

## STMM 504 Christian Ethics

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### Course Description:

The Catholic tradition has a long and rich heritage of scholarship and teachings regarding ethical issues. Both in the areas of sexual & familial ethics and in that of social ethics, this is a tradition that has consistently sought across the centuries to uphold three prized values: the dignity of the human person, the commitment to promote justice in the world, and the pursuit of a common good. This course is designed to provide ministry students with an understanding of the development of this ethical tradition through the reading of primary texts (Church teaching in both areas) and the scholarship of some leading Catholic ethicists. The three weekend sessions will:

- a) provide foundational background through the professor's lectures
- b) require pastoral application through required work of students done in advance of each session
- c) engage student's in the assigned readings through group discussion and interaction

### Course Objectives:

1. Re the readings: provide students with
  - a. a *wide exposure to Church teaching documents* in the areas of sexual, familial and social ethics
  - b. some familiarity with the key issues in the contemporary scholarly and pastoral dialogue among Catholic ethicists
2. Re the class sessions: provide *an understanding of the foundations* of Catholic ethics through an appreciation of sources relied upon and methods utilized
3. Re the written papers: assist students to *sharpen the pastoral skills* that are needed in order to
  - a. assist persons in the ethical challenges of daily life
  - b. assist communities with the ethical challenges arising in our socio-economic and political world

## Grading:

1. **Participation:** This means an assessment of the quality of student preparedness and reflective work as evidenced through the questions, insights, and contributions made during our class sessions. My own teaching style is quite interactive and somewhat Socratic so students will have ample opportunity to engage with the material and demonstrate the work that they have put into the course through reflection on the readings. 25% of the final grade.
2. **Attendance:** Given the limited time of in-person work available to us, it goes without saying that assessing student performance and work requires presence at all sessions. As indicated above, presence itself does not qualify as participation...it simply makes participation possible. Of course, unforeseen emergencies can arise but students would be wise to be absent from class rarely.
3. **Essay papers:** Two short reflection papers will be required during the quarter. More on this at the first session. These averaged together will count as 25% of the grade.
4. **Final Essay Exam:** Due on June 12, *hard copy only*, with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope enclosed. 50% of the grade.

## Required Reading: (available through Amazon.com)

- Russell B. Connors, Jr. & Patrick T. McCormick. Character, Choices & Community. New York: Paulist Press, 1998. [Paper]

*[Note: This volume is very readable and accessible, and a good overview of the current conversation among Catholic ethicists for pastoral contexts. I selected this in part because of its continued value and usability for those in pastoral ministry settings.]*

- Margaret A. Farley. Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics. New York: Continuum, 2006. [Paper]

*[Note: Sister Farley is an eminently respected Catholic ethicist who has written this volume as a pastoral response to issues of sexual ethics shaped by her years of teaching and ministering at Yale University. Make sure you read her preface and introduction. Of particular importance is her attentiveness to gender, culture, race and religious pluralism in her construction of a framework for sexual ethics.]*

- Kenneth B. Himes, O.F.M., ed. Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretation. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005. [Paper]

*[Note: This volume will be a real asset to pastoral ministers in that it provides recent analysis among leading Catholic scholars on Catholic social teaching, described by some as our “best kept secret.”]*

### **Catholic Church Documents:**

#### **Sexual and Family Ethics:**

- Pope Paul VI “On the Regulation of Birth” (*Humanae Vitae*). 1968. [HV]
- Pope John Paul II “On the Family” (*Familiaris Consortio*). 1981. [FC]  
 “On The Value and Inviolability of Human Life” (*Evangelium Vitae*). 1995. [EV]
- “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” (1986)

#### **Social Ethics:**

*[Note: These Church documents are available online. Using “Google” type in “Official Catholic Documents.” There are also various collected volumes that will have contain some of these. For example, Michael Walsh and Brian Davies, eds. Proclaiming Justice and Peace: Papal Documents from Rerum Novarum through Centisimus Annus. Mystic, Conn: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991. There were available copies of this volume on Amazon.com.]*

- Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) “On the Condition of the Working Classes” (*Rerum Novarum*). 1891. [RN]
- Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) “On Reconstruction of the Social Order” (*Quadragesimo Anno*). 1931. [QA]
- Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) “Christianity and Social Progress” (*Mater et Magistra*). 1961. [MM]  
 “Peace on Earth” (*Pacem in Terris*). 1963. [PT]
- Vatican Council II (1962-1966) “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (*Gaudium et Spes*) 1965. [GS]



**Week 2:** (April 7-12)

Read:

- Farley, chapters 3-4
- Connors & McCormick, chapters 1-6

Write: Begin an “Ethics Journal” that helps you identify questions and insights gleaned from your readings. The importance of this journal is to make notes for yourself for future reference, to make connections between what you are reading and the class lectures and discussions, and to keep a record of your questions and observations for the next class session. This journal should be useful for the written work required during the course and for the final exam paper at the end of the quarter.

**Week 3:** (April 14-19)

Read: Connors & McCormick, chapters 7-12  
Farley, chapters 5-6

Write: notes, questions, insights in your Ethics Journal

**Week 4:** (April 20-26)

Read: Pope John Paul II, [FC]  
Himes, Chapter 15  
Pope John Paul II, [EV]

Write: **Short Paper #1 (more about this later)**

A short essay in which you

- lay out a summary of your learnings from the readings re sexual and familial ethics
- make connections and applications to ministry
- raise your questions.

Send me an e-mail no later than Monday noon (April 28) with the paper attached. [Maximum length: 3 pages, double-spaced]

**Week 5:** (April 28-May 2)

Read: Himes, Part I  
Pope Leo XIII [RN]  
Pope Pius XI [QA]

Write: notes, etc in Ethics Journal

Review: notes, questions, insights from Ethics Journal prior to class.

**Session II: May 3-4, Saturday and Sunday**

**Week 6:** (May 5-10)

Read: Pope John XXIII      [MM]      and      Himes, Chapter 8  
   [PT]      and      Himes, Chapter 9  
  
   Vatican Council II      [GS]      and      Himes, Chapter 11

Write: notes, questions in Ethics Journal

**Week 7:** (May 12-17)

Read: Pope Paul VI      [PP]      and      Himes, Chapter 12  
   [OA]      and      Himes, Chapter 13  
  
   Synod of Bishops      [JW]      and      Himes, Chapter 14

Write: notes, questions, in Ethics Journal

**Week 8:** (May 19-24)

Read: Pope John Paul II      [LE]      and      Himes, Chapter 16  
   [SRS]      and      Himes, Chapter 17  
   [CA]      and      Himes, Chapter 18

Write: **Short Paper #2**

A short essay in which you

- lay out a summary of your learnings from the readings re Catholic social thought
- make connections and applications to ministry
- raise your questions.

Send me an e-mail no later than Monday noon (May 26) with the paper attached. [Maximum length: 3 pages, double-spaced]

**Week 9:** (May 26-31)

Read: Himes, Part III

Write: notes, questions, insights in Ethics Journal

Review: notes, questions, insights from Ethics Journal prior to class.

**Session III: May 31 and June 1, Saturday and Sunday**

**Final Exam: PLEASE NOTE!!!**

- ✓ Final Essay Exam will be distributed on June 1.
- ✓ Must be postmarked by June 10<sup>th</sup>. Hardcopy only
- ✓ Enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope