



NORTH PARK
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CEDF 7190 NextGen Ministry in Context
OR Building Sustainable Foundations for Children and Youth Ministry
North Park Theological Seminary

May 18-July 10, 2026
Intensive Dates: June 1-5, 2026
3 credit hours

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Dr. Sara Heacox Sosa

Email: shsosa@northpark.edu (preferred means of communication). Professor will respond within 24 hours to emails from students Monday through Friday.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides participants with the necessary skills to develop sustainable and contextually appropriate ministries for children and youth. Students will integrate child and youth development theories with family systems theory to understand the relational dynamics influencing spiritual formation. Key topics include a methodology for evaluating ministry contexts, establishing efficient ministry systems (including program development and volunteer management), collaborative strategies for engaging with church personnel, and intentional approaches for partnering with parents to foster family faith formation

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this intensive course, students will be able to:

- **Analyze Development:** Articulate the key developmental stages of children and youth and apply age-appropriate strategies for spiritual formation.
- **Apply Systems Theory:** Utilize family systems theory to understand relational dynamics within ministry settings and develop effective engagement strategies.
- **Assess Context:** Employ practical tools to evaluate the unique contextual needs, strengths, and challenges of a specific ministry environment.
- **Design Systems:** Design comprehensive, sustainable systems for children's and youth ministry that include volunteer management, programming, and administrative oversight.
- **Collaborate Effectively:** Demonstrate the skills necessary to work collaboratively and communicate effectively as part of a multi-staff church team.
- **Engage Families:** Develop and implement intentional strategies that empower parents and guardians to partner in the faith formation of their children.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Allen, Holly Catterton. *Forming Resilient Children: The Role of Spiritual Formation for Healthy Development*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. (200 pages)

Conde-Frazier, Elizabeth, S. Steven Kang, and Gary A. Parrett. *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004. (224 pages)

Creech, R. Robert. *Family Systems and Congregational Life: A Map for Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. (240 pages)



DeVries, Mark, and Annette Safstrom. *Sustainable Children's Ministry: From Last-Minute Scrambling to Long-Term Solutions*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018. (220 pages)

Powell, Kara, Jen Bradbury, and Brad Griffin. *Faith Beyond Youth Group: Five Ways to Form Character and Cultivate Lifelong Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2023. (224 pages)

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING SCALE

1. Pre-Course Reading Reports (20%)

Students must complete a Reading Report for each of the five required texts. Reports should demonstrate that the student read the book in its entirety by identifying broad themes and using supporting quotes with internal citations.

- **Due:** June 1 (before class begins).

2. Ministry Platform Review (20%)

Students will spend time interacting with a ministry platform or website (e.g., Fuller Youth Institute or International Network of Children's Ministry). You can do this project on your own or collaborate with classmates. Write a 750-word summary of the following:

- Description of your ministry context
- Features useful for your specific context (minimum of three features)
- List of hoped-for resources not included on the platform (minimum of two)
- **Due:** June 5.

3. Ministry Application Project (20%)

This project requires you to create an original resource for your specific ministry setting that applies the learning from the course to your ministry context. Regardless of the chosen option, the submitted assignment should consider these three texts: *Family Systems and Congregational Life* (Creech), *Faith Beyond Youth Group* (Powell, et. al.), and *A Many Colored Kingdom* (Conde-Frazier, et. al.). Choose ONE of the three options below for your project.

- **Due Date:** June 30.

A. The Congregational Genogram & Systems Analysis

Building specifically on the work of R. Robert Creech, this assignment moves beyond personal family trees to analyze the "emotional system" of a ministry.

- **The Task:** Diagram a "Congregational Genogram" of their current or a former ministry context. Instead of individuals, they map influential "families," long-term power brokers, and historical "triangles" (conflicts involving three parties).
- **Assessment:** Write a 1,200-word analysis identifying where "anxiety" typically enters the system and how the current ministry structure reacts to it based on systems theory.

