

Starr King School for the Ministry
Online Course Syllabus – DRAFT
Fall Term 2007

Theology & Reproductive Decision Making

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Course Description:

This course addresses theological, ethical and pastoral care issues in reproductive decision-making from historical and feminist perspectives. It examines contemporary debates about reproductive choices, including issues of authority, public policy and church-state relations, as well as how these debates are constructed along racial, economic, gendered and sexual orientation lines. Resources include varied religious perspectives on moral theology, theological anthropology, and sexual ethics. Integration of socio-cultural contexts and pastoral care will be addressed through case examples, online discussion, and online student presentations.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics, care must be taken to respect diverse viewpoints and strategies of care.

Texts: (These can be purchased through Amazon.com or Abe.com.)

Jackson, Timothy P., ed. *The Morality of Adoption: Social-Psychological, Theological, and Legal Perspectives*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005.

Lammers, Stephen E. and Allen Verhey, eds. *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

Maguire, Daniel C, ed. *Sacred Rights: The Case for Contraception and Abortion in World Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Articles posted on Blackboard

Recommended Text: (Note: this book is out of print, but can be found on Amazon.com or Abe.com.)

Harrison, Beverly W. *Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion*. Boston: Beacon, 1983.

Objectives:

1. To compare the historical developments and theological/philosophical underpinnings of various religious stances on reproductive decision-making.
2. To relate ethical values and concerns for human dignity, autonomy, freedom and bodily integrity to contemporary public policy debates on reproductive issues.
3. To analyze positions in contemporary reproductive choice debates in terms of their underlying theologies, sources, norms, and assumptions about (and not limited to) race, class, sexual orientation, and gender.
4. To articulate supportive pastoral care strategies for dealing with reproductive choice issues, including contraception, unplanned pregnancy, infertility, adoption, and pregnancy loss (miscarriage and stillbirth).

Assignments:

1) Weekly Postings, Reflections and Responses: ½ page to 1 page (to be submitted online each week)

Reflections: To begin online discussions each week, each student will submit a short written reflection addressing the following question about a reading assigned for that week of his/her choice: What did you find most helpful, interesting, challenging, and/or troubling about the readings and why?

Responses: Each student is expected to thoughtfully respond to two of the other students' reflections each week (¼ to ½ page each response) on readings in which the respondent did not already write a reflection. The instructor will facilitate online discussion with questions and issues raised in the reflection papers.

2) Film, Play or Novel Review: 5 to 6 pages (to be submitted to the instructor at a scheduled time)

Select and see a film or play or read a novel that deals with reproductive decision-making (the instructor will provide a list, but feel free to request another film, play or novel not on the list). Write a 5 to 6 page paper that describes the work and engages the following questions:

- a) What is the issue and from whose perspective is it presented?
- b) Identify the theological perspectives that are (implicitly or explicitly) supported and critiqued and by whom? Which characters are sympathetic and what positions do they advocate?
- c) Analyze the responses of the characters around the protagonist. In what ways are their responses supportive or not? How well do responses address the complexity of such situations? How is the socio-cultural context (sexuality, race, gender and class) implicated or critiqued in their responses?
- d) What insights did you gain from this work and what will they add to your pastoral approach?

Some of the issues and questions raised in these papers may be used to facilitate online discussion.

3) Paper: 3 to 5 page Pastoral Care Case Study (to be submitted online at a scheduled time)

Using one of the case examples to be provided by the instructor or from your own ministerial/clinical experience, prepare a 3 to 5 page paper that includes:

1. For purposes of this paper, identify: a) your professional identity (i.e. minister, pastoral counselor, social worker, school counselor, etc.); b) your professional setting (i.e. private practice, church, not-for-profit organization, etc.); c) the pastoral concerns and your approach to pastoral care, including those dimensions which will be easiest and most difficult for you to provide pastoral care.
2. Identify the salient theological issues related to the pastoral care in this situation, and
3. Be prepared to lead an online discussion of the case after it has been presented online.

Weekly reading reflections and responses will not be submitted the week in which case studies are submitted. Each student is expected to thoughtfully respond to at least two case studies by answering the following:

In what ways did the case study provide you with a new way of conceptualizing the roles, the function, and/or the approaches to pastoral care?

4) Theological Position Paper: 8 to 10 pages (to be submitted to the instructor at a scheduled time)

Prepare a theological statement of your position on any reproductive issue (with the approval of the instructor) utilizing your denominational and personal faith perspective. Engage the following questions: What are the moral and ethical stances (explicit and implicit) in your position? What are the related theological issues at play in your position? What are the areas of tension between your position and the official stance of your denomination? (How) have the course materials, assignments, and readings informed your position? What are the strengths and challenges of your position? What are the pastoral implications of your position? How might

your own gender, class, sexuality and race inform your pastoral care? You can utilize brief vignettes to illustrate the pastoral care implications, but this is not to be a case study. Use both primary and secondary sources to support your position. Online sources are allowable in-so-far as they add significantly to your materials.

Course Grading:

Grading will be based on the following:

1) Weekly postings, reflections and responses	28 points (2 points per week)
2) 5-6 page Film, Novel or Play Review	17 points
3) 3-5 page Pastoral Care Case Study Paper	25 points
4) 8-10 page Theological Position Paper	30 points
 Total possible points	 100

A=90-100 points

B=80-89 points

C=70-79 points

D=60-69 points

Course Schedule:

Week 1, September 4-8: Course Introduction and Reproductive Biology for Pastors
Blackboard Reading: Embryonic status and the rhythm method articles.

Week 2, September 9-15: Introduction to Constructive Theology and Theological Ethics in Relation to Reproductive Decision-Making

Lammers: Ch 2: Section 9: *Can Theology Have a Role in "Public" Bioethical Discourse?*
 Lisa Sowle Cahill

Section 11: *Salvation and Health: Why Medicine Needs the Church*
 Stanley Hauerwas

Section 12: *Bio-ethics: Some Challenges from a Liberation Perspective*
 Karen Lebacqz

Section 13: *Feminist Theology and Bioethics*
 Margaret Farley

Recommended: Lammers, Ch 2: Section 7: *Theology Confronts Technology and the Life Sciences*
 James M. Gustafson

Week 3, September 16-22: Life, Personhood, and Pastoral Care including When Life/Standing Begins

Lammers: Ch 4: Section 24: *The Transcendence of God and the Value of Human Life*
 James M. Gustafson

Section 25: *Toward Freedom from Value*
 Richard Stith

Ch 9: Section 51: *Four Indicators of Humanhood- the Enquiry Matures*
 Joseph F. Fletcher

Section 58: *The Basis of Medicine and Religion: Respect for Persons*
 David C. Thomasma

Blackboard: Gudorf, Christine E. "To Make A Seamless Garment, Use a Single Piece of Cloth." *Cross Currents*, Winter, 1984-1985, pp 473-491.

Week 13, November 25-December 1: Reproductive Technologies (Sterilization, In Vitro Fertilization, Embryonic Stem Cell Research, and Genetic Control – Part 2)

- Jackson: Ch 2: *Adoption, Parentage, and Procreative Stewardship*
Brent Waters
- Ch 12: *Legal and Ethical Challenges of Embryonic Adoption*
John C. Mayoue
- Lammers: Ch 12: Section 69: *Mother and Father*
David L. Scheidermayer
- Section 71: *The Problem of Genetic Manipulation*
Karl Rahner
- Section 72: *From Clinic to Congregation: Religious Communities and Genetic Medicine*
M. Therese Lysaught
- Section 74: *The Search for Shalom*
Hessl Bouma III
- Blackboard: Lasker, Judith N. and Harriet L. Parmet. "Rabbinic and Feminist Responses to Reproductive Technology." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Volume 6, Number 1, Spring, 1990, pp. 117-130.

Week 14, December 2-8: Adoption including Surrogacy and Sperm and Gamete Donation & Reception – Part 1

- Blackboard: *Guidelines for Christian Clergy: Providing Care to the Family Experiencing Perinatal Loss, Neonatal Death, SIDS or Other Infant Death* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau Publication. 2002)
- Jackson: Pages xxiii-xxix
- Chapter 3: *Adoption and the Moral Significance of Kin Altruism*
Don S. Browning
- Chapter 4: *Navigating Racial Routes*
Sandra Patton-Imani
- Chapter 9: *Suffering the Suffering Children: Christianity and the Rights and Wrongs of Adoption*
Timothy P. Jackson

Week 15, December 9-15: Pregnancy and Perinatal Loss including Still Birth, Miscarriage, and Neonatal Death

Theology Paper Due