

SU190 – Section 3: Good News from the Poor: Preaching and Bible Study Towards Ending Poverty

*(Sponsored and facilitated by the Poverty Initiative, in cooperation with Field Education staff)
This is a one-day, one-credit course – February 25, 2011*

Course Description:

Poverty is a moral outrage in our affluent society but some religious congregations have resigned themselves to tolerating it or, at best, managing it. Why? Some churches are simply not aware of the realities of poverty; others may be stunned into silence by their apparent powerlessness to affect change; still others may be exhausted from addressing the endless and immediate needs of poor people in their communities. This seminar will look at equipping participants with practical skills for preaching and teaching about poverty in local congregations and community organizations. We will explore some of the obstacles to making poverty a priority in our congregations as well as effective models and examples of sermons, biblical resources and Adult Ed programs. The seminar will: explore how to preach about the reality of poverty in our congregation, how to talk about issues of poverty in a diversity of congregations – both affluent and economically struggling congregations, and how to do bible studies using the methodology of “Reading the Bible with the Poor.” Participants in this daylong seminar will be joined by seminarians, local pastors, and community leaders who have taken on the challenge of this topic and who are willing to share their experiences – both successes and struggles – in engaging the religious community in a movement to end poverty, led by the poor.

Course Requirements:

This course is designed for people who are interested in learning about the role of relationship-building and religious organizing that will unite religious leaders and local congregations with poor people’s organizations to build a social movement to end poverty. Students are required to attend and actively participate in class and write a 2-page reflection paper on some aspect of the class. For example: reflection on how the relationship building between religious leaders, local congregations and poor people’s organizations relates to your personal life and ministry; a brief proposal on how you will integrate the concepts learned and discussed into your work and ministry at Union and beyond; or a summary of a particular aspect of the course that interested you. Please e-mail papers to Adam Barnes at amb2215@columbia.edu or drop them in Pit Box #34 by Friday, March 11.

Goals of the Course:

- 1) Present and discuss poverty as the defining issue of our times.
- 2) Think through the resources that the Christian Church has for addressing poverty.
- 3) Discuss the leading role of the poor in ending poverty.
- 4) Learn about and reflect upon some of the strategies, obstacles and successes that individuals and groups have employed in their efforts to combat poverty.

AGENDA

MORNING SESSION (9:00am – 12:45pm)

Introductions

- Who's in the room? Walk through the agenda.
- Overview
 - o Poverty: the defining issue of our time (Willie Baptist)
 - o Work of the Poverty Initiative (Jake Moore)

Setting the Context: Economic Crisis and the Church

- o PowerPoint presentation (Crystal Hall)
- o Personal connection to poverty (Adam Barnes)

Transition: What does the Christian tradition have to say about poverty?

Biblical Framing and Textual Study (Liz Theoharis)

- How do we draw on the resources of our faith tradition in a time of crisis?

Textual Study (Nkosi Anderson and Crystal Hall)

- Joseph and the storehouse (First mention of poverty in the Bible)

The Bible and Poverty

- Manna, Jubilee, and Paul's Collection (Liz Theoharis)

Practical Application: Taking it to our communities and congregations

- How to preach good news from the poor (Derrick McQueen)
- How to read the Bible with the poor – an approach to Bible study (Colleen Wessel-McCoy)

Lunch Break - 1 hour

AFTERNOON SESSION (1:45 – 4:00pm)

Group Discussion: Re-defining the Church in times of poverty and economic crisis (Blair Moorhead and Emily McNeill)

- o What is the Church's relation to these issues?
- o Successes

Lessons from History: The last days of Arch Bishop Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesus. (Vanessa Cardinale, Cathy Cornell, Jennifer Wilder, Willie Baptist and Charon Hribar)

Lessons from the field: Poor organizing the poor:

- United Workers - Baltimore, MD (Onleilove Alston)
- Coalition of Immokalee Workers – Immokalee, FL (Jennifer Wilder)

Closing: What does this all mean? Evaluation and next steps (Adam Barnes)

- In what ways might today's lessons be valuable and applicable to congregational work?
- What are some of the barriers to implementing it?