“...I was in prison and you visited me...”

Faith Behind Bars – 19–215
Christie Billups, D.Min.

Syllabus

Contact Information:
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Course Description: This course explores the religious aspects of the world of incarceration. Course participants will develop an understanding of the U.S. and Illinois corrections systems historically, culturally, demographically, and sociologically. This knowledge will be placed in dialogue with and contrast to the Catholic response to the system as well as those in jails and prisons based in Scripture and Church documents. Restorative Justice will be explored and its current practices investigated through relevant readings as well as testimonies of ministers, ex-offenders, and, hopefully, some of those who have been victimized by crime. The class will also look into the implications of the death penalty from anthropological, sociological, political and religious perspectives.

Students will discuss the spirituality of those incarcerated as well as those called to work or minister beside them. To the extent possible, students will explore responses to the practical and spiritual needs of those who are locked up. A handful of ministerial skills will be fostered and practiced to develop skills for better listening and compassionate presence.

Goals:

 To listen to and respect the stories and thus the dignity of persons who are incarcerated as well as others impacted by the penal system. Also, specifically, to reflect on the spiritual journeys and realities of offenders, victims, family members of victims and offenders, ministers and corrections officers.
 To learn more about the specific realities of incarcerated individuals through correspondence as service.
 To engage Catholic Social Teaching as it applies to the life and dignity of every human being regardless of past actions or current attitudes.
 To examine our own attitudes toward those who are incarcerated as well as those victimized by crime.
 To explore incarceration historically, sociologically, anthropologically, psychologically, religiously and spiritually.
 To consider the particular realities of juveniles, women, mentally ill persons and others doubly marginalized within the prison system.
 To learn a handful of pastoral skills which might be used to be truly present to another person who is isolated, struggling or in pain
 To break open the death penalty in order to better understand those calling for its abolition, including Church leaders.
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Required Texts
*New American Bible* (or other academically respected translation)

Assessment:  (Additional explanation to follow)

- Participation                  15%
- Weekly correspondence with detainees     16%
- 3 reflection papers             15%
- 3 annotated bibliographies – 5 sources each  24%
- 3-5 page practical response paper (Final Project)  10%
- Midterm                          10%
- Final                            10%

Grading:
A, A-    = 94-100, 90-93
B+, B, B- = 87-89, 84-86, 80-83
C+, C, C- = 77-79, 74-76, 70-73
D+, D, D- = 67-69, 64-66, 60-63
F      = Below 60

[See course handbook for GPA scale.]
Grades will be available and calculated on blackboard.com. Other course documents and notes will also be posted on Blackboard from time to time.

Teacher Expectations:
- Respect will be offered to all classmates, correspondents, guests and the professor at all times. This includes a respectful response to all points of view.
- Engage the material. Everyone in the class is both teacher and student. Attendance, preparation, and participation are necessary.
- Use inclusive language whenever possible. The Family of God knows no favoritism or discrimination.
- Take pride in your work. Hand in assignments prepared with care and excellence.
- Assignments MUST be handed in ON TIME. Printing problems and other avoidable difficulties should be addressed well before class time to avoid tardiness.
- Pending TRUE emergencies (e.g. the death of an immediate family member or illness with a 103 degree fever), students MUST be present on days of exams or assignments due.
- Texting is prohibited during class time. It is distracting for everyone in the learning community and detracts from the learning potential of those who do it. If a student is asked more than once to refrain from texting (or random websurfing on laptops), that
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student’s participation grade will be impacted. The use of handheld devices which serve as dictionaries and other resources that aid in learning are acceptable.

- **No plagiarism or cheating will be tolerated.** All works used for research, whether quoted or referenced, must be cited in the text of the papers and listed in a bibliography or works cited. Papers will be submitted through turnitin on Blackboard to assist in assessing papers for excessive use of other authors’ works. If a student is suspected of any type of academic dishonesty, a thorough investigation will ensue. Consequences will be grave.

  See the Lewis University policy at:

**Explanation of Evaluation Tools:**

- **Participation** (15% of grade)
  - **Attendance** is expected and required for successful completion of this course. One cannot be a successful student or teacher if one is not present to learn from colleagues and dialogue. After **one absence** from class (there are only 13 in all), one’s participation grade drops a point for each additional absence. Students are also expected to be punctual.
  - Secondly, being **prepared for discussion** is absolutely necessary. This course is not a lecture style course, therefore one must stay on top of assigned readings and bring necessary resources to class.
  - Third, active, insightful, and consistent **participation** of each student is expected throughout the semester.

- **Weekly Correspondence** (16%)

  Every week, students are asked to bring in one stamped letter to the detainee to whom you have been assigned. These letters should be a **minimum of one page** in length. The instructor will check off that you have done this and mail the letters. If students have the resources, it would be a HUGE gift to the guys inside if you could include a **$10 money order with your first letter**. This defrays postage costs for detainees who have no monetary resources to speak of.

