

Theology and Practice of the Sacraments
North Park Theological Seminary
THEO 7190, Summer 2026
3 credit hours

Instructor: David Bjorlin
Phone: 773-244-5