. Assignments should be submitted via the class A2L site. (further instructions on this will be given on the first day of class) using a word or pdf format.

**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 Sundays. 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 via zoom or in person, please feel free to make an appointment with me for a time that works for both of us.

**Required Texts:**

- *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story*. Michael W. Goheen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

- *Women in the Mission of the Church: Their Opportunities and Obstacles Throughout Christian History*. Leanne M. Dzubinski and Anneke H. Stasson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021).

- *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines that Shape the Church for Mission*. David Fitch (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2016).

## Course Requirements

### i. Paper: A Biblical Theology of Mission

This paper should offer an introductory biblical foundation for the mission of the church. The paper should offer a biblical basis for mission and develop a theological foundation for the ongoing mission of the church. The paper should interact with key biblical texts in the Old and New Testament that speak to the missional nature of Israel and the church, it should also offer theological reflection on how those texts along with any other relevant historical examples can be formed into a coherent theology of mission. A short, concluding section should offer some brief reflection on the implications of this theology on the work of the church in contemporary culture. The paper should demonstrate comprehension of course materials, required texts (particularly *A Light to the Nations* and *Women in the Mission of the Church*) as well as at least six other pertinent sources on the issue of mission. This assignment is designed to address learning goal #1 under Knowing and learning goal #1 under doing.

**This paper should be 10-12 pages (double spaced) in length. It will constitute 30% of the course grade. It is due Oct. 23, 2024.**

### ii. Paper and Presentation: Challenges Facing the Church in Mission

This assignment is in two parts. The paper should offer three key challenges that you believe the church in North America is facing today as it seeks to engage the context missionally. Each challenge should be briefly presented and an explanation as to why you see it as a key challenge should be provided. The presentation and exploration of each challenge does not have to be exhaustive, but it should be descriptive enough to make it clear why it stands as a missional challenge for the church. The challenges should not be so local that they only apply to your church context, but it is okay to write from your own social and/or cultural vantage point. This means that you may identify a challenge (or two) that are unique to your context but may not apply to all churches throughout North America (i.e. challenges unique to immigrant churches or churches in a particular social location). However, they should be challenges that other congregations in a similar situation would share, not just something that is unique to your church or ministry context. The paper is designed to be descriptive, not

prescriptive, so there is no need to provide solutions to these challenges in this paper. The paper should reflect that research has been done on each challenge identified by citing at least three appropriate sources for each challenge (some sources can be duplicated for different challenges if appropriate).

**This paper should be 6-8 pages in length and will constitute 20% of the final course grade. It is due Nov. 6, 2024.**

The second part of this assignment is to prepare a short presentation based on your paper to present to a small group of your classmates. The presentation should be conceived in a TED talk style where you succinctly offer your three challenges and describe why they are things that the church must pay attention to. The talk should conclude with one idea as to how the church must position itself (i.e. how it must think and/or behave) in order for it to face these challenges effectively. The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes (going over this limit will adversely affect your grade on this assignment).

The presentation will be recorded and distributed to a group of 3-4 students and the course instructor (details on how to do this will be given in the first class meeting). Each group member will be expected to provide a comment and/or question to each of their group members presentations in an online forum that will be created on our class A2L site. Groups will be developed and announced within the first two weeks of the course.

This whole assignment is designed to address learning goal #2 under knowing and goal #1 under being.

**The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes in length and will constitute 10% of the final course grade. The presentation is due Nov. 13, 2024.**

**Responses to group members presentations are due by Nov. 27, 2024 and will constitute 10% of the final course grade.**

**iii. Research, Reflection and Specialization Paper: How can we do mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century West?**

**Church in Culture Specialization**

For students taking the course as part of the specialization in Church in Culture this paper should offer an introductory analysis of approaches to mission (and evangelism) that the church has employed over the past 40 years. The paper should critically engage with those approaches and how they either do, or do not, equip the church to engage effectively with the contemporary (current North American) context. Finally, the paper should offer ideas on how the church can truly be missional and how it should do mission in the contemporary world by relating it to a specific context (i.e. your home church, field placement site, university campus, etc.). The paper should

demonstrate comprehension of course materials, required texts and at least seven other sources pertinent to the issue of mission and evangelism.

