

Pacific Southwest District
Lay Leadership Training Program

**Course Syllabus for New Testament
(In Six Sessions)**

A. Course Description

This course will provide an overview of the New Testament, with emphasis on its content, themes, formal aspects and how it is used by the Church.

B. Course Goals

- 1. General:** Students will...
 - a. Understand the broad content of the New Testament with its unified message in a diversity of forms.
 - b. See Christ as the cornerstone of the New Testament and the touchstone for its interpretation.
 - c. By God's grace develop a greater appreciation for and love of the text and the One to whom it directs us.
- 2. Specific:** Students will make progress toward...
 - a. Demonstrating an increased knowledge of the content of New Testament, its themes, context, formats, the principles by which it is interpreted, and how it has come to us.
 - b. A greater ability to understand the relationship between the meaning of the text as written, its interpretation and application.
 - c. Discernment in questions brought to the text and how those questions can be answered.
 - d. Exemplifying better skills in communicating to others the meaning and content of specific New Testament passages.

C. Texts

The Bible: Preferred translations are the RSV or NIV

Fee, Gordon D. and Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

Various commentaries, Bible dictionaries, concordances and other secondary resources as may be available to the student through such sources as libraries, etc. recommended: an atlas of the Bible.

Recommended for additional reading:

Bohlman, Ralph A. *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions.* St. Louis: Concordia, 1983.

D. Student Roles

It is assumed that participants will be present and on time for all class sessions. If students miss more than four hours of class time, certification credit will not be earned. If students do not complete all written assignments in a timely manner, certification credit will not be earned. Participants are expected to complete all assignments individually.

E. Unit Outline and Class Schedule

Session One: Introduction

Assignment: *Read Fee and Stuart, chapters 1-4; also appendix, pp. 219-221 (246-249, new ed).*

Introduction, principles of interpretation, derivation and transmission of the text, understanding the text in context, discussion of key terms and principles, bridging cultural and linguistic gaps, evaluation of translations. *What limitations, if any does the fact of the NT's inspiration place upon methods used to interpret it? What is Scripture and how is it recognized as such?*

How does our culture or language affect the way we think or understand the meaning of a text from a different language? What difference are there among Hebrew, Greek and English and how do they affect our understanding?

How does oral communication differ from written? How does the audience to which a word is addressed affect that word or its transmission?

Since certain formats are more communicate more effectively in given situations, where can this be observed in the NT? How will it affect interpretation?

Session Two: Paul

Assignment: *Read the letters of Paul to the Galatians, Colossians and Titus.*

Submit choice of passage for major paper.

The Pauline Corpus; Jewish and Hellenistic background; the form and function of letters; relationship to apostolic Christianity; God and creation,

spiritual powers; human solidarity in Adam and Christ; law; justification; Jesus is Lord, Christ, God; solidarity with Christ; sacraments; role of the Spirit; election/predestination; Church, ministry and the Christian life; the End and resurrection of the dead.

What special challenges does the choice of epistolary format pose for us in interpreting the letters of Paul?

How does the issue of apostolic authority show itself as a continuing theme in the letters of Paul? Why does it do so?

To what does the term 'law' refer in Paul – Torah/Old Covenant, commandments, a legal principle?

What is the dominant language used for salvation in Paul? What other language or images are also important?

In what sense can we characterize Pauline ethics by the admonition, 'Become what you already are'?

Session Three: Matthew and Mark

Assignment: Read Fee and Stuart, cc. 7 & 8; submit list of sources for major paper.

The movement from proclamation to book; the relationship of gospels to apostolic witness. On Mark: strange messiahship; exorcism; the 'Messianic secret'; blind eyes and deaf ears; the role of suffering; glory versus the cross. On Matthew: the Kingdom of God/heaven; the wise scribe; Jesus as 'God with us', Son of God and Son of Man; Jesus as the Lord of the Church; Jesus as the One greater than Moses, David, Solomon; the cross as the beginning of glory.

