



Grace Communion Seminary

TM501 Theology of Ministry

Short Syllabus

Instructor: To be arranged, based on your primary area of interest and instructor availability.

GCS mission statement

“Equipping the Saints for Pastoral Ministry.” We are committed to equip the saints for pastoral ministry through quality graduate-level distance education programs in biblical, theological, ministerial and pastoral studies informed by Incarnational Trinitarian faith.

Course description

This course integrates learning from biblical, theological, and ministry studies into a capstone paper or research thesis that expresses one’s theology of ministry. This three-unit course often covers two semesters, and it is conducted as an independent study under the guidance of the professor as the capstone course for the Master of Pastoral Studies degree. **Prerequisite:** Student must be within six units of completing the Master’s program and must pass a summative exam.

Course requirements

1. You must pass a summative exam *before* you register for this course.¹ This exam may be taken after you have earned 36 units, or with permission of the Dean of Faculty, dean@gcs.edu. The summative exam will include four essay

¹ The summative exam is graded pass or fail; it does not carry any credit. Contact the Dean of Faculty for further guidance when you are close to taking the exam.

questions – one on biblical studies, one on theology, one on church history, and one on Christian ministry. Sample questions may be obtained from the Dean of Faculty. The exam must be proctored, and must be completed within three hours. For details on proctoring, see the *Academic Catalog*, section VI.B. Since it may take us a week for the exam to be graded, you should take the exam at least a week before you want to register.

2. There are two ways in which you may complete this course:
 - a. Accept the assigned topic, write book reviews and a thesis paper on how theology informs your ministry. There are no lectures; the course may be completed in one semester of independent study.
 - b. Choose your own topic, do additional research, write a thesis paper, and defend the paper in an oral exam. This generally takes two or more semesters.

Option A: Capstone Paper: How Theology Informs Your Ministry

The topic is not how theology informs ministry in general – it is how theology informs *your* ministry. We expect that you will apply what you have learned (in previous GCS courses as well as in the readings for this one) to your own ministry. You will need to describe your own ministry setting and show how theological principles shed light on the purpose and manner of your ministry.

Required textbooks for option A

Anderson, Ray S. *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry With Theological Praxis*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001. 342 pages. ISBN: 9780830815593. About \$27 new, less if used.

Harper, Brad, and Paul Louis Metzger. *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009. 352 pages. ISBN: 9781587431739. About \$17.

Tidball, Derek. *Ministry by the Book: New Testament Patterns for Pastoral Leadership*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008. 277 pages.
ISBN: 9780830838592. About \$20.

Recommended textbooks

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. Expanded edition. San Francisco: Harper, 1951, 2001. 978-0061300035. About \$10.

Stone, Howard W. and James O. Duke. *How to Think Theologically*, 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013. ISBN 978-0800699321. About \$12.
Older editions are also acceptable.

Requirements for option A:

1. Read Derek Tidball, *Ministry by the Book*. Read it all in two weeks. Write a book review. In the first part of the review, describe the merits of this book. In the second part of your review, focus on a chapter that is appropriate to your ministry. For example, chapter 7: “Ministry in a Maturing Church.” Five pages, double spaced, due at the end of the second week of the semester.
2. Read Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*. Read it within two weeks. Write a book review. In the first part, comment on how the book as a whole informed your understanding of the church. In the second part, focus on a chapter that is appropriate to your ministry. For example, chapter 5, “The Church as a Worshipping Community.” Five pages, double spaced, due at the end of the fourth week of the semester.
3. Read Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*. Read it within three weeks. Choose a chapter that is appropriate for your ministry, and focus your entire review on that chapter (although you may refer to and use insights from the other chapters, too). How did this chapter shed light on what you are doing? Or you may choose a chapter in which you had significant disagreements, and explain why you disagreed. Five pages,

double spaced, due at the end of the seventh week of the semester.

4. Your capstone paper, part 1: Describe the circumstances of your ministry, including the history of the ministry, the doctrinal context, and the culture you are working with. In a congregation, for example, you might discuss the range of doctrinal views among the members, the attitude within the church for Bible study, worship, and mission, and the culture of the surrounding community. You are part of the context as well, so your own history, personality and abilities is relevant to the way that you do ministry in this context. Ten to 15 pages, due at the end of the ninth week of the semester.

