MB Convictions: Engaging in the World
THS 520

The mission of MB Seminary is to educate and equip men and women to help lead the church in reaching Canada and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Instructor: Brian Cooper, PhD
Associate Professor of Theology
Email: briancooper@mbseminary.ca
Credit Hours: 3
Prerequisites: None
Course Term: November 13, 2023 – January 13, 2024
Instruction: Nov. 30-Dec. 1, 2023 (6:30 pm - 9:30 pm), Dec. 2, 2023 (8:30 am – 1:00 pm) at Willingdon Church

Course Description

If being a Christian is about personally confessing Jesus as Lord, what does it mean to be a community of disciples engaging the mission of the church in the world? Why are Mennonite Brethren so specific about what it means to live as disciples? This course will focus on the key missional elements of discipleship as articulated in the MB Confession*, drawing upon the principle of letting biblical conceptual language shape the theological reflection of the believing community in discerning ethical and missional outcomes.

*Based on a study of articles 7, 10-17 of the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith.

Objectives
By the end of this course, each student should:

1)   Embrace the core commitments of the Mennonite Brethren Church in personal practice and ministry in the context of Christian discipleship and ethics (Character).

2)   Articulate an understanding of Mennonite Brethren convictions about Church mission, as well as the biblical teachings and methodologies from which they arise (Content).

3)   Assess the contextual nature of Mennonite Brethren confession and describe how that informs an incarnational awareness of the Christian engagement with contemporary society (Cultural Analysis).

4)   Demonstrate the skills to faithfully embody and bring Mennonite Brethren convictions to life in the contemporary world (Professional Capacities).

Required Texts and Materials

There will be no required textbooks for this course. All of the required reading will come from materials that will be linked to the course web site.

The focus of the course will be articles 7, 10-17 from the *Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith*. Please note that we will be using the newly updated 2020 version.

If students are looking for recommended theological reference books to add to their personal libraries, here are some suggestions:

McKim, Donald K. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. This dictionary will help clarify terms that students are likely to encounter while doing reading and research.

Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform*. Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999. Olson's approach traces theological developments in their historical context and gives a very helpful survey of the major currents in Christian theology.

I also recommend owning a good one-volume systematic theology. Here are a few suggestions:

Bird, Michael F. *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.

Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology* (3rd ed). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.

Grenz, Stanley, J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

I also highly recommend the seven-volume Christian Foundations series by Donald G. Bloesch.

Intensive Schedule

Teaching Weekend (Willingdon Church)	
Thursday, November 30, 2023	6:30 – 9:30 pm
Session 1	Course Introduction Why Are We Here? The Mission of the Church
Session 2	Baptism and the Lord's Supper: What They Are and What They Mean
Friday, December 1, 2023	6:30 - 9:30 pm

Session 3	All in the Family: Spiritual and Biological
Session 4	Now and Not Yet: Living in the Two Kingdoms
Saturday, December 2, 2023	8:30 am – 1:00 pm
Session 5	Life in the Real World: Discipleship and Ethics
Session 6	Living Our Witness in a Pluralistic World

Note: Attending all sessions of the course intensive is a requirement for passing the course.

Course Assignments

The assignments for this course are listed below. Please double-space all written assignments and use proper formatting (Chicago or Turabian).

Assignments are due by 11:59 pm (your time) on the day they are due. I would ask that you submit your assignments in Populi. Once I have marked your assignment, I will put it in your grade book in Populi where you can check your grade and review the comments I made on the assignment (you will receive an automatic notification whenever I put a graded assignment in your grade book). Please note that I reserve the right to deduct 5% of an assignment's total possible value for each week that it is late (assignments submitted more than two weeks beyond the due date will not be accepted). If you find that you are unable to complete an assignment on time, I will grant one extension of up to one week for one assignment during the course (without penalty) when you inform me of your need for an extension before the due date for that particular assignment. I will also consider extensions in exceptional circumstances such as a medical emergency (when a doctor's note accompanies the request).

Here is an overview of all the course work followed by a detailed description of them:

Overview of Course Work

Week	Due Date	Assignments	Percentage of Final Grade	Cumulative Percentage
Week 1	Nov. 18	Project #1: Building for Mission	10%	10%
Week 2	Nov. 25	Project #2: Baptism and the Lord's Supper	10%	20%
Week 3	Dec. 2	Project #3: All in the Family	15%	35%
Week 4	Dec. 9	Group Discussion #1 (date to be determined by group leader)		
Week 5	Dec. 16	Project #4: Living in the Church and the World	15%	50%
Week 6	Dec. 23	Group Discussion #2 (date to be determined by group leader)		
Week 7	Dec. 30	Project #5: Making it Real	15%	65%
Week 9	Jan. 6	Group Discussion #3 (date to be determined by group leader)	5% (for all three)	70%
Week 9	Jan. 13	Capstone Assignment	30%	100%

Theological Construction Projects (65% of the final grade)

During five weeks of the course, you will have to submit theological construction projects based on the course themes. Unless otherwise noted, the maximum length for each construction project is 1,500 words.

Week 1 -- Project #1: Building for Mission (10%)

Pretend that you are starting a new church with a core group of people in a neighbourhood you know well. In light of the things you know and believe about the mission of the church, tell me what you are going to prioritize in your church. Think about your intended missional outcomes and work backwards toward what your church – location and facility, leadership, culture, planning, finances, etc. – will look like. If necessary, tell me specifically what it is that churches typically do that you will do differently.

Week 2 -- Project #2: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (10%)

We know that Jesus commanded his followers to baptize Christ-followers and to continue to observe the Lord's Supper until his return. But what do we know about the purpose of these practices? Write an instructional piece about baptism and the Lord's Supper that addresses, among other things, the following issues:

- What 1 Corinthians 11:29 means, in context, when it refers to "discerning the body of Christ"
- What should parents do with their children in a communion service?
- Why your church practices the baptism of believers only, and what this means
- What does it mean to become a member of a local church, and why it is important

Week 3 -- Project #3: All in the Family (15%)

This is a two-part construction project. The first part involves creating teaching material on what true family is about. Look at the biblical teaching on family in the Old and New Testaments to support your case. What happens when family connections and expectations clash with the call to discipleship?

Second, write about how a church community can work intentionally to grow to reflect the cultural makeup in the larger community. What does a church need to do to forge connections among diverse members of the community, including members from groups that are at odds with one another outside of the church. Give special attention to not only cultural but also linguistic differences.

Week 5 -- Project #4: Living in the Church and the World (at the same time) (15%)

Your assignment is to visit with someone about their understanding of the relationship between society and the church and then to reflect on what you heard. If possible, choose someone you know who fits one of the following categories:

- Someone who has served in public office (city council, school board, community watch, provincial offices, etc.)
- Someone you know who chooses not to vote
- A current or retired police officer
- A member of the armed forces or a military veteran

What kind of questions does your conversation raise, especially in light of your awareness of the tension between church and world? How might you affirm or critique what you heard?

Week 7 – Project #5: Discipleship and Ethics – Making it Real (15%)

Look at the [pamphlet series](#) published by the National Faith and Life Team of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Write a pamphlet on an important ethical topic from the following list:

- Environmentalism
- Consumerism
- Choosing a career

- Human sexuality
- Social media

Discussion Groups (5% of the final grade)

The discussion groups will serve two purposes. First, they will address questions and provide a forum for students to process what they are learning in the class. Second, they are community hermeneutic working groups leading to the completion of the capstone project.

Capstone Assignment (30% of final grade)

Your capstone assignment is going to accomplish a number of elements. You are asked to write a theology of church mission that encompasses the local congregation, the fellowship of congregations in an area, and a theology of denominations. Tell me why each is important and how they relate to one another. Your assignment should encompass the following elements:
- A theology of mission, both local and global
- A section describing your group's mission statement, vision, and values for mission
- A statement on collaboration and cooperation among Christians
- A description of what this would look like in your ministry context

The theological work you do in the course should contribute to your work in this final project. Here's the interesting part. This is a group project, not an individual one. You will work on this project in groups and use the group discussion times as times to collaborate, discuss, and strategize the project. Each group will submit only one paper, and, assuming each makes a comparable contribution, each member of the group can expect to receive the same grade for this assignment. The maximum length for each capstone project is 3,000 words.

Course Evaluation

Because your feedback is very important to me, I have made the course evaluation a required part of the course. Your will find the course evaluation in Populi.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description	Grade Point	Meaning in Graduate Work
A+	97-100	Superior	4.30	Exceptionally well-reasoned, compelling development of position. Outstanding incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Strikingly appropriate examples. Extraordinary insight, critical analytical and evaluative ability, and creativity. Superlative style and language usage. Makes an original contribution and is potentially publishable.
A	93-96.99	Excellent	4.00	Well-argued and convincing development of position. Insightful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Notably appropriate examples. Excellent insight, critical analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Impressive style and language use.
A-	90-92.99	Very Good	3.70	Thorough and plausible development of position. Skilful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Very good examples. Very good insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Commendable and fluent style and language usage.

