RS 113: The Church in the New Testament
Provisional Syllabus

Course description
Study of the developing theology and praxis of the early church as seen in the New Testament.

Expanded description
In this class, we will seek to understand the church in the New Testament. What does the church look like, believe, and do? How do individuals fit into the church? How does the church relate to God? As we approach these questions, we will set the New Testament church in its context: Jewish Palestine and the Roman empire. How does the church reflect and challenge first century Mediterranean social and cultural structures, expectations, and values? Finally, as we survey early church theology and praxis, we will continually ask the significance of our study for the church today. What modern questions and concerns can the early church speak to? How do we continue the story of the church?

RS 113 satisfies the GE component Serving Society, Enacting Justice. This element of the GE asks us to reflect on the needs of the society we live in and respond in faith, hope, and justice by serving our society. As a class, we will seek to understand the ways in which the early church responded to issues of social, political, and economic injustices in its society – and how the church today is called to continue this work. As a class, we will seek to embody the church in response to the needs of our own Santa Barbara community.

Course goals
• To identify and investigate the New Testament texts crucial for understanding the nature and shape of the early Christian community.
• To understand the development of the church from its beginnings among Jesus’ disciples through the late first century.
• To understand the organization and function of the church within the context of first century Judaism and Greco-Roman society.
• To see the connections between the faith and life of the early church.
• To identify and understand the early church’s central theological concerns.
• To identify and explain points of tension and conflict and paths of resolution in the early church.
• To understand the challenges the church faced as it grew.
• To understand the significance of the story of the early church for the church today.
• To appreciate the life of the church as a contemporary interpretation of the New Testament church.
• To be the church together as we identify, understand, and respond to the needs of our own society.

Required texts
An NRSV Bible
Robert Banks, Going to Church in the First Century (Seedsowers, 1990)
Carolyn Osiek, *A Woman’s Place* (Augsburg Fortress, 2005)
[More to come after the SBL Annual Conference]

**Recommended texts**
Bruce Longenecker, *Community Formation* (Hendrickson, 2002)
Arthur Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church* (IVP, 2001)

**Class policies**

*Attendance*
I expect you to attend class. This means being present physically and mentally: during class, you should be in your seat on time, with your NRSV Bible, other readings, and your reading notes available, ready to pay attention and contribute to class discussions.

Habitual absence of body or mind will result in loss of points: your grade will fall by 1% for each unexcused absence or absent-mindedness above three. (In case of illness, family emergency, or an approved extra-curricular activity, please let me know by email, before class when possible; if you do not let me know about an excused absence, your absence will count against you.) In a sport requiring frequent absence? Please keep me informed of your schedule, and keep up with your work.

*Laptops*
Laptops can be great aids in class, letting you take notes faster and more legibly than by hand. However, laptops also offer many temptations… to check your email, Facebook, chat, shop, watch tv, read the news, play games, etc. Just think: when you use your laptop for non-class purposes, you are missing out on an exciting discussion, distracting all the people sitting behind you, being rude to the people who are talking, and going to lose out in the end. Use your laptop wisely – avoid the urge to multitask, and turn off the wireless during class.

*Turning in your work*
Homework is due during class on the date listed in the syllabus. Late work will lose points (5% per day). Unless otherwise noted, a hard copy must be turned in (not by email), and work must be typewritten, not handwritten. Please note: computing or printing problems do not excuse late work.

In the case of a pre-known absence (sports, extra-curricular activities) or an unexcused absence, work must be turned in before class. In the case of an unexpected excused absence, please contact me to make arrangements.

*Citing your sources*
You must cite anything you take from someone else – facts, theories, quotes, phrases – even if I know what source you’re using. If you didn’t think it, don’t take credit for it. When in doubt, cite! Westmont College’s policy on plagiarism can be found on the Eureka site for this...
class. If you plagiarize any work in this class, you will receive a 0 for the assignment, and in the case of a severe offense, I will inform the dean. Repeated offenses may result in failure of the course. Plagiarism is a serious matter; please don’t do it.

In written work, reference biblical passages by book, chapter, and verse (Mark 15:51-52). Cite your secondary sources in an approved format (SBL, MLA, or other). I prefer the following format: Author date, page number (example: Rowling 2005, 389). Provide a ‘Works Cited’ list for each assignment in which you use a secondary source; do not include the Bible on this list.

Grade definitions
Westmont has an extensive description of what it means to get an A, B, C, D, or F. If you haven’t read it, it may be helpful (www.westmont.edu/_offices/registrar/academic_policies/grades.html). Here is my own brief summary of the policy:

• A: Exceptional. Engages with course material critically, grasps its wider implications, and applies it creatively. Submitted work is superior in content and presentation.
• B: Very good. Demonstrates interest in and comprehension of the material and the underlying scholarship. Submitted work is neat and mostly free of errors.
• C: Satisfactory. Meets the course requirements and shows adequate knowledge and understanding of the material. Submitted work is presented according to expectations.
• D: Poor. Completes course requirements, but submitted work does not show understanding of the material.
• F: Failing. Course requirements are not met and submitted work indicates a lack of understanding.

Please see the grading rubric available on Eureka for further information and explanations of the quality of work expected in this class.

Grading scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95-100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>67-69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class components
1. Reading journal (20%)
Keep track of the assigned biblical and secondary readings throughout the semester in a reading journal. Keep track of content, relationships and connections to other material covered in the course, questions, critiques, and personal revelations. Your journal will be collected several times throughout the semester (preferably via email attachment) and graded for completion and depth of engagement with the texts.

2. Reading the Church: Book Analysis (20%)
Choose a book from one of the following categories to read and analyze. You only need to complete one analysis. Your paper, which should be 1500 words only, is due 22 March.
A. Academic texts

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (Crossroad, 1994)

Your analysis of an academic book should include the following components: a summary of the contents or argument of the book; an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the book; a close reading of your book’s interaction with a particular biblical text, story, or history (being sure to comment on the accuracy and value of the interpretation provided); and a response to the book (What did you learn? What was most challenging for you to hear? What do you find most valuable here? How does this book interact with our study of “the church”? Etc.).

B. Modern novels

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* (Harper Perennial, 2008 [2004])
Mischa Berlinski, *Fieldwork* (Picador, 2007)

If you choose one of these books, your analysis will include the following: a summary of the story; an analysis of the picture of the church created in the story; a close reading of this picture of the church with respect to the New Testament church (commenting particularly on the issues involved with embodying church in different times, cultures, and peoples); and a response to the picture of the church in the story (What did you learn? What was most challenging for you to hear? What do you find most valuable here? How does this book interact with our study of “the church”? Etc.).

C. Popular ministry literature

John Stott, *The Living Church* (IVP, 2007)
Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Zondervan, 1995)

Your analysis of a church ministry book should include the following: a summary of the book’s definition of “church”; an analysis of the picture of the church created by the author; a close reading of this picture of the church with respect to the New Testament church (commenting particularly on the issues involved with embodying church in different times, cultures, and peoples); and a response to the presentation of the church (What did you learn? What was most challenging for you to hear? What do you find most valuable here? How does this book interact with our study of “the church”? Etc.).

3. Embodying the Church: Serving Society (20%)

RS 113 satisfies the GE requirement Serving Society, Enacting Justice. This component of the GE seeks to confront our academic life with the often harsh realities of life outside the ivory tower. In a class centering on the life of the church in the first century, a life that – as we will see – included theologically and socially necessary engagement with economic, political, and religious oppression, it is particularly relevant for us to practice being the church today by serving society.
Dr. Jon Lemmond, Pastor for Gospel Action at Montecito Covenant Church, will be visiting our class on Friday, 15 January, to introduce us to the needs of the Santa Barbara community. As a class, we will then reflect together on the ways in which the church is called to meet needs like these – and hear from Dr. Lemmond about opportunities for you to be involved with filling these needs this semester. The Serving Society GE requires a minimum of 12 hours of community service over the course of the semester. Two hours will be completed together as a class on Saturday, 24 April. Please mark this date on your calendar now; attendance is required. The remaining ten hours will be completed with one to two other members of the class over the course of the semester on a project of your choice (to be selected by the end of the second week of class).

You will keep a journal of your Serving Society experience. As you complete your twelve hours of service, you should regularly note what you’re doing, why you’re doing it, and how your work realizes the mission of the church (then and now). Connect your work with your classroom experience: how does your study of the early church inspire you to work in our society today? How do the ways the early church embodied the gospel of Jesus impact the way we, as the church today, embody the gospel? How do the struggles faced by people in our own society relate to struggles faced by the communities of the early church? How is your study of the early church and your experience of the Santa Barbara community impacting the way you think, believe, and live? Your journal will be collected and commented upon irregularly throughout the semester, so keep it up to date! Your final journal submission is due 29 April.

