

Grounded in God: Decision-Making and Discernment in Congregations and Organizations

Spring 2003

Andover Newton Theological School

How can ancient traditions of spiritual discernment bring depth and a sense of unhurried presence into modern congregational and organizational life? How does our social location influence our discernment? How can we learn corporate spiritual discernment in the midst of an individualistic culture? This course will consider structures and processes of twenty-first-century congregations and organizations and explore how spiritual discernment practices can be integrated into decision-making processes.

This will be an experiential course, in which participants' own decision-making experiences in congregations and organizations will serve as the basis for reflection and discernment. Insights from the fields of spirituality, management, and leadership studies will be combined to consider decision-making and discernment in these settings.

Outcomes of the course:

By the end of the course, you will have:

Analyzed a congregational/organizational decision from your own experience in light of the readings.

Reflected on your own spiritual awareness and resources in relation to congregational or organizational decisions you are called upon to make.

Reflected on your own theory of decision-making and discernment in congregational/organizational life.

Experimented with practicing and teaching spiritual discernment in a congregation/organization.

_____ (add your own outcomes, in
_____ consultation with me)

Course work which will facilitate these outcomes:

Reading

Class participation (discussion, group work, presentations)

Short reflection papers

Integrative paper (10-12 pp.)

Final project (10-12 pp.)

Texts:

Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie A. Hull, and R. Taylor McLean, *Grounded in God*, Morehouse, 1996.

J. B. Libanio, *Spiritual Discernment and Politics*, Orbis, 1982.

Danny Morris and Charles Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together*, Alban, 1997.

Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday/Currency, 1990.

John Ackerman, *Listening to God*, Alban, 2001.

Michael Skelley, "Learning Communities: A Spirituality of Work for the Information Age," *Review for Religious*, Fall 1998.

Margaret Benefiel, "Maturing in Christ: Corporate Spiritual Discernment as a School of the Spirit," *Quaker Life*, July/August 2000

Other information:

Instructor: Dr. Margaret Benefiel

Phone: 617-436-8341

Office hours: by appointment

Schedule:

- 1/29 Introduction to course
Overview of discernment
Discernment exercises
- 2/5 Due at beginning of class: short reflection paper on Farnham/Hull/McLean or
Morris/Olsen or Senge
Presentations
Discuss Farnham/Hull/McLean, Morris/Olsen, Senge
- 2/12 Due at beginning of class: short reflection paper on Farnham/Hull/McLean or
Morris/Olsen or Senge
Presentations
Discuss Farnham/Hull/McLean, Morris/Olsen, Senge
- 2/19 Due at beginning of class: short reflection paper on Farnham/Hull/McLean or
Morris/Olsen or Senge
Presentations
Discuss Farnham/Hull/McLean, Morris/Olsen, Senge
- 2/26 Due at beginning of class: short reflection paper on Morris/Olsen or Senge or Ackerman
Presentations
Discuss Morris/Olsen, Senge, Ackerman
- 3/5 Due at beginning of class: short reflection paper on Ackerman or Senge or Libanio or
Benefiel
Presentations
Discuss Ackerman, Senge, Libanio, Benefiel
- 3/12 SPRING BREAK : no class
- 3/19 Due at beginning of class: short reflection paper on Ackerman or Senge or Libanio or
Skelley
Presentations
Discuss Ackerman, Senge, Libanio, Skelley
- 3/26 Work on integrative paper
Presentations
Discuss progress on integrative paper
- 4/2 Due at beginning of class: integrative paper
Presentations
- 4/9 Presentations
Final project progress reports
- 4/16 Presentations
Final project progress reports
- 4/23 Presentations
Final project progress reports
- 4/30 Final project progress reports
Closing reflections

5/5 Final project due

Grading:

25% for each outcome

Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory system.