### **Pastoral Studies Specialization**

For students taking the course as part of the specialization in Pastoral Studies this paper should offer an introductory analysis of approaches that have been taken to mission (and evangelism) in church ministry over the past 40 years. The paper should critically engage with those approaches and how they either do, or do not, equip the church to engage effectively with the contemporary context. The final section of the paper should focus on how a pastoral leader in a local church can equip the congregation for effective missional ministry in today's context. What are the strategies and particular approaches you would take to lead your church in mission? The paper should demonstrate comprehension of course materials, required texts and at least seven other sources pertinent to the issue of mission and evangelism.

### **Christian Worldview**

For students taking this course as part of the specialization in Christian worldview the paper should offer an introductory analysis of why the church needs to engage in the propagation of the Christian message (or not), and what the Christian message has to offer to contemporary society as a corrective to other prevailing worldviews that shape North American culture. The paper should provide some critical engagement with recent approaches to mission and evangelism that have been employed by the church and conclude with some introductory thoughts on ways that the church can approach Christian mission effectively in today's culture.

This assignment is designed to address learning goal #3 under knowing, #2 under being and #2 under doing.

**\*Please include your specialization on the title page of your paper.**

**\*\* For students not taking this course toward their specialization you are free to choose either one of these approaches to the paper.**

**This paper should be 10-12 pages (double spaced) in length. It will constitute 30% of the final course grade. It is due Dec. 4, 2024.**

## **Course Outline and Expectations**

**Course Introduction: Wednesday Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>, 9:00-10:50 am ET**

Course overview, review of syllabus, introductions, time for student questions regarding the course.

Lecture Topic: Introduction to a biblical theology of mission.

Student Responsibilities: Please review the course syllabus before this meeting and come prepared to offer a brief (1-2 minute) introduction of yourself (program at MDC, professional background, personal/family situation (not required), your hopes for the course), and to ask any questions you may have about the course.

### **Unit One: A Biblical Theology of Mission**

Weeks of September 18, 25 & Oct. 2. We will consider the concept of the theology of mission as it is presented in the Old and New Testaments, with reflection on other theological ideas that help form a Christian theology of mission.

Student Responsibilities: Attend class either in person or on-line. Complete reading the course text *A Light to the Nations*.

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### **Unit Two: The History of Christian Mission**

The Weeks of Oct. 9 & 23. We will explore the history of Christian mission and how the church has engaged in mission throughout the different eras of history.

\*\*Please note that the week of Oct. 16 is reading week, no class will be held that day.

Student Responsibilities: Attend class. Complete reading the book *Women in the Mission of the Church*. Work on your *Biblical Theology of Mission* paper and turn it in no later than Oct. 23.

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### **Unit Three: Critical Issues in Mission Today**

- The weeks of Oct. 30, Nov.6, 13, 20 we will explore a number of issues that confront the North American church today in terms of challenges and opportunities for missional engagement some of the possible topics may include (but are not limited to); the impact of secularization, the rise of the “nones and dones,” racial and indigenous issues, “spiritual but not religious,” immigration and immigrant churches (particularly the issue of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> gen. retention and evangelism), contextualization in a post-Christian culture.

-Student Responsibilities: Attend weekly classes. Prepare and hand in your *Challenges facing the Church in Mission* paper on Nov. 6. Prepare and submit your small group presentation on Nov.

13. Respond to your group member presentations no later than Nov. 27. Complete reading the book *Faithful Presence*.

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**Unit Four: Equipping the Church for Mission**

The weeks of Nov. 27 and Dec. 4 we will consider issues of equipping the church for mission and developing strategies for engagement.

Student Responsibilities: join us for class each week. Work on and hand in your *Research, Reflection and Specialization* paper by Dec. 4.

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**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 (e.g., Grammarly) 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](mailto: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**

Adeney, Francis S. *Graceful Evangelism: Christian Witness in a Complex World*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.

Barrett, Lois Y. et. al. *Treasures in Jars of Clay: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Beach, Lee. *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope after Christendom*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2015.



Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, No.16, Mayknoll: Orbis, 1991.

Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian*, Peabody, Mass.:Hendrickson Publishers, 2006.

\_\_\_\_\_ and Hirsch, Alan. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*, Peabody: Mass: Hendrickson, 2003.

Guder, Darrell, (editor) *Missional Church*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Hastings, Ross. *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2012.

Heath, Elaine. *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

Hunsberger, George and Van Gelder, Graig (ed.'s), *The Church Between Gospel and Culture; The Emerging Mission in North America*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Muck, Terry and Adeney Francis. *Christians Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.

Newbiggin, Leslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

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Ott, Craig and Strauss, Stephen J. *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments and Contemporary Issues*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.

Stone, Bryan. *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007.

Van Gelder, Craig. *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2006

