**ALPS-MTH Course of Study COS 323 Course Syllabus – 2025**

**Course:** COS 323 – Congregational Care

**Date/Location:** October 10-11; November 7-8 (all sessions will be on Zoom)

 *Attendance at all sessions (on Zoom) is required to get credit for the class. After you have registered for the class, you will receive a welcome letter with pertinent information as well as be emailed a packet of class handouts.*

***All prework must be received by the instructor by the date of the first class session.***

**Instructor:** Paul H. Walles, 1007 Simon Court, Eureka, IL 61530;

309-338-7737 (pwalles@mtco.com)

**Course Description:**

This course introduces students to practices of congregational care and the pastor’s responsibility in caregiving. Readings, class experiences and course assignments are designed to deepen the students’ appreciation for the collaborative ministries of the pastor and the congregation.

**Goals:**

Students will begin and/or deepen their ability to:

1. Implement and oversee appropriate types of care in varieties of settings, including prisons, hospitals, nursing facilities and homes.
2. Organize caring ministries within the congregation.
3. Discern and implement appropriate boundaries, knowing when and to whom to refer people, and when and when not to share information.
4. Reflect on and practice skills of sensitive caregiving, using role play and analysis of case studies.

**Required Readings** (please buy the most recent editions)**:**

Larry Webb, Crisis Counseling in the Congregation. (ISBN 978-1-4267-2698-9)

 Edward P. Wimberly, African American Pastoral Care and Counseling.

(ISBN 978-0-687-64949-5)

 Karen Lampe, Melissa Gepford, The Caring Congregation Ministry: Implementation Guide (ISBN 978-1-7910-1338-7)

 Karen Lampe, Melissa Gepford, The Caring Congregation Ministry: Care Minister’s Manual (ISBN 978-1-7910-1340-0)

**Highly Suggested Reading:**

Lee Franklin, A Pastor’s Practical Guide to Funerals: Offering Help, Assurance and

 Hope. (ISBN 978-1-4267-5819-5)

 Cameron Lee and James L. Furrow, Preparing Couples for Love and Marriage.

 (ISBN 978-1-4267-5320-6)

**Supplemental Reading:**

Jeanne Hoeft, L. Shannon Jung, Joretta Marshall, Practicing Care in Rural

Congregations and Communities. (ISBN 978-0-8006-9954-3)

 Howard Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling.

 (ISBN 978-0-687-66380-4)

**Preface:**

In 1977 Henri Nouwen offered the following counsel in his book The Living Reminder:

“Training for ministry will bear more fruit when it occurs in the context of a spirituality, a way of life in which we are primarily concerned, not to be with people but to be with God, not to walk in the presence of anyone who asks for our attention but to walk in the presence of God – a spirituality, in short, which helps us to distinguish service from our need to be liked, praised, or respected. Over the years we have developed the idea that being present to people in all their needs is our greatest and primary vocation. The Bible does not seem to support this. Jesus’ primary vocation was to be obedient to His Father, to live constantly in His presence. Only then did it become clear to Him what His task was in His relationships with people. This also is the way He proposes for His followers . . .”

Nouwen’s caution is that for ministry to be effectively done we must understand that our response in each relationship must be shaped by a prior relationship, our relationship with God. This class will focus on attempting to maintain a healthy balance between our identity in Christ and our call to servant ministry. Our ability to care grows out of our having received divine care.

As the apostle John wrote, “We love, because He first loved us.” (I John 4:19)

**Pre-Class Assignments:**

Assignments must be received by the instructor by the date of the first class session**. Please carefully read the directions for each assignment and follow the directions in your writing.** Written assignments should be single-spaced or space and a half (as opposed to double-spaced), not larger than 12-pt. font size, and margins not larger than 1 inch.

**Assignment #1:**

This assignment will ask you to write about your understandings of the nature of your call to pastoral ministry. In order to accomplish this assignment shape your answer by following the four-step outline below:

1. As a Christian (even if you were not a pastor), what is God wanting to accomplish in your life as a follower of Jesus?
2. As God’s purpose for you as a Christian is accomplished, how does it shape the pastoral ministry to which you are called?
3. All Christians are called to a ministry of caring. What is distinctive about your role as a pastor, and how does it relate to the caring ministry of all Christians?
4. Give two specific examples of ministry you have observed in a local church setting that demonstrate your understanding of effective elements of congregational care. Your specific examples should consider both the pastor’s role and the congregation’s role.

As you write assignment #1, give indications of how scripture informs your understandings (cite specific texts). As you write assignment #1, give indications of ways your particular cultural setting has influenced your understandings. In a final paragraph compare your understandings with those expressed by Lampe/Gepford in their books and Larry E. Webb in his.

Assignment #1 should be at least 4 pages in length.

