

**The School of Theology**  
**The University of the South, Sewanee TN**  
**MNST 562 - Transforming Congregations & Communities**  
**Advent Semester 2017**  
**Wednesdays, 3:05 – 5:05 PM      Location: Hamilton Hall, Room 117**

Instructor: The Rev. April Berends  
Office Hours (HH110--shared): By appointment

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### **Rationale**

This interdisciplinary course was collaboratively created by University students and faculty and colleagues with a shared concern for graduating a cohort of students that have the cultural awareness and ability to analyze systems of power and injustice and are prepared to walk out the door and into a church or other setting and know how to faithfully engage injustice in ways that are effective and transformational, both for congregations and communities in which congregations live and move and have their being.

Leadership development tools will be employed to equip students to organize congregations and communities to use power relationally in order to bring about political, economic, social and spiritual transformation. As we explore various biblical, theological and social perspectives on how power works in congregations and communities, we will connect our work to the Baptismal Covenant. This course will give students the opportunity to explore movements building power for change and renewal within our own local context using a project-based learning approach applying the tools and concepts. In addition the course will prepare students for future participation as leaders in the Mission Engagement Initiative.

In this course, students have the opportunity to practice leadership by organizing a leadership team to work with them to mobilize members of a community to work together to achieve specific outcomes in the pursuit of a shared purpose by the end of the semester. Students learn five core leadership practices: building committed relationships; using narrative to translate values into the capacity for agency; turning resources into power by strategizing; turning intentions into effective action; and structuring organization so as to develop leadership, engage people, and achieve goals. Students learn to coach others as well as receive coaching. Students learn the limits of mobilizing resources in the short-term – as in getting petition signatures or mouse clicks – unless linked to organizing people for the longer-term – as in building an organization or movement.

This course is for students interested in learning how to create social change through collective action and how this action is rooted and grounded in the faith of Christianity in general and the Episcopal Church in particular. Because it is a course in practice, it requires trying new things, risking failure, and stepping outside your comfort zone. As reflective practitioners, students will learn through critical reflection on their experience, feedback and coaching.

The course directly connects with the stated purpose of the University of the South: the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom in close community and in full freedom of inquiry, and enlightened by Christian faith in the Anglican tradition...to the end that students be prepared to search for truth, seek justice, preserve liberty under law, and serve God and humanity.

## Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student will be:

1. Alert to injustice and the economic, religious and political systems of society that perpetuate it, critiquing them from a faith perspective;
2. Able to lead transformational change through collective action grounded in the baptismal covenant of the Episcopal Church;
3. Equipped with theological and leadership skills to build the capacity of one's self and others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty and injustice; and
4. Proficient applying tools for building relational culture and transformational ministry and their theological foundations.

## Strategies

The educational approach in this course creates opportunities for students to organize others to work together to achieve shared purpose rooted in five specific practices: relationship building, story telling, strategizing, acting, and structuring leadership. Students commit to values-based organizing projects that require mobilizing others to determine, strategize, and achieve an outcome by the end of the semester. Each class session includes discussion of foundational theological perspectives and narratives in order to facilitate the integration of faith and action. Students' learning is supported with discussion, readings, reflection papers, and skill building workshops.

1. Attending and participating fully in each class session.
2. Written reflections on learning growth, challenges and insights.
3. Completing all reading assignments and participate in class and Blackboard discussion about those readings.
4. Students base class work on their experience working as a team in leading an "organizing campaign" of their choosing, designed on theological foundations and engaging spiritual practices. This project will require mobilizing others to join in collaborating to achieve a clear outcome that advances your shared purpose by the end of the semester. Engaging in this practical application of the course content should average some 6 hours/week.

## Evaluation

### Relational Meetings (25%)

This course maintains that relational power's most radical act is intentionally building relationships that engage people in public life. During the first three weeks of class each student will schedule and meet with eight people in the community to conduct a relational meeting. Two of these relational meetings will be shadowed by a fellow student, with the permission of the person with whom the student is building relationship (and they preferably may be meetings with a fellow student). A written record and evaluation of each meeting of these (8) relational meetings will be submitted confidentially to Blackboard and discussed in class. The target date for the first four (4) records of relational meetings and one (1) peer evaluation form from shadowing is 9/20/17; the target date for the second four (4) records of relational meetings and one (1) peer evaluation form from shadowing is 10/03/17. The final due date for all eight (8) records of relational meetings and two (2) peer evaluations is noon on 10/03/17.

### Justice Ministry Project (25%)

Develop a class project addressing a shared need, concern, issue, or injustice in a church, community group, mission agency, regional judiciary or denomination, city government agency, state or federal agency, academic institution, etc. At the end of the term, students make a team presentation analyzing their organizing project. Students are evaluated not on whether their project is a "success," but on a demonstrated ability to analyze what happened, how and why. How did your team use the discussion, reading, tools, models, and ideas in this course to further the coming of the shalom community in this place? What would you change to address an issue or concern in the future?

### Reflection Papers (35%)

Beginning in the fourth week of class, students submit reflection papers of two single spaced pages in which they analyze their experience of their organizing project. Each week we pose questions to stimulate reflection. Papers are due on Thursday mornings at 8:00 a.m. prior to the class session. Of seven total reflection papers, you may skip two. But two of the remaining five are required, the second and the final: due 10/04/17 and 12/13/14. At the end of the term, on 12/13/14, students submit a final reflection paper analyzing the organizing project from their personal experience and perspective on how would you describe your understanding of power and how that affected the way you went about practicing prayerful and prophetic leadership in this community.

### Class Participation (15%)

The ability to work collaboratively and to build relationships is critical to success this this course. Students are required to

attend all class sessions, participate in class discussions, complete assigned presentations, respond thoughtfully to presentations by other students and engage with questions about assigned readings and ongoing community engagement work.

## Course Annotated Bibliography

### Required Texts

1. Chambers, Edward T. *The Power of Relational Action*. Skokie, IL: ACTA Publications, 2009. This small but powerful booklet is one of the best tools for learning about and finding inspiration for why people of faith would want to engage in *the* foundational practice of community organizing – the one-to-ones or relational meetings. The work aptly describes what this course maintains, which is that critical to all transformations are the personal relationships we have, the close connections with others that sustain our lives and give meaning to our larger contexts. The distinction between public and private relationships is an important one, and Chambers makes the case here for the essential, soulful work of building public relationships and how the power of those relationships can translate into personal and social transformation.
2. Ganz, Marshall. “Organizing People, Power, and Change.” Class Lecture Notes, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Spring 2014. The Leadership Development Training the Episcopal Church is using with congregations has been modeled after much of what is taught in the Ganz course, integrated with spiritual practices, and adapted for congregational and other contexts. Each student in the “Transforming Congregations & Communities” course will teach at least one of these lectures/lessons to their peers.
3. Gecan, Michael. *Effective Organizing for Congregational Renewal*. Skokie, IL: ACTA Publications, 2008. Using illustrations from the Roman Catholic, Muslim, Lutheran, Jewish, and Episcopal traditions, this booklet gives a great summary of the ways each of the community organizing tools can renew congregational life. He makes the case that at all times we have two choices in congregational leadership: to continue doing what we always have done or to reorganize and re-energize the way we do things. Whether or not these four universal tools of all effective organizing are employed for justice ministry, the methods of individual (one-to-one relational meetings), power (relational) analysis, teaching and training, and action and evaluation are described in ways that those who may have an aversion to community organizing in theory can be encouraged to practice them in other ways as faithful leaders.
4. Krehbiel, Jefferey K. *Reflecting with Scripture on Community Organizing*. Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2010. This is an excellent short resource for giving congregations an introduction to community organizing principles through the lens of bible study. The author leads us through the process of conversion from crowd to community, anger to action, pride to perseverance, and the responsibility to keep hope alive, respectively. Key concepts include: 1) a fundamental assumption of organizing is that every community has within it leaders capable of acting on their own behalf in relationship with others; 2) if you cannot remember what you really value, if you do not grieve over the way things are that do not respect those values, you cannot sustain the struggle to organize for change; 3) persistence and public exposure are two of the most potent accountability tools; and 4) what is currently needed is a way of reflection on the relationship between the actions of community organizations in working for justice and the values of faith communities using scripture.
5. Salvatierra, Alexia and Peter Heitzel. *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2013. This book makes a clear distinction between adapting a secular model (“faith-based organizing”) and an approach that is rooted in faith principles and practices. Faith-rooted organizing takes the beliefs, values, and disciplines of the people of God as the first order which then shapes and guides not only what and how we organize for justice but why. Questions posed to stimulate reflection will be drawn from the chapters in this book and from theology reflected in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

### Texts for Further Reading on Reserve

1. Brueggemann, Walter. *Truth Speaks to Power: The Countercultural Nature of Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013. This is a current resource by a scholar highly respected in the Episcopal Church that addresses how “biblical faith is concerned with questions of social justice and the consequent mandate to social action.” In particular he speaks to the contention in this course around the essential public nature of using biblical narratives that place the power of YWHW in the public drama alongside the transformative potential of social pain when it is enacted in the public domain.

2. Jacobsen, Dennis A. *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001. Written by a Lutheran priest active in the Gamaliel faith-based community organization, this is a concise “how-to” manual for this work. The chapters on Power, Self-Interest, and Agitation are especially helpful for dispelling common misunderstandings of these principles and for integrating it with faith perspectives.
3. Kahane, Adam. *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change*. A BK Currents Book. 1st ed. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010. This book is a synthesis and broad application worldwide of the concepts which Paul Tillich and Martin Luther King, Jr. have shared about love and power. The author helps to reframe notions that are often misunderstood by church leaders and therefore hinder our ability to practically address our toughest group, community and social challenges. Kahane is a behavioral scientist with wide experience in addressing the world’s most difficult issues for almost 25 years. He maintains that to co-create new social realities we have to work with two distinct fundamental forces that are in tension: power and love. He describes the generative and degenerative sides of both power and love and uses the analogy of walking on two legs, always being in dynamic balance, for learning to employ both power (the drive to achieve purpose) and love (the drive toward unity) in addressing our social challenges. I understand the church’s handicaps around doing justice as based on our being crippled by a failure to theoretically and practically reconcile notions of love and power. We have explicitly focused on one (love) and distained the other (power, though often *covertly* engaging it). Community-organizing practices have tended to be *overtly* associated with the degenerative aspect of power (*power-over*), and so there is a developed aversion for people of faith to participate. However, when properly articulated, understood, and practiced, the generative *power-to* create social change, to do justice, can be an ongoing journey of moving forward together in ways that require a high degree of accountability and commitment in order to maintain that delicate balance of power and love. Kahane’s stories describing real successes and failures help to reframe notions of power and love that are often misunderstood by church leaders and therefore hinder our ability to practically address our toughest group, community and social challenges.
4. Linthicum, Robert C. *Building a People of Power: Equipping Churches to Transform their Communities*. Waynesboro, GA; Federal Way, WA: Authentic Media; Published in partnership with World Vision Press, 2006. The “Transforming Congregations & Communities” course for the fall of 2013 was based on the course Linthicum has taught in other seminaries and for which he wrote this book as a text for those graduate level seminary courses. It is comprehensive in its social analysis and description of practical application of the values and processes for enabling people to come together to address injustices.
5. Sparks, Paul and Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen. *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. A new resource worth exploring which has been recommended by a student and endorsed by several other authors of required texts for this course.
6. Taibbi, Matt. *The Divide: American injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap*. New York: Spiegel & Grau Trade Paperbacks, 2015. Taibbi, a reporter for *Rolling Stone*, investigates the disparities within the American justice system when it comes to prosecuting and sentencing the rich and the poor. Taibbi explains the massive fraud and other crimes committed within the American financial sector, and how the perpetrators of such crimes dodged prosecution. Meanwhile “Poverty goes up; crime goes down; prison population doubles.” He explores the lives of ordinary people in America’s poor neighborhoods, and juxtaposes the effects of “law and order” policing in the lives of poor people against the failure to hold Wall Street accountable.

### Course Work Schedule

Class session	Date	Lecture and/or Reading Discussion	Reading, Reflection & Responsibility to Prepare	Practical Application Topics
	Thurs 2014			<b>ACTION</b>
1.	8/30	Introduction to Relational Culture		Skill building: Relational Meetings, Building Relational Culture
2.	9/06	Integrating with Learning to Organize	Chambers, <i>The Power of Relational Action</i> Ganz, “Why stories	Skill building: Organizing Project & review Relational Meetings

			matter” Brueggemann, <i>video (see Blackboard)</i>	
3.	9/13	<b>I believe in God:</b> Biblical Exegesis from the Margins to the Middle	Brueggemann, <i>Truth Speaks to Power, Intro, chapters 1 &amp; 5</i> Krehbiel, <i>Reflecting with Scripture on Community Organizing.</i>  <i>Reflection paper #1</i>	Ganz, <i>People, Power &amp; Change:</i>  Skill building: Mobilizing Shared Values - Public Narrative Story of Self
4.	9/20	<b>I believe in God:</b> The Biblical Prophetic Tradition	Salvatierra, <i>Faith-Rooted Organizing, Intro &amp; chs. 1 &amp; 2</i> Cone, excerpt from <i>The Cross and the Lynching Tree</i>  Prepare list of potential meetings with congregational and community leaders for review in class	Ganz, <i>What is Public Narrative:</i>  Skill building: House meetings, community problems assemblies & cutting an issue
5.	10/4		<b>Reflection paper #2</b> <b>Relational meetings (8) &amp; 1-1 Evaluations (2)</b> Taibbi, <i>The Divide</i> , Chapter 3 (book on reserve)  Jacobsen, <i>Doing Justice (Power)</i> on reserve  Strategy worksheet due—collaborate with group and turn in one copy.	Skill building: Power analysis
6.	10/11	<b>Continue in the apostles teaching, fellowship &amp; the prayers:</b> Leadership & spiritual practices for God’s people	Salvatierra, <i>Faith-Rooted Organizing</i> , Chs. 5, 8 & 9	Ganz, <i>Relationships:</i>  Skill building: Recruiting & Building Leadership Teams: <i>Developing Shared Purpose</i>
7.	10/18		<b>Reflection paper #3</b> Additional reading on Blackboard prior to class.	Ganz, <i>Structuring Leadership:</i>  Skill building: <i>Strategy in Organizing: Creating a Plan that Meets Goals &amp; Develops Leaders, House meeting practice session.</i>
8.	10/25	<b>Continue in the apostles teaching:</b> The Prophetic	Gecan, <i>Effective Organizing for Congregational Renewal</i>	Ganz, <i>Strategizing:</i>

		Call		Skill building: House meeting script and practice session.
9.	11/1	<b>Persevere in resisting evil:</b>	<b>Reflection paper #4</b>  No additional reading this week. Develop and practice House meeting script with peers.	Ganz, <i>Action</i> :  Skill building: Creating Strategy: Tactics & Timeline
10.	11/8	<b>Continue in the prayers:</b>	<b>Reflection paper #5</b> <i>Read Justice Knox: Covenant on Blackboard</i> <i>Conduct House meetings</i>	Ganz, <i>Organization: Communities in Action</i> :  Guest speaker—Pastor Chris Battle of Justice Knox
11.	11/5	<b>Loving your neighbor as yourself.</b>	Review house meetings Build team for implementing project	Organizing Project Work Recruitment
12.	11/29	<b>Respect the dignity of every human being:</b> Developing a call to action	<b>Reflection paper #6</b>  Jacobsen, <i>Doing Justice</i> (Community) on reserve  Additional reading on Blackboard prior to class.	Skill building: Diagnosing the Condition of your Leadership Team  Organizing Project Work
13.	12/06	<b>The duty of all Christians:</b> Work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom	Jacobsen, <i>Doing Justice</i> (A Spirituality for the Long Haul) on reserve Salvatierra, <i>Faith-Rooted Organizing</i> , ch. 11	Ganz, <i>Becoming a Good Organizer</i> :  Organizing Project Work
14.	12/13	<b>The church pursues its mission:</b> Seek to transform unjust structures of society	<b>Final Reflection paper #7</b>	<b>Project Presentation &amp; Celebration</b>