What is a gospel?

What are the various contexts in which Jesus' words were spoken and have been received? How does this affect their meaning?

To what sort of audience or in what circumstances would the message of Mark be especially appealing?

What is the role of Law and righteousness in the life of the disciple?

What is the relationship of Jesus or the church to the Old Testament?

Session Four: Luke and Acts

Assignment: Read Fee and Stuart c. 6. Read an introductory article from a Bible dictionary, encyclopedia, or commentary on the Gospel of Luke and a second article on the Acts of the Apostles. Total length must exceed ten pages.

The Good News as literature and history; the Great Reversal of human values and expectations; peace on earth; repentance and the saving of the lost; the relationship of Jew and Gentile to the people of God; the spirit of prophecy; from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Glory in spite of the cross.

What difference does treating Luke and Acts as part of the same work make for interpreting the whole?

What are the limits on accommodating the gospel to different cultures to which it is proclaimed, and how is this exemplified in Luke-Acts?

What is Luke's agenda, and how does this influence his choice and

presentation of material?

What has led some to characterize Luke as the ‘lightweight’ among the gospel writers?

Why is Luke the favorite author of so many Christians

Session Five: Gospel and Letters of John

Assignment: Consult with instructor on major paper.

Profound concepts in simple terms; symbolism, irony and drama; signs and glory; narrative and discourse; the sending of the Revealer into the flesh and the crisis of faith it provokes; “I AM”; the cross as the power of love; glory as the cross; the relationship of the gospel to the letters (and Apocalypse).

In what ways is the presentation of Jesus in John different from that in the synoptic gospels?

What does glory mean in John, and how is it revealed in Jesus?

What does it mean to believe as John sees it?

In what ways do the Letters of John develop themes from the gospel?

Session Six: the Catholic Epistles (except 1-3 John) and the Revelation

Assignment: Read Fee and Stuart, c. 13, 1 Peter; major paper due.

The New Testament canon; ‘circular letters’ (encyclopedias); emergence of heresy; the Church in the world; the defense of the Faith; the use of patterns and typology. Evaluation.

What did the delay of Christ’s second coming mean for the Church?

How do the last books of the New Testament show the Church relating to the broader culture around it? How might that help the present Church?

How does one reconcile James’ statements about salvation and faith with those of Paul in Galatians?

What difficulties does the language of sacrifice present for modern people?

What situation in life does apocalyptic address and what are the means it uses?

What does it mean to “Follow the Lamb wherever he goes?”

F. Course Evaluation

Evaluation will be based on approximately equal measure upon the major written assignment, class participation and a brief written evaluation during the last meeting. Grading will be Pass, Fail or Commendable.

Each student will submit a paper of 1000-1200 words on one of the following passages:

Matthew 25:14-30 (Parable of the Talents)

Luke 1:46-55 (the Magnificat)

John 6:1-14 (the Feeding of the Five Thousand)

Acts 17:16-34 (Paul’s Speech on the Areopagus in Athens)

Galatians 4:1-7 (an analogy from law; “when the fullness of time had come...”)
Philippians 2:5-11 (a Hymn to Christ used as an example)
Philemon
1 Peter 3:1-7 (parenthesis on the relationship between husbands and wives)

In the paper, the student will:

Comment on important differences, if any, among various English translations.

Identify and comment upon any important terms in the passage.

Analyze its form and structure.

Indicate what parallels may exist to the passage and how they may help determine its meaning.

Discuss the contexts of the passage, beginning with the nearer and moving to the farther.

Comment upon any materials from its social/historical context that might bear on the passage.

From the prior steps, determine what the intention and meaning of the passage are and show how that message is developed in the passage.

G. Policy on Honesty and Plagiarism

This course seeks to empower students for independent learning, resourcefulness, clear thinking and perception. All submitted work and activities should be genuine signs of individual achievement from which the student should derive personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

H. Course Particulars

Instructor:

Location:

Dates: