04PT725 Pastoral Care in Grief and Grieving

Course Description:

Through Isaiah, His prophet, God charges us to “Comfort my people” (Is 40:1; cf Mt 5:2). This course teaches pastors and Christian workers how to recognize the many causes and faces of grief and grieving in biblical, historical, and cultural contexts and how to respond effectively with theologically sound, practical ministry skills. Students will learn about the various artificial means by which people respond to grief (some of which are red flag indicators of grief’s unrecognized presence), how to come to grips with their own mortality and its implications for the way they live and minister pastorally in the context of such understanding.

Course objectives:

1. To consider and investigate the biblical/theological understandings related to the grief experience that stem from a Reformed perspective and the various religious traditions from which our people come.
2. To teach students how to recognize the presence of grief in their own lives and the lives of people to whom they are called to minister and to see that grief impacts people in more than bereavement or loss through death of a loved one.
3. To determine the impact that grief in shaping our understanding of the theology and praxis of effective care giving for those who grieve.
4. To determine the role of the pastor as care giver in the grieving process including setting boundaries and limits to personal involvement and vulnerabilities.
5. To study certain Scripture passages that are helpful for people going through grief.
6. To understand the vital role of a Christian community in helping its people recover from the experience of grieving and how a pastor might encourage this to happen.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance at all classes and participation in class interaction
2. Reading Assigned material
3. 3 papers including one book review, personal experience paper, and final paper (All papers are to be double spaced - 12 pt Times New Roman – 1” margins)
4. Participation in visit to local funeral home followed by one page reflection paper due on the Saturday of the week following the visit

Course texts:

Hayford, Jack. I'll Hold You In Heaven: Healing and Hope for the Parent Who has Lost a Child through Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Abortion or Early Infant Death: Regal, 2003
Robinson, Haddon W., Grief. Discovery House Publishers, 2013
Yarbrough, Julie, Inside the Broken Heart. Abingdon Press, 2012
Course outline:

First weekend: February 14 & 15

Introductions
Orientation to the course: Syllabus, Course requirements, expectations and logistics
The various causes of grief
Preliminary consideration of the dynamics of grief
Definitions (and “mis-definitions”) of grief and the experience of attachments
The 7 stages of grief
Loss and grief as it relates to crisis moments and eras in the lives of people
The many faces of grief: Grief is more than the death of someone dear
Presentations of multiple categories of the loss experience
Consideration of the levels of human and other relationships
The relationship between grief and chronic illness
The relationship between grief and anger
The relationship between grief and low-grade depression
Visit to a local funeral home – Come with questions you have about the various means of dealing with the body of deceased persons

Second weekend: March 7 & 8

Viewing of Shadowlands (the movie) and discussion of what this film teaches us about grief
A presentation on the biblical and theological understanding of the phenomenon of death
The evolution of the “medicalization” of death in a North American context
Recognition of explicit and implicit theological assumptions that inform our ministry
A discussion of mortality’s reality in particular (using Scripture as our guide)
The caregiver/pastor in relationship to those who grieve
How to identify the many markers of the grieving experience in our own lives and lives of others
The attitude with which the pastor approaches those who know they are dying including an understanding of their personal theology and experience
Key questions and concerns in ministering to them
Practical pastoral caregiving with an emphasis on various social settings, cultural histories, and family systems and how they inform us as we minister in the context of death and other griefs
Disenfranchised grief
Personal case studies revealing the student’s own experience of grief in the loss of someone dear
Other experiences of grief we know from firsthand experience

Book review due: 4 pages double spaced on Lewis, C.S., A Grief Observed

Third weekend: March 21 & 22

Grief’s gender differential – do men and women grieve differently?
Consideration of particular grief experiences that are unique including abortion, miscarriage, SIDS, suicide, AIDS, accidental deaths, and other traumatic forms of death
Ambiguous loss
Catastrophic loss and grief in the context of community

Second paper due: *My Personal Grief Experience*. 3-4 pages double spaced that include something from this course that has helped you understand your experience more fully.

Final paper due April 5, 2014: Apply the learning of this course to a real life grief situation with which you are familiar, demonstrating how you would minister based on what you have learned here. (Length 10 pages).