**Assignment #2:**

This assignment will ask you to write about offering pastoral ministry and offering congregational care in the context of a specific wedding held at your church. In order to accomplish this assignment follow the two-step outline below:

1. Describe a specific wedding that occurred at your church. Describe what was done in offering pastoral care to the couple (give special attention to premarital counseling). If you have not done a wedding as a pastor, describe a wedding you have observed in a church in which you were involved, describing how the pastor provided care. Describe how the congregation offered care to the couple (and to the couple’s families) in hosting the wedding.
2. Citing your reading from the Webb, Wimberly and Lampe/Gepford texts (and, if you have read it, the Lee and Furrow book), develop a more general description of how you would do premarital counseling, how you would organize a wedding rehearsal and how you would offer follow-up care to the newly married couple. Be as specific as you can, with the intention of actually using what you develop.

Assignment #2 should be at least 3 pages in length.

**Assignment #3:**

This assignment will ask you to write about offering pastoral ministry and offering congregational care in the context of a specific death and the attendant grief that followed. In order to accomplish this assignment follow the two-step outline below:

1. Describe a specific death that occurred at your church. Describe what was done in offering pastoral care to the grieving family. Describe how the congregation offered care to the family. Describe how the pastor and the congregation prepared for the funeral and provided ministry surrounding the funeral. If you have not done a funeral as a pastor, describe a funeral you have observed in a church in which you were involved, describing how the pastor and that congregation provided care.
2. Citing your reading from the Webb, Wimberly and Lampe/Gepford texts (and, if you have read it, the Franklin book), develop a more general description of how you would have an initial meeting with a grieving family, how you would organize a funeral and how you would offer follow-up care to the grieving family. Be as specific as you can, with the intention of actually using what you develop.

Assignment #3 should be at least 3 pages in length.

**Assignment #4:**

 The apostle Paul wrote, “The gifts He (Christ) gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ . . . (Ephesians 4:11) This assignment will ask you to write a plan for “equipping the saints for the work of ministry,” emphasizing the collaborative nature of ministry in the local congregation. In order to accomplish this assignment follow the outline given below:

1. What does it mean to be a church? Share your understanding of how pastors and congregations are intended to work together to provide caring ministry. How does it diminish the church’s ministry when only one person (the pastor) provides care?

Design a plan for congregational care suited to your congregation by identifying the following:

1. What specific things can people do in your congregation to provide care? What kinds of things are they already doing? Are there ways you could equip them to begin or to improve in providing care?
2. Are there specific people in your congregation who have the kinds of gifts to assist in visitation (e.g. in homes, hospitals, nursing homes, in prisons)? Are there specific people in your congregation who have the gifts to mentor new Christians? Are there specific people in your congregation who have the gifts to walk with people through crisis times (e.g. grief, divorce, sickness)? How could you equip them to be effective in these kinds of caring ministries?
3. Are there ways, specific to your church’s community, that your church could provide care to the community? Identify particular needs and what it would take to address them.

In developing your plan make good use of your required reading books. Note specific ideas from the books that you have incorporated in your plan. In responding to the questions, cite scriptures that help inform your understandings and strategies. Try to be as honest and as practical as you can in putting together your plan for congregational care. Write it to do it.

 Assignment #4 should be at least 5 pages.

**Class Assignments:**

During the class sessions you will have opportunities to share some of your writing and to give attention to that of classmates. Be prepared to fully participate.

 By the end of the class sessions, you will be asked to reflect on those things that have contributed to your growth, as well as to identify those things that still need to be explored as potential growth points.

**Assignment #5 - Final Assignment:**

The final assignment is not to be done until the end of the class sessions. As we come to the end of our class sessions you will be asked to pull together your readings, class lectures and discussions, and do an honest assessment of your current attention to personal health. Specific instructions for submitting a written copy of your self-care covenant will be given during the final class session.

This assignment will ask you to write about your own spiritual, emotional, relational and physical health, and the importance of self-care for caregivers. In order to accomplish this assignment follow the four-step outline below:

1. Give an honest assessment of your spiritual health, your emotional health, your relational health and your physical health.
2. What are you currently doing to maintain health in these areas? Where are your growing edges in these areas?
3. How do these things impact your ministry? How could your ministry be stronger if you were healthier in any or all of these areas?
4. Develop a self-care covenant. What will you commit yourself to do to address your personal health (spiritual, emotional, relational, physical)?

Assignment #5 should be at least 2 pages.

**Grading:**

The final grade will be calculated by:

 20% Pre-Class Assignment #1 grade

 20% Pre-Class Assignment #2 grade

 20% Pre-Class Assignment #3 grade

 20% Pre-Class Assignment #4 grade

 10% Final Assignment grade

 10% Class participation grade