Your Serving Society experience will be scored as follows:
A. Completion of 12 hours of community service: 50 points
B. Completion of your Serving Society journal: 10 points
C. Quality of reflection on your community service: 40 points (see the Serving Society, Enacting Justice rubric on Eureka for guidelines on this component)

4. Making the Church: Great Debates (20%)
As the church faces new issues, places, peoples, cultures, times, and concerns, different responses are formulated by different parties – and “the Church” faces the task of deciding how to move forward. As the history of the church shows, these decisions often lead to fissures, schisms, and splits, and the church fragments even more. We will enter into several debates in class, seeking to understand the issues at stake, to practice responsible, faithful dialogue and debate, and to find answers and common ground that can unite the factions as one body.

The first debate we will engage with is the most important debate for the story of the early church: the question of the Gentiles. You will divide into three parties (the Jerusalemites, the Gentiles, and the Judaizers) and stage the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 in class on 12 March. You will have the responsibility of getting inside the head of your position, formulating strong arguments for your case, and debating the other groups on the issues involved.
In the second half of the class, your groups will each select a critical issue faced by the church today. You will research your issue in all its complexities, and divide the debate into different parties. Each mini-group will again formulate strong arguments for their case. Groups will present their issue and their debate in class; the class as a whole will 'judge' the debate and determine the way forward.

In addition to your verbal presentation in class, your group will submit the following: 1. Group meeting notes initialed by each group member, indicating the contribution of each member; 2. Argument summary prepared by the whole group (3 pages); and 3. Individual contributions on specific points pertinent to the overall argument (3 pages). More details on the format, structure, and expectations for the debates will be presented in class. Each debate is worth 10% of your grade.

5. Living as the Church: Contemporary Churches (20%)
Choose a church in Santa Barbara to study throughout the semester. Your project will include the following components: three sequential visits (e.g., attending a service three weeks in a row) to a regular worship service and at least one visit to a special service (a baptism, Bible study, prayer meeting, Lenten service, etc.); interviews with a leader in the church and an average member of the church; and a detailed analysis of the church’s contemporary understanding of an element of the life of the early church (e.g., a particular sacrament, leadership structure, the image of the church as a family, etc.). Your work will result in a 4000-4500 word paper describing and explaining your experience and exploring, appreciating, and critiquing the church’s interpretation and enactment of the story of the early church. Your paper is due during the final exam period.

Provisional Schedule
Week one: Introduction
• What is the ‘church’ in the New Testament?
• The second person plural in the New Testament
• Unity and diversity (Jews and Gentiles, orthodox and heretics)
• Serving Society; Enacting Justice: An Orientation

• Jesus and the church: Discipleship (Matthew), teaching (Sermon on the Mount, Romans 12, James), the cross (Mark, Hebrews, Acts 6-7), resurrection (Luke 24, Acts, 1 Corinthians 15), blessed are those who have not seen (John 20, 2 Corinthians 5, 1 Peter 1)
• Pentecost and mission (Acts)
• Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15, Galatians, James)
• House churches (Acts, Philemon)

Weeks ten-fifteen: Life of the church in its Mediterranean context
• Joining up: Mission, baptism, adoption (Matthew 10 and 28, Acts, 1 Peter, 1 Corinthians 1, Galatians)
• Meeting together: Worship, meals, prophecy and prayer (Acts, 1 Corinthians, Philippians)
• Support: Financial and emotional (Acts 1-6, 1-2 Corinthians, Hebrews)
• Leadership: Apostles, women, 'catholic' structure, false teachers (Acts, 1-2 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, 1 Peter, Jude)
• Besetting sins: Idolatry, sexuality, financial, doctrinal (1 Corinthians, Revelation 2-3, 1 John, Hebrews)
• Discipline (Matthew 18, 1-2 Corinthians, Hebrews, Revelation 2-3)
The journal will provide a way for students to actively reflect on their service experience. Students will be graded on the level of their engagement with the service – not only completing the hours, but drawing the connections between what they are studying and what they are doing (learning outcome concerning theological motivation). I will collect and respond to the journals several times through the semester, giving students a conversation partner beyond the others working on the same project. Of course, class lectures and discussions will include reflection on the social engagement of the early church and the world of the church today.

This topic for the journal draws on the second set of learning outcomes for Serving Society: the personal impact of service. As students study the early church and understand its ethical imperative, and as they engage with the needs of the SB community, they will have the chance to explore in their journal how the experience is challenging and changing them, and how their experience may influence their future choices.