B. The "Character Compass" & Pivot Audit

Building specifically on the research of Kara Powell, Jen Bradbury, and Brad Griffin, this assignment moves from analyzing the *structure* of the church to analyzing the *discipleship output* of the ministry.



- **The Task:** Select one existing "flagship" program in your ministry (e.g., the annual high school retreat, the confirmation class, or the student leadership team) and perform a "Pivot Audit." You must "map" this program onto the **Character Compass** framework:
 - **Identity:** How does this program explicitly define who the student is in Christ (beyond their role as a "volunteer" or "student")?
 - **Agency:** Where does this program give students the power to make meaningful, non-scripted choices in their faith journey?
 - **Character:** What specific virtue (e.g., humility, justice, or perseverance) is this program designed to move from *information* to *practice*?
- **Assessment:** Write a 1200-word analysis that identifies where the program is currently stuck in "Performance-Based" ministry (e.g., "We measure success by how many kids showed up or how quiet they were during the sermon") and proposes three specific "Pivots" (e.g., *From Pointing to Practice*) to redesign the program. Explain how these changes will foster a "Sticky Web" of intergenerational support rather than a siloed youth experience.

C. Multicultural Ministry Analysis

Building specifically on the ideas of Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, et. al., this assignment assesses the student's ability to see through lenses of diversity and inclusion.

- **The Task:** Attend a ministry gathering (service, small group, or committee meeting) in a culturally different context than your own ministry context.
- **Assessment:** Write a 1200-word analysis of the "unwritten rules," language, and learning styles of that environment, that would either foster or hinder the spiritual formation of a diverse group of children.

4. Integrative Final Project (30%)

This project is the culmination of your learning, requiring you to demonstrate mastery of the three core pillars: theology of faith formation, systems theory, and a vision for a diverse faith community.

Option A: Traditional Integrative Paper

- **Format:** A formal academic paper with a minimum of 2,500 words.
- **Content:** You must synthesize the course readings, podcasts, and lectures into a cohesive ministry philosophy.
- **Requirements:** Use Turabian-style citations to support your arguments with quotes from the required texts (Creech, Conde-Frazier, etc.). All five texts must be included in your paper.

Option B: Strategic Multimedia Project

- **Format:** A 20–30 minute recorded presentation of your ministry philosophy using software like PowerPoint, Keynote, Canva, or Prezi. All five texts must be included in the presentation. A minimum of 10 slides. Sources must be cited using Turabian. Pay attention to use of font, font size, font color, and graphics – your slides should contain only your main ideas and should not be visually overwhelming.
- **Delivery:** You must record yourself (video) delivering the content; if the software does not support native recording, use an external tool like Loom.
- **Alternative:** You may schedule a live 30-minute presentation with the instructor.



Mandatory Project Proposal

Regardless of the option chosen, a one-page proposal is due by the end of the intensive week. It must include:

- Your choice of project option.
- List of resources you plan to use (digital, written, or human).
- Your planned submission format.
- A timeline for completion.

Due Dates: Proposal due June 5; Final Project due July 10.

COURSE GRADING

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENTAGE	GRADING
Participation	10%	Superior work (A=95-100; A-=93-94)
Pre-Course Reading	20%	Above Average (B+=91-92; B=88-90; B-=86-87)
Ministry Contextualization	20%	Average (C+=84-85; C=80-83; C-=78-79)
Ministry Application Project	20%	Unsatisfactory (D+=76-77; D=72-75; D-=70-71)
Integrative Project	30%	Failing (69 and below)

GRADING CRITERIA & RUBRICS

Ministry Platform Review Criteria (20pts)

Context: Clearly defines demographics, church culture, and specific ministry challenges of the student’s setting (4pts)

Features: Identifies at least three specific tools, articles, or features from the chosen platform (4pts)

Utility: Explains how each of the three features serves the specific needs of the described context (4pts)

Gaps: Lists at least two resources or tools missing from the platform that would benefit the student’s specific ministry (4pts)

Mechanics: Meets the 750-word minimum (within a 10% margin) (2pts)

Format: Uses Turabian citations for the platform and maintains clear grammar throughout (2pts)



Ministry Application Project Rubric (50pts)

Criteria	Excellent (10-9 pts)	Good (8-7 pts)	Fair (6-5 pts)	Poor (4-0 pts)
Execution of Option-Specific Tasks	Task completed perfectly: Genogram maps include power brokers/triangles; OR Audit includes application of three specific pivots; OR Gathering report identifies "unwritten rules."	Task completed with minor gaps: Genogram lacks one "triangle"; OR Only two pivots proposed; OR Report identifies rules but lacks specific examples.	Task partially completed: Genogram is purely biological; OR Only one pivot is proposed; OR Report is a general summary of the event.	Task incomplete: Failed to draw a diagram, apply pivots, or attend a different cultural context.
Integration of Required Texts (Breadth)	Seamlessly integrates and cites insights from all three required texts.	Integrates and cites insights from two of the required texts.	Mentions texts but does not integrate their theories into the project's logic.	Fails to reference or integrate the required course textbooks.
Contextual Application (Depth)	Moves beyond summary to solve a specific problem. Theory is clearly "translated" into a practical ministry strategy.	Good application of theory to context, though some suggestions may be generic rather than specific to the setting.	Mostly summarizes the books with minimal effort to apply concepts to the specific church or setting.	Purely a book report; no evidence of applying learning to a specific ministry context.
Analytical Content (Assessment)	High-level analysis: Clearly identifies anxiety entry points (A), Pivots (B), or formation hurdles (C).	Clear analysis: Identifies the core issues required by the prompt but could be more precise in identifying "why."	Surface-level analysis: Identifies issues but does not use course terminology to explain them.	No analysis present; description only.
Professional Delivery & Turabian Style	Professional standard: Clear structure (1k words/5 slides); impeccable grammar; all citations in correct Turabian format.	Good standard: Minor grammatical errors; one or two Turabian formatting slips; clear structure.	Developing: Frequent mechanical errors; inconsistent citation style; structure is difficult to follow.	Unacceptable: Significant errors in grammar/spelling; no citations; does not meet length requirements.



Integrative Final Project Rubric (50pts)

Criteria	Excellent (10-9 pts)	Good (8-7 pts)	Fair (6-5 pts)	Poor (4-0 pts)
Synthesis of Three Core Pillars	Masterfully integrates theology of formation, systems theory, and diverse community into a cohesive ministry philosophy.	Discusses all three pillars clearly, though the connection between them could be more integrated.	Mentions all three pillars but treats them as separate sections rather than a synthesized philosophy.	Fails to address one or more of the core pillars; no cohesive philosophy present.
Integration of Required Texts	All five texts are cited and integrated meaningfully. Use of quotes and theory demonstrates mastery of the material.	All five texts are mentioned, but one or two are treated superficially or lack deep integration.	Only 3-4 texts are included, or references are vague and do not support the argument well.	Fewer than 3 texts included; fails to demonstrate engagement with the required reading.
Argument & Ministry Philosophy	Presents a compelling, original vision for ministry. Logic is sound and supported by lectures and other course materials.	Presents a clear ministry philosophy, though some arguments rely more on personal opinion than course synthesis.	Philosophy is present but generic or inconsistent; lacks strong support from course materials.	No clear ministry philosophy or vision is articulated; disorganized thoughts.
Format & Delivery (Option Specific)	Paper: 2,500+ words, professional flow. Media: 20-30 mins, 10+ slides, high-quality audio/video, clean visuals.	Paper: 2,200-2,400 words. Media: 15-19 mins, 8-9 slides, minor technical or visual issues (cluttered slides).	Paper: Under 2,200 words. Media: Under 15 mins, few slides, or slides are visually overwhelming/ hard to read.	Significant failure to meet format requirements (e.g., no video recording, very short paper).
Turabian Citations & Mechanics	Impeccable Turabian citations (Notes/Bib). Excellent grammar, spelling, and professional tone.	Minor errors in Turabian formatting. Grammar and spelling are mostly correct.	Frequent citation errors. Tone is overly casual or mechanics hinder readability.	No citations provided or widespread mechanical errors. Potential plagiarism concerns.



ADDITIONAL COURSE GUIDELINES

Written assignments should adhere to guidelines, including the inclusive language policy found in the Student Writing Handbook.

Late work will be reduced in grade by 10% per day. In case of an emergency the instructor may, at her discretion, make an exception but it is the student's responsibility to communicate with the professor in advance.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

In keeping with our Christian heritage and commitment, North Park University is committed to the highest possible ethical and moral standards. Just as we will constantly strive to live up to these high standards, we expect our students to do the same. To that end, cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Students who are discovered cheating will receive a failing grade on the assignment and are subject to discipline up to and including failure of a course and expulsion. Our definition of cheating includes but is not limited to:

1. Plagiarism – the use of another's work as one's own without giving credit to the individual. This includes using materials from the internet.
2. Copying another's answers on an examination.
3. Deliberately allowing another to copy one's answers or work.
4. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.
5. Use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software to impersonate individual assignments.

For additional information, see the Seminary Academic Catalog.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Your experience in this class is important to me. North Park is committed to creating inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have already established your accommodations, please share your accommodation letter with me so we can discuss how your accommodations will be implemented in this course. If you have not yet established services and have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations, please email the Disability Access Specialist or contact by phone (773-244-5737). Student Engagement facilitates the interactive process that establishes reasonable accommodations.

TITLE IX & EQUITY

In accordance with Title IX, North Park employees who become aware of any incident of discrimination, harassment or retaliation based on sex, gender, including pregnancy or related medical conditions, and other protected classes are required by law to notify North Park University's Title IX & Equity Team by submitting a report [here](#). The Title IX Coordinator will respond and manage concerns about students. The Senior Director of Human Resources and Deputy Title IX Coordinator will respond and manage concerns about employees. More information can be obtained here: [NPU's Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#).



INCOMPLETE GRADES

If, due to extenuating circumstances (specifically, pregnancy, illness, personal and family issues, military assignment, etc.), a student anticipates they will be unable to complete course work within the allotted time, that student may request a grade of incomplete from the course instructor before the last week of class clearly stating the reason(s) for this request. Overscheduling and/or lack of self-discipline are not considered extenuating circumstances. If the request is timely and meets the criteria, student and instructor will submit the incomplete grade form and the grade for that class will be listed as “I” until the last day of the following semester. If coursework is not submitted by the last day of the following semester the listing of “I” will automatically be changed to “F.” For the full policy, see the Seminary Academic Catalog.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Below is an overview of the intensive week and the topics we will cover each day. It is easy to see which texts we will be discussing. Case studies in the afternoon will give a chance for collaborative work and direct ministry application of the ministry concepts from the day.

Teaching Topics Schedule (9am – 4pm M-TH; 9am – 12pm F)

Day	Morning Session (Theory & Foundation)	Afternoon Session (Practical Application)
Mon	Welcome and Introductions: Class introductions, review of syllabus, discussion on pre-intensive reading.	The Multi-Colored Context: Evaluating the cultural and ethnic dynamics of your ministry (Conde-Frazier). Case Study: Multicultural Dynamics.
Tue	The Church as a System: Applying Family Systems Theory to congregational life (Creech).	Navigating Anxiety: Managing relational dynamics and conflict within church staff and volunteer teams. Case Study: Family Systems/Congregational Life
Wed	Sustainable Infrastructure: Transitioning from "scrambling" to long-term administrative systems (DeVries & Safstrom).	The Volunteer Engine: Strategies for recruiting, training, and retaining a healthy volunteer culture. Case Study: Sustainable Infrastructure
Thu	The Character Compass: Moving from “sin management” to “identity in Christ” (Powell).	Three Big Questions: Applying the Fuller Youth Institute research on Identity, Belonging, and Purpose. Case Study: The Performance Trap
Fri	Family Partnership: Moving beyond "drop-off" culture to intentional parent/guardian empowerment. Case Study: Transactional Spiritual Formation	