5. Your capstone paper, part 2: Describe how scripture and theology help inform your ministry, showing what needs to be done in the situation, and how to go about it. What situations in the life of Jesus or Paul provide insight on the way that ministry should be done? Is your role primarily that of a pioneer, a builder, a priest, a shepherd, a parent, a doctor, or some other role? How do biblical images of the church shape what you do? What theological lens² helps you keep your ministry in better focus?
For paper formatting, see Appendix H. We expect that you will use all three of the assigned textbooks, plus some books from previous GCS courses, and the Bible.
Part 2 of your paper should be fifteen to 20 pages, due at the end of the 12th week of the semester. This paper is not added to the GCS library and is not a public document.

6. Your grade will be based 40 percent on the book reports and 60 percent on the capstone paper.

² For example, the lens of “image of God,” or the lens of “kingdom of God,” “family of God,” or “life of the Trinity,” or “life together forever.”

Estimated student workload

Assignments, estimated hours, and grade weighting for option A	Hours ³	Percentage of grade
Studying for the summative exam	15	
Taking the summative exam	3.5	
Reading the syllabus	1.5	
Reading Tidball: 234 pages	12	
Reading Harper & Metzger: 274 pages	14	
Reading Anderson: 322 pages	21	
Writing three book reviews, 15 pages	30	40
Writing the thesis paper, 30 pages	120	60
Total – about 18 hours each week	217	100
This is more hours per week than most GCS courses.		

For grading policies, see appendix D.

Grades will be reduced if papers are late. See appendix E.

³ This is an estimate for the “average” student. A student who reads quickly may be slow in writing papers, and vice versa. Some students will complete the course requirements in less total time, and some will take more time.

Option B: Research Thesis: Choose Your Own Thesis Topic

1. Even before you register for the course, establish a topic for your paper. In most cases this will be your own ministry. This is a theology of ministry, explaining how theology informs the way you do ministry. Develop a one to two-page synopsis and a brief outline of the ideas you plan to develop in your paper. It is highly recommended that you do this before you register for the course.
2. Also before you register: List 15-20 books that are relevant to your paper. Some of these texts will probably be part of your previous coursework. You will need to expand your research a little beyond the books you have already read. For example, depending on your area of focus, you may want to read Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, or Andrew Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, or Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*. But do not attempt to read too many new books – there is not enough time to master a new field of study. Focus on something you are already doing and already know something about. In some cases this research can be integrated into an independent study course that you take for credit before you take this course.
3. You may request a specific GCS faculty member to be your primary advisor for this project, but we reserve the right to assign a different advisor, based on your topic and the workload of the faculty members.
4. Register for TM501 and pay the tuition. You will then be given access to the course website, which includes a “forum” that you will use for all communications. (Other students cannot see what is in your forum.) You can then upload (in Word format) your list of books. For all future submissions, click on “reply” rather than creating a new topic. This will keep all the communications on the same page.
5. Your advisor will comment on your list of books, perhaps suggesting a small number of additional books.
6. Prepare an annotated bibliography of these books, with a one-paragraph analysis for each book of how it is relevant to your paper.

7. Write your theology of ministry paper. **Do not write it all at once!**⁴ It should be done in stages, as outlined below. The final paper will be **no less than 13,000 words, no more than 22,000 words**, double spaced, with one-inch margins, Times New Roman font, 12 point.⁵ It must have a works cited section at the end and appropriate citations throughout. Use footnotes for citation references, as described in Turabian's manual, or use the MLA style.⁶ This paper will be added to the GCS library, and will be available to other students. As a contribution to pastoral scholarship, it should reflect academic excellence not only in what you write, but also in the appearance of the material. *Formatting and citation details are important.* This requires careful proofreading and attention to punctuation details. See Appendix H. For examples, see the theses posted at <https://www.gcs.edu/course/view.php?id=47>; ask the Registrar for access to this part of our website.
8. As you are doing the research and the writing, you are required to give updates to your advisor every 30 days. If we do not hear from you in any 30-day period, we will initiate some communication. Tardiness in this matter can affect your grade, and if we do not hear from you for an entire semester, you will automatically receive a grade of W for "withdraw."

⁴ If you write the entire paper before submitting any of it, you risk wasting a lot of time. You may be writing in the wrong style, or using a lot of space for a topic that is not important for your thesis. By submitting the paper a bit at a time, your adviser can provide "course corrections" for your research and writing.

⁵ The word count does not include the title page, table of contents, footnotes, or the works cited section. This will be about 40-70 pages.

⁶ For formatting details, you may consult a style guide, such as

- 1) Kate Turabian et al., *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, or Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers*. More information can be obtained from the Purdue University Online Writing Lab: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>.
- 2) If you are already familiar with MLA style, you may use it. owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/
- 3) Students from other nations may use a style appropriate to their own nation. You must tell us what your manual of style is.

9. If the final paper⁷ is not uploaded by the end of the 12th week of the semester, you will be given a grade of I (incomplete), and you will remain enrolled in the course for the second semester. The fee for a third semester extension is one-third the regular tuition. If a fourth semester is needed, the student must register for the course again and pay the full tuition amount for three units.
10. If you do not complete the project by the end of the third semester, you will be given a grade of W, and you will not be able to proceed unless you re-register for the course. All coursework for the MPS degree must be completed within ten years of when you began as a GCS student.
11. There will be an oral defense of the paper, in which you explain the results of your research and answer questions from three GCS faculty members. This may be done in person, or by a video connection. We ask you to give a 10-minute overview of your research and the paper, and then the faculty will ask questions about the paper.
12. The committee has a range of possible responses:
 - a. Rejection of the paper, usually with a suggestion that additional research be done and the paper extensively revised. (This is rare. You will not even get to the oral defense unless your advisor believes that your paper is acceptable.)
 - b. Accepting the research and the conclusions, but with a requirement that the paper must be edited. This is by far the most common response, so it is wise to allow time for this additional work. Edits may be extensive, or much more limited.
 - c. Acceptance, with recommendations for minor edits before the paper is finalized.
13. After the paper is finalized, *it will be edited further* to make it conform to

⁷ Simply because you *hope* that it is the final does not mean that it *is* the final. Major revisions may still be needed. It is final only if the advisor says the version can be used for the oral defense. Even then, more edits are likely after the oral defense.

academic standards,⁸ and it will be placed in the GCS library, and thus may be accessed by students and faculty. The paper is not a place to air private misgivings or grievances. It is a public contribution to scholarship that may help others. As the *Academic Catalog* notes, the acceptance of a paper as sufficient for the program does not necessarily imply that the conclusion has been accepted by the instructor, the seminary, or the sponsoring denomination.

Suggested schedule

Although we have some deadlines for communication, as mentioned above, you have to set your own pace. With two semesters and a break between, you have 25 weeks to do the paper. Here are some targets that might help:

Before registration: Send an email to the Dean of Faculty stating 1) your proposed topic, and 2) if you have a preference for a particular advisor for your project. Do not register if you do not have a topic in mind.

Right after registration: Upload your preliminary list of books (you should have been thinking about this even before you register), and a preliminary thesis statement. Your advisor will comment on these within one week. In the meantime, you should be reading and/or preparing the annotated bibliography.

Week 2: Your advisor will comment on your list of books and your preliminary thesis statement. You should use this week for preparing the annotated bibliography.

Week 3: Upload the annotated bibliography. It is often wise to turn this in even you have not yet read two or three of the books.⁹ Your advisor will respond to it

⁸ Students should do their best to conform to a published academic style, such as that given in Turabian's *Manual*. However, even scholars find it difficult to get all the details right, so we will fix whatever irregularities we notice.

⁹ Your advisor may have recommended a couple of books you were previously unaware of, but you can't put your project on hold until you have read everything. The annotated bibliography is not graded, so it is better to turn it in incomplete, than to delay everything in the

within a week. In the meantime, you should work on your outline.

Week 4: Upload your tentative outline. You may expand the stock outline presented below, or you may suggest a modification due to the needs of your paper.

Part 1: Introduction: statement of the topic and survey of some of the literature that has been done on this topic.

Part 2: Theological foundations of the topic. How does the doctrine of God, Christ, salvation, etc. provide a foundation for the type of ministry you are writing about? Ministry always begins with God, and what he has done.

Part 3: Biblical foundations. What passage of Scripture best addresses your ministry? What passages provide additional support? Are there passages that might give evidence against your view?

Part 4: Application in ministry: How do the theological and biblical principles then inform what you are doing in ministry?

Part 5: Works cited. List the documents you referred to in your paper. This must be done in a consistent style – see Appendix H.

There is no structure that fits every topic, so there is some flexibility in the way that the paper is written. Your advisor will respond to your outline within a week.

Week 5: Review the comments your advisor made on your annotated bibliography. This may help you as you write the introduction, which would include a “survey of the literature.” You do not have time to survey everything that is written about your topic, but you can survey what has been said *in the materials you have read*.¹⁰

schedule. We do not allow much time for this because we expect that you have already read the books, or at least the parts that are pertinent to your paper, and all you have to do it write a paragraph of annotation for each book. Write one paragraph per day and you’ll be on schedule.

¹⁰ Your annotated bibliography does not become your literature review. The annotated bibliography is generally too fragmented, with no transition statements between the books. The annotated bibliography may also include books about biblical interpretation, for example, that

Week 6: Upload your introduction and literature review. Do not wait until the whole paper is “done” before you submit it. *We know* it is not finished yet, but we prefer to get it in smaller pieces, rather than one large piece. That is because the feedback we give you on the initial sections can help you write subsequent sections in a better way. If there is a problem, it is easier to fix it when it is small.

Week 9: Upload the theological section, which may include some historical background as well. This will lay a foundation for further sections.

Week 12: Upload the biblical analysis, including the exegesis of your primary passage and a survey of other relevant verses.

Week 15: Upload the section on practical theology, or application to ministry. Explain why this topic is pastorally important.

Week 18: Draft of complete paper, with conclusion and works cited. This step requires that you have a good grasp of your paper overall, integrating editorial suggestions in all sections, perhaps doing some additional research. Devote a significant block of time in which this is your main task. Don’t try to do it in odd moments squeezed between your other responsibilities.

Week 21: Upload the final draft. Your advisor will have one week to review it.

Week 22: If your paper is ready, the advisor will then schedule an oral presentation for your paper about a week later, giving the other two committee members a week to read the paper, too.

Week 23: Oral presentation. This is generally done by video conference. We’ll ask you to give a 10-minute introduction to your paper (why you chose the topic, why you developed it the way you did, etc.) followed by 50 or 90 minutes of comments and questions from the three faculty members on your committee. It may take a couple of weeks to arrange a time suitable for all four people involved.

are not directly about your topic, but are relevant to your biblical analysis, and their contributions to your study are best addressed in a later section. Your survey of the literature should have smooth transitions and be topically organized.

Week 25: Upload the finalized paper. Although it is theoretically possible to finish in one semester, the process usually takes two semesters: you will register for TM501 in the first semester, and remain in the course for the second semester. The student may obtain a course extension of a third semester to complete their thesis (either option A or option B). Contact the Registrar at 800-851-2611 or registrar@gcs.edu. The fee for a third semester extension is \$200. If a fourth semester is needed, the student must register for the course again and pay the full tuition amount for three units.

Week 26: The oral defense and revising the paper.

Assignments, estimated hours, and grade weighting for option B

Assignment	Hours *	Percentage of grade
Reading the syllabus and instructions	4	
Studying for the summative exam	16	
Taking the summative exam	4	0
Reading books	100	
Writing the annotated bibliography	30	
Writing the final paper	200	100
Preparing for the oral defense	4	
The oral defense	2	0 ¹¹
Total	351	100
The number of hours is more than double what other GCS courses require.		

¹¹ The grade for the course is based on the written paper, but the student must pass the oral defense.

Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

As the capstone course of the GCS Master's degree, TM501 incorporates all the learning outcomes that we desire for GCS students:

GCS Student Learning Outcomes:

GCS SLO #1. Explain the revelation of the Bible in its historical and cultural setting as it relates to God, Jesus Christ and salvation, and its application for faithful living today.

Course Student Learning Outcomes:

Course SLO 1. Establish biblical foundation for personal ministry (pastoral or support ministry) that addresses the core of your ministry goals (or the societal issue you address).

Course Objectives:

Course objective 1. Exegete a biblical passage that is core to your ministry or issue you address.

Course objective 2. Cite biblical references for claims made regarding biblical meaning.

GCS SLO #2. Reason from a sound theological basis as new covenant Christians centered in Trinitarian Incarnational faith.

Course SLO 2. Explain your theological foundation for ministry by grounding it in God's interaction with humanity through Christ in the Incarnation.

Course objective 3. Provide theological development on your topic as it relates to the church and its role in culture and conduct.

Course objective 4. Integrate research on church fathers and leaders who address issues relevant to your topic.

GCS SLO #5. Integrate biblical exegesis with sound theological exposition that informs personal spiritual growth and that directs effective ministry in Jesus Christ.

Course SLO 3. Integrate the first two GCS SLO's into your ministry topic, explaining the relevance to the specifics of your ministry.

Course objective 5. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the type of ministry you have chosen to study (or theological issue as it applies to ministry).

Course objective 6. Project the opportunities and threats to your ministry topic (or theological issue as it applies to your ministry).