  Writing letters to those inside jails and prisons is perhaps the heart of this course. It is in this way that you can begin to get a glimpse of the life of those on the inside. **Despite the fact that you may not get letters every week from your correspondent, you are asked to write a letter each week to them.** These letters should be a response to what they have shared with you, but they are prepared to answer questions you may have as well. Your readings will hopefully raise questions also, and those might also be directed to them. Keep in mind that they are not reading what we are reading and may not know the more technical aspects of what we discuss. (Then again, they might!)

  When you write, be sensitive to your correspondent. Do not judge anything he may share with you. We all have our shortcomings and have erred at some point in our lives. On the flip side, this may not be the appropriate venue for sharing your own personal issues. If you choose to send a picture to them upon their request, make sure it is a photo free of all mixed messages (e.g. suggestive clothing, clothing with inappropriate print or logos on it).
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Reflection Papers (15% total, 5% each)
In 1-2 pages, please share your reflections on three occasions during the semester.

1) Please reflect on the input provided by the gentlemen who will come to our class to share their experiences of incarceration. These reflections may also include your experiences with correspondence up to this point. Key questions that could be addressed:
   - How are their experiences different or the same from what you expected?
   - What impressions and biases are you discovering in yourself?
   - What things, feelings, ideas are you struggling with as you attempt to relate to the stories you are hearing and reading?
   - Where is God in all of this?
   - Due Feb. 22nd

2) In March, there will be a speaker who has been involved in jail ministry for over 30 years. He will be exploring juvenile delinquency and restorative justice. I am also attempting to bring in a woman who was caught up in the prison system to share the unique realities of women in jail/prison. Thirdly, I will be showing a variety of informative and moving film clips throughout the course. You may share your reflections on any of these events – CHOOSE ONE. Refer to above guide questions, or simply share your impressions in a cohesive paper.
   a. Due March 29th

3) On the final evening of class (Due April 26th), please submit a reflection paper examining your experience of corresponding with your pen pal. Again, the questions connected to Reflection Paper #1 might continue to be apropos. Other possible questions to explore:
   - How have your ideas about incarcerated people changed?
   - What moved you about the story shared by your correspondent?
   - What challenges arose in the process of corresponding?
   - If he shared about his faith journey, what was that like for you?

Annotated Bibliographies (24%)
Three times (8% each) during the semester, 5 annotated bibliographies will be submitted. Annotated bibliographies are simply a bibliographic reference followed by 50-100 words (single-spaced) summarizing the content of that passage, article or chapter.

There is a lot of assigned reading, and while not every page will be covered thoroughly by student or class, students do need an extensive and broad understanding of the ideas and realities which will be explored. Doing as much reading as possible is expected. Make sure you read from different resources and not just those books with short chapters. Below is an example of what one annotated bibliography will look like. As you can see, it is single-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-font. Any excerpts that are too short or too long will lose points. If you base all five excerpts on a single source, you will lose points. All five annotated bibliographies should fit on a single sheet of paper. (But two pages are OK as long as the word count remains within the expected 100 words.)
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Example


If you’re wondering what 50 to 100 words looks like, I thought I’d demonstrate that it’s not very much at all. What I’m looking for is simple evidence that you are keeping up with the reading and doing your best to understand the concepts in the books. While I certainly (50) hope that you take the time to edit and revise carefully, use verbal economy. It’s all about clarity and eloquence. Single spacing is fine, but please use Times New Roman 12-font. Do NOT exceed 100 words. All five entries could fit on one page therefore making some trees very happy. (100)

Final Project (10%) – Students will explore one specific aspect of the justice system which needs attention or reform. Church teaching on this would be used to consider possible spiritual/ministerial/pastoral/practical responses. JLPS students might consider professional implications of Church teachings for police or corrections officers, lawyers, or others associated with the administration of the Department of Corrections employed by the state of Illinois or one of the counties. Through the lens of restorative justice and Church teaching, legislative modifications may also be addressed in the spirit of advocacy.

1) Format specifications:
   a. 4-5 pages (not including works cited). No separate title pages please.
   b. 12-font, double-spaced, Times New Roman
   c. Use a header (with full name and course number) and pagination
   d. 5 source minimum; sources must be varied and must be listed accurately and alphabetically in Works Cited at the conclusion of your paper
   e. Citations are expected throughout – preferably with footnotes or parenthetical citations – again, correct referencing and punctuation is expected
   f. You may use the Theology Department’s preferred system: Kate Turabian Chicago Style
   g. Due April 12th

*Papers must be submitted both in hard copy into the hand of the professor on the day they are due as well as through the program “Turn-it-in” by midnight of the due date. Submissions for turnitin should be done through Blackboard.

Midterm (10%) & Final (10%)
The Midterm will be a very brief, objective exam looking at a very few major themes and important vocabulary from the beginning of the semester forward. A review guide will be provided.

The Final Exam will be based on a film excerpt shown in class on the Monday night of Finals week and will address major themes of the course from the midterm on. A review guide will be given to students the week before finals.