

# **Syllabus**

## **Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World**

**Virginia District Training Center**  
Online/Google Classroom

### **Course Dates:**

April 19, 2021 - May 30, 2021

### **Instructor:**

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#### Module Vision Statement:

Christian discipleship and ministry in a world marked by a diversity of world religions is not new for the Church. Many of the early Christians had “turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming” (1 Thess 1:9-10). But a postmodern pluralistic ideology is new, at least two centuries in the making. The ideology of religious pluralism claims that not only are there many religions, the diversity represents the way things “ought to be.” There exists no single religious perception of reality that is universally applicable and binding. No religion can legitimately claim to proclaim the truth for all persons. There is no metanarrative, no overarching story. There are many narratives, all of which are “true” to the extent they satisfactorily provide meaning for all persons and communities who participate in them. Religious narratives are as diverse and “true” as there are narrative communities.

Pluralism may, but need not, rest upon the notion that behind the various narratives lies a single divine reality variously and legitimately expressed in humankind’s many cultures and communities. According to the postmodern ideology of religious pluralism, any religion that claims to have “the narrative” for all persons, and that tries to proselytize accordingly, ought to be seen as oppressive. It spreads injury in the world. It tyrannizes the human conscience and overwhelms human freedom. According to the ideology of religious pluralism, orthodox Christian doctrine as expressed in the New Testament and the Church’s creeds is a holdover from the

long night of human oppression. Christianity either needs to be made a respectful member of the human community or it needs to be abandoned.

That is part of the atmosphere in which Christianity takes place. Religious pluralism presents its own set of challenges and opportunities.

Paradoxically, religious pluralism exists in a world also marked by resurgent religious fundamentalism and extremism. Where these dominate a society and state, religious pluralism does not exist. Particularly in many Muslim countries, the powers of state are used to prevent religious diversity, and even more so the ideology of religious pluralism.

In its broader sense, pluralism refers to more than just “religious pluralism.” We also speak of moral, cultural, and political pluralism. The various “pluralisms” depend on the notion that “meaning” is contextual. “Right” and “wrong” are dependent on one’s own preferences and the “story” by which he or she lives. The “moral” depends upon the values a community cherishes, nurtures, and transmits. The traditional notion that moral values must submit to judgment by some universal or transcendent norm is rejected. That old standard reveals an ignorance of how communities and values are formed.

In this module we will concentrate on religious pluralism. How is one to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world? More specifically, how is one to do this from within a Wesleyan perspective? Those are the questions this module addresses. If one were to be satisfied with ignoring the pluralistic context in which we live, then the content of this module would be unnecessary. But one who would choose this option would thereby limit his or her range of ministry, would deny the power of the gospel, and could not adequately represent the Wesleyan tradition. To proclaim the gospel in a way that pays attention to the context in which we speak, we must take seriously the pluralism that so extensively characterizes our age.

A minister in the Church of the Nazarene cannot adequately serve the church’s mission if he or she chooses not to be cognizant of pluralism’s importance and profile. Our commitment to an informed ministry will not permit it. The ideology of religious pluralism does present a challenge to ministers in the Church of the Nazarene. In our Articles of Faith we affirm orthodox Christian theology. This affirmation puts the Church of the Nazarene at odds with the pluralistic spirit. The denomination rejects the ideology of religious pluralism. It embraces the “scandal of the Cross and Resurrection” that proclaims Jesus Christ to be the definitive revelation of God. We believe that in Jesus Christ the universal reign of God has begun, is advancing by the Spirit, and will be consummated in God’s own time. We make these affirmations in ways that distinctly show the influence of the Wesleyan theological tradition. In the Wesleyan tradition—when communicating the gospel—we rely upon the persuasive Holy Spirit, not upon any form of intellectual, political, or social coercion.

The purpose of this module is to help prepare Christian ministers in the Church of the Nazarene—the Wesleyan tradition—for ministry in a religiously pluralistic world.

## Educational Assumptions

1. The work of the Holy Spirit is essential to any process of Christian education at any level. We will consistently request and expect the Spirit's presence within and among us.
2. Christian teaching and learning is best done in the context of community (people being and working together). Community is the gift of the Spirit but may be enhanced or hindered by human effort. Communities have common values, stories, practices, and goals. Explicit effort will be invested to enhance community within the class. Group work will take place in every lesson.
3. Every adult student has knowledge and experiences to contribute to the class. We learn not only from the instructor and the reading assignments but also from each other. Each student is valued not only as a learner but also as a teacher. That is one reason that so many exercises in this course are cooperative and collaborative in nature.
4. Journaling is an ideal way to bring theory and practice together as students synthesize the principles and content of the lessons with their own experiences, preferences, and ideas.
5. A Special Note to the Student

The resources contained in the Student Guide, including the lesson motivators, are present because the module's author wants to provide a truly representative array of primary sources dealing with religious pluralism. They do not appear because the author necessarily agrees with either the positions expressed or the lifestyles of those who wrote the pieces. It should be clear that they are not included as an indication that they agree with historic Christian faith. The student is urged to take seriously the resources as means for understanding postmodernity, religious pluralism, its emergence and so forth. A well-prepared minister is both a well-informed and discriminating learner and teacher.

## Outcome Statements

This module contributes to the development of the following abilities as defined in the U.S. Sourcebook for Ministerial Development.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

CN 22 Ability to articulate the distinctive characteristics of Wesleyan theology

CP 19 Ability to think globally and engage cross-culturally for the purpose of mission

CP 20 Ability to preach evangelistically and to be engaged with and equip others in personal and congregational evangelism

CX 1 Ability to discover sociological dynamics and trends and to apply that information to specific ministry settings

CX 8 Ability to place the ministry context in light of the large schemes of world and national history

CX 9 Ability to apply historical analysis to the life of a local congregation in order to describe its historical and cultural context

CX 10 Ability to understand and articulate the biblical, historical, and theological bases for Christian mission

## Course Requirements

1. Class attendance, attention, and participation are especially important. Students are responsible for all assignments and in-class work. Much of the work in this course is small-group work. Cooperative, small-group work cannot be made up. That makes attendance imperative. Even if one does extra reading or writing, the values of discussion, dialogue, and learning from each other are thwarted. If one or two lessons are missed, the learning leader will require extra work before completion can be acknowledged. If two or more lessons are missed, the student will be required to repeat the whole module.

**Small-Group Work.** Nothing is more important in this course than small-group work. The class members will be assigned to groups of two to four students each. The group members will serve as study partners for explorations and discussion.

## 2. Assignments

**Journaling:** Throughout the life of the module each student will keep a journal—daily entries preferred. Maintaining a journal will make intentional a conversation with the various expressions of pluralism—particularly religious pluralism—the student observes in one’s culture and in the media. The conversation will increase awareness and provide a broader context for knowing how best to communicate the gospel of God in a religiously pluralistic world.

Far more than just recording observed instances of religious pluralism, the journal provides an opportunity for reflecting upon the question, “How ought I be formed in order to effectively communicate the gospel in a religiously pluralistic world?” Answering this question well involves spiritual and character formation, increase in knowledge and wisdom, and theological and intellectual growth. A student should be pressing forward on all these fronts.

Take note not only of instances that demonstrate the ideology of religious pluralism, but also instances that seem to contradict it, e.g., militant fundamentalism whatever the religion.

Keeping a journal provides an opportunity for tuning one’s ears to hear and sharpening one’s eyes to see the pluralistic world in which we live and minister. Regularly raise the questions, “What challenges for the Church does the ideology of religious pluralism present? How should Christ’s Church respond? And how may this be done in ways that express our Wesleyan theological heritage and commitments?”

Students will discuss with other students the questions their observations raise. This will be done at the beginning of each lesson. Bring your journal to each class session.

The teacher of the module will on occasion read a section of each student's journal, and will engage the student in conversation either in writing or verbally.

The journaling experience ensures that the "Be" component of "Be, Know, and Do" is present in the course of study.

**Course Work:** This module has regular homework assignments. It is called daily work because even though the class may only meet once a week, the student should be working on the module on a "daily" basis. Sometimes the homework assignments are quite heavy. The assignments are important. Even if homework is not discussed in class every session, the work is to be handed in. This gives the instructor regular information about the student's progress in the course. The normal time for homework to be handed in is at the beginning of each class session. All assignments are to be completed.

**Google Meet:** The student is expected to participate in a 45 minute Google Meet class that takes place every Monday @ 8:00pm during the duration of the course.

**Interviews:** During the course of the module each student will interview two to three members of diverse non-Christian religions—preferably persons who serve as religious leaders in their communities. Students should make notes of the interviews and attach or include the notes in their journals.

Before conducting the interviews, a student should spend time becoming acquainted with each of the two to three religions. This can be done either by consulting books or by exploring the Internet.

Questions should inquire regarding why a person is committed to his or her religion. Why does it attract his or her allegiance? What makes the religion fulfilling?

Questions should also attempt to ascertain a person's assessment of religions other than his or her own. The ideology of religious pluralism can be briefly defined and responses can be solicited.

*The interviews provide an opportunity to listen. They are not meant to be efforts to evangelize the person being interviewed. Treat the person with the same courtesy you would expect if the situation were reversed.*

If possible, students are urged to visit two or more religious services of the religions about which they are inquiring. The assignment is due the last class session.

**Final Paper:**

A Credo: At the end of the module each student will write a three- to five-page credo—affirmation—regarding how he or she intends to minister as an orthodox Christian and Wesleyan in a religiously pluralistic world. The assignment is due the last class session.

## Course Outline and Schedule

There will be 12 lessons that seek to accrue 18 credit hours according to the following schedule:

Session Dates	Expected Minutes Inside Classroom (google meet, lecture, student response, dialogue)	Expected Minutes Outside Classroom (reading, papers, assignments)	Session Theme
4/19/21 - 4/25/21	120 Minutes	60 Minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Various Meanings of Pluralism</li> <li>2. A Brief History of Religious Pluralism</li> </ol>
4/26/21 - 5/2/21	120 Minutes	60 Minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism</li> <li>4. The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism</li> </ol>
5/3/21 - 5/9/21	120 Minutes	60 Minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Responses to Religious Pluralism among Christians</li> <li>6. The New Testament and Religious Pluralism</li> </ol>
5/10/21 - 5/16/21	120 Minutes	60 Minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Prevenient Grace, The Gift of Faith, and Justification</li> <li>8. The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Sanctification</li> </ol>
5/17/21 - 5/23/21	120 Minutes	60 Minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Wesleyan Response to non-Christian religions - Part One</li> <li>10. Part Two</li> </ol>
5/24/21 - 5/30/21	120 Minutes	60 Minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Communicating the Gospel in a religiously Pluralistic World</li> <li>12. Student Accountability</li> </ol>

## Course Evaluation

The instructor, the course itself, and the student's progress will be evaluated. These evaluations will be made in several ways.

The progress of students will be evaluated with an eye for enhancing the learning experience by:

1. Carefully observing the small-group work, noting the competence of reports, the balance of discussion, the quality of the relationships, the cooperation level, and the achievement of assigned tasks
2. Careful reading of homework assignments
3. Journal checks

A letter grade is not the measure of completion. Completion of the module is based on attendance, participation, completion of all homework, and showing competence in the ability statements.

The evaluation of the course materials and the teacher will be evaluated by frequently asking and discussing the effectiveness and relevance of a certain method, experience, story, lecture, or other activity.

Some evaluation cannot be made during the class itself. Some objectives will not be measurable for years to come. If students encounter the transforming power of God at deeper levels than ever before, learn devotional skills and practice them with discipline, and incorporate the best of this course into their own ministries, the fruit of this educational endeavor could go on for a long time. In truth, that is what we expect.

### **Additional Information**

A reasonable effort to assist every student will be made. Any student who has handicaps, learning disabilities, or other conditions that make the achievement of the class requirements exceedingly difficult should make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to see what special arrangements can be made. Any student who is having trouble understanding the assignments, lectures, or other learning activities should talk to the instructor to see what can be done to help.

### **Instructor's Availability**

Good faith efforts to serve the students both in and beyond the classroom will be made.

### **Journaling: A Tool for Personal Reflection and Integration**

Participating in the course of study is the heart of your preparation for ministry. To complete each course you will be required to listen to lectures, read several books, participate in discussions, write papers, and take exams. Content mastery is the goal.

An equally important part of ministerial preparation is spiritual formation. Some might choose to call spiritual formation devotions, while others might refer to it as growth in grace. Whichever title you place on the process, it is the intentional cultivation of your

relationship with God. The course work will be helpful in adding to your knowledge, your skills, and your ability to do ministry. The spiritually formative work will weave all you learn into the fabric of your being, allowing your education to flow freely from your head to your heart to those you serve.

Although there are many spiritual disciplines to help you cultivate your relationship with God, journaling is the critical skill that ties them all together. Journaling simply means keeping a record of your experiences and the insights you have gained along the way. It is a discipline because it does require a good deal of work to faithfully spend time daily in your journal. Many people confess that this is a practice they tend to push aside when pressed by their many other responsibilities. Even five minutes a day spent journaling can make a major difference in your education and your spiritual development. Let me explain.

Consider journaling as time spent with your best friend. Onto the pages of a journal you will pour out your candid responses to the events of the day, the insights you gained from class, a quote gleaned from a book, an ah-ha that came to you as two ideas connected. This is not the same as keeping a diary, since a diary seems to be a chronicle of events without the personal dialogue. The journal is the repository for all of your thoughts, reactions, prayers, insights, visions, and plans. Though some people like to keep complex journals with sections for each type of reflection, others find a simple running commentary more helpful. In either

case, record the date and the location at the beginning of every journal entry. It will help you when it comes time to review your thoughts.

It is important to chat briefly about the logistics of journaling. All you will need is a pen and paper to begin. Some folks prefer loose-leaf paper that can be placed in a three-ring binder, others like spiral-bound notebooks, while others enjoy using composition books. Whichever style you choose, it is important to develop a pattern that works for you.

Establishing a time and a place for writing in your journal is essential. If there is no space etched out for journaling, it will not happen with the regularity needed to make it valuable. It seems natural to spend time journaling after the day is over and you can sift through all that has transpired. Yet, family commitments, evening activities, and fatigue militate against this time slot. Morning offers another possibility. Sleep filters much of the previous day's experiences, and processes deep insights, that can be recorded first thing in the morning. In conjunction with devotions, journaling enables you to begin to weave your experiences with the Word, and also with course material that has been steeping on the back burner of your mind. You will probably find that carrying your journal will allow you to jot down ideas that come to you at odd times throughout the day.

It seems that we have been suggesting that journaling is a handwritten exercise. Some may be wondering about doing their work on a computer. Traditionally, there is a special bond between hand, pen, and paper. It is more personal, direct, aesthetic. And it is flexible, portable, and available. However, as computers become more and more an integral part of our lives, the use of a computer for journaling may take on that special bond.

With regular use, your journal is the repository of your journey. As important as it is to make daily entries, it is equally important to review your work. Read over each week's record at the end of the week. Make a summary statement and note movements of the Holy Spirit or your own growth. Do a monthly review of your journal every 30 days. This might best be done on a half-day retreat where you can prayerfully focus on your thoughts in solitude and silence. As you do this, you will begin to see the accumulated value of the Word, your course work, and your experience in ministry all coming together in ways you had not considered possible. This is integration, weaving together faith development with learning. Integration moves information from your head to your heart so that ministry is a matter of being rather than doing. Journaling will help you answer the central question of education: "Why do I do what I do when I do it?"

Journaling really is the linchpin in ministerial preparation. Your journal is the chronicle of your journey into spiritual maturity as well as content mastery. These volumes will hold the rich insights that

will pull your education together. A journal is the tool for integration. May you treasure the journaling process!

## **Suggested Books for the Student's Library**

For those students interested in acquiring books for their personal library the following would be recommended as good books for this module topic:

Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2001.

Netland, Harold. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Smith, Chuck. *The End of the World . . . As We Know It: Clear Direction for Bold and Innovative Ministry in a Postmodern World*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001.

Starkey, Lycurgus M. *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Sweet, Leonard, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000.

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Carter, Stephen L. *The Culture of Disbelief*. New York: Anchor, 1994.

Cunningham, Floyd T. "Christ, the Word, the Light and the Message: A Wesleyan Reflection on World Mission," *Asia Journal of Theology* 5. April 1991.

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Eck, Diana L. *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002.

Escobar, Samuel. *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

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Harink, Douglas. *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1990.

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

Herrick, James A. *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Hick, John. *God and the Universe of Faiths*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973.

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Hutchison, William. *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Idea*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Kant, Immanuel. An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?" Königsberg in Prussia, 30th September, 1784. Located in Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, and What is Enlightenment?* New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1990.

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[http://www.pluralism.org/publications/new\\_religious\\_america/index.php](http://www.pluralism.org/publications/new_religious_america/index.php)

Sermons of John Wesley,

<http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/>