B+	87-89.99	Proficient	3.30	Proficient development of position. Appropriate incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Relevant examples. Good quality insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Clear and correct style and language usage.
B	83-86.99	Good	3.00	Competent development of position, but possibly with some gaps and/or limitations. Good incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Good examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally good style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
B-	80-82.99	Average	2.70	Average development of position, but with obvious gaps and/or limitations. Satisfactory incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Satisfactory examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally satisfactory style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
C+	77-79.99	Adequate	2.30	Adequate development of position with significant gaps and/or limitations. Some incorporation of personal vision as well as references and resources. Adequate use of examples. Very little creativity. Considerable number of issues related to coherence and style.
C	73-76.99	Acceptable	2.00	Limited development of position with a noticeable lack of consistency with personal vision or references. Limited integration with external sources. Acceptable analytic and evaluative ability. Numerous weaknesses in terms of clarity, coherence, and grammar.
C-	70-72.99	Needs Work	1.70	Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision *or* references and resources not taken fully into account *or* examples are basic or not completely convincing *or* barely acceptable insight and analytic and evaluative ability. Adequate style and language usage, but with weaknesses in some respects (e.g., clarity, coherence, grammar). Overall quality shows noticeable deficiencies.
F	Below 70	Below Standard	0.00	Unacceptable work at graduate level. Shows lack of understanding and/or competence in several of the criteria described above. This grade is a failing grade at the graduate level.

Assignment Assessment

When I assess written assignments and presentations, I tend to look for the following:

➢ Appropriateness – The content matches the requirements of the assignments.
➢ Substantiveness – The content reveals deeper level thinking. This may take the form of critiquing existing ideas and proposing new ones. It may involve applying ideas from the readings and class discussions in deeply personal ways. It could also include a novel integration of ideas from various sources. As you think about substantiveness, I would also ask you to go beyond "left brain" thinking that focuses on systematic and logical thinking. Add "right brain" analysis that views concepts in intuitive and more holistic ways. This may involve viewing assignment topics from creative vantage points by using word pictures, analogies, metaphors, pictures, diagrams, drama, poetry, music, and other creative devices that can often enrich conceptual meaning and make it more personal. In order to get an A on an assignment, **you really need to present your ideas in an integrative and creative way.** Go beyond the stated expectations of an assignment (not in terms of length ☺). Surprise me with a novel combination and/or expression of ideas.
➢ Coherence – The content flows in a consistent and meaningful way.

> ➢ Engaging – The writing style does not distract from the content (e.g. grammatical mistakes), but rather engages the reader's attention. By the way, I love creative title pages that introduce a theme or multiple themes from your assignment in an engaging way.

Academic Notes and Policies

Artificial Intelligence

Students may use AI tools (eg, ChatGPT, Bing) to assist in research for assignments for this course, as long as any assistance or content that the AI tools provide or create is identified as a source and is properly and fully cited. Citation is not needed for simple proof-reading and editing (eg, Grammarly).

Paper Formatting

Students are required to adhere to the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format for all papers. Please consult the [Purdue Owl](#)website for information or:

Turabian, Kate, L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Thesis, and Dissertations,* 9th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire MB Seminary community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and required to abide by the principles of sound academic scholarship at MB Seminary.

Assignment Grade Appeals

Students can appeal their grade to the course instructor by stating in writing their reasons for contesting the grade. Deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has receipt of grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made directly to Dr. Brian Cooper, Director of Student Development, briancooper@mbseminary.ca.

Web Support-Student Portal — https://mbseminary.populiweb.com

All students at MBS will receive a MBS-Populi username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application. If you have any difficulty with your password or your login credentials, please contact Keith Reed, Director of Ministry Support, (keithreed@mbseminary.ca).

Course Intensive/Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate information regarding the cancellation of classes to your church host and contact.

Equity of Access

It is the responsibility of a student with a learning disability to inform the MB Seminary Director of Student Development (briancooper@mbseminary.ca) of that fact **before the beginning of a course** so that necessary arrangements may be made to facilitate the student's learning experience. To repeat: To ensure that instructors know to accommodate a student who has a learning access issue, the student must inform the Director of Student Development of a disability before the beginning of the class. After that is too late.