

LA 503 Rationale
Thomas E. Frank

Professor of Church Administration and Congregational Life
Spring 2006

This course will introduce Master of Divinity students to basic perspectives and research methods on “congregations in place:” local church congregations in connectivity with their natural and built environments, their surrounding human communities, their histories, and continuing challenges for well-being and justice in their places. Students will approach the subject through reading interpretive essays about congregations in the U.S. as well as ethnographic studies about specific congregations.

Students will also undertake their own field study in relationship with a partner congregation, either of their own choosing or, if possible, in a single congregation with whom I will covenant for self-study with a team of several students. Field studies will include observation and analysis of the natural environment of the church building, the church facilities and surrounding built environment, community demographics and organizations, and congregational activities. Students will explore and write about the culture of the congregation – its stories and symbolic life – in continuing relationship with its natural and human environment.

The class will experience some research methods collectively, including interpretive walks through the facilities and surrounding land of Glenn Memorial Church on the Emory campus (particularly Baker Woods, the main auditorium, the classroom building, and youth building across North Decatur Road). Students will make class presentations on their partner congregations.

This is also a course in leadership, by which I mean practices of helping a congregation develop a shared vision for its ministries and organizational means for working toward that vision. Students will gain from the course knowledge of research and self-study methods useful in the congregations in which they will work in the future. They will also gain a particular perspective on the nature of leadership as a practice of making connections and modeling the well-being of human beings living in harmony with the natural environment.

Few church leadership studies are available to guide students in a perspective that integrates nature, history, and identity with congregational purpose. I hope this course will evolve into a fresh resource for that perspective.

LA 503
**LEADING CONGREGATIONAL CULTURE:
HISTORY, IDENTITY, PLACE, AND MINISTRY**

Thomas E. Frank
Professor of Church Administration and Congregational Life
Spring 2006
3 hours
Wednesdays 2:30 – 5:30 p.m.

Purpose

In recent years a fresh critical perspective on the life and mission of Christian congregations has been emerging through innovative studies drawing on methods from ethnography, geography, sociology, and theology. This perspective views the congregation as a small culture with its own story, identity, and purpose developed in continuing interaction with its natural and human environment. The more deeply pastors and lay leaders learn this culture, the more effective they can be in the tasks of developing ministry and mission that grows out of and extends the living traditions of a congregation in a particular place.

In this course we will read recent congregational studies and examine the usefulness of various methods for analyzing congregational life. We will assess the applications of congregational analysis for entry into a congregation as a new pastor or program leader, as well as in strategic planning of a congregation's ministries for its wider neighborhood. We will consider how to understand and use culture constructively as a practice of leadership.

The course will work in partnership with local churches. We will use a variety of study methods, including a resource for congregational self-study and planning entitled "Your Sacred Place is a Community Asset." This Tool Kit has been developed by Partners for Sacred Places, a non-profit agency providing resources nationally for the preservation of historic churches and synagogues.

Students will have the opportunity to conduct the self-study exercises and methods for data collection outlined in the Tool Kit and other resources, in partnership with church members. Students will write a series of short papers bringing together the results of field research with the perspectives of other course texts. Together these writing assignments will comprise a resource that the partner churches can use for writing grant proposals and seeking financial support from the wider community for preservation and repair of land and buildings and for the community ministries supported by these resources. Students can also have the results of the class study to keep as a model for future congregational studies and consultation.

Requirements

Classroom time will be devoted to discussion of assigned readings and congregational study activities at Bishops Hall and at partner churches. The seminar and consultation format makes attendance, reading, and full participation essential. Grades will be based on presence and participation in class, working knowledge of assigned readings, and quality of written work.

Research and Writing Assignments (based on field work in a partner church)

Observation I -- DUE February xx -- 4 pp.

Report on observation of a worship service.

Observation II -- DUE March xx -- 4 pp.

Report on observation of a community ministry, meeting, or congregational activity.

Observation III -- DUE March xx -- 6 pp.

Description of natural and neighborhood context, based on observation and data collection.

Interview -- DUE April xx -- 6 pp.

Report on two interviews of congregation members.

Paper on implications of natural environment, historic structures, history and identity for leadership of congregational ministry and mission -- DUE May xx -- 10 pp.

Primary Texts (in order of syllabus)

Partners for Sacred Places, *Your Sacred Place is a Community Asset*, Tool Kit.

Wind, James P. and James W. Lewis, *American Congregations*, vol. 2 (Chicago 1994).

Hopewell, James F., *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Fortress 1987).

Eiesland, Nancy L., *A Particular Place* (Rutgers 2000).

Frank, Thomas Edward, *The Soul of the Congregation* (Abingdon 2000).

Ammerman, Nancy T. et al., *Studying Congregations* (Abingdon 1998).

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Hours posted or feel free to see me after class, call or e-mail for an appointment.

SCHEDULE

January	25	Congregations in place: introduction to congregational studies
February	1	Perspectives on congregations Wind and Lewis, Chapters 1, 2
	8	Congregations as diverse cultures Wind and Lewis, Chapters 5, 8
	15	Congregations as communities in place Hopewell, Chapters 1, 3-6 <i>Nature walk, Baker Woods</i>
	22	Congregations as communities of story Hopewell, Chapters 7-9 <i>Facilities tour, Glenn Memorial Church</i>
March	1	Exploring congregational history Wind reprint <i>Memory timeline reports</i>
	8	Congregations as communities of ritual and symbol Williams reprint <i>Space walk reports</i>
	22	Congregations as social institutions Eiesland, Chapters 1-3 <i>Neighborhood walk reports</i>
	29	Continued Eiesland, Chapters 4-7 <i>Community partner reports</i>
April	5	Leading congregations as communities of presence Frank, 9-100
	12	Continued Frank, 103-80
	19	Presentations on partner churches
	26	Presentations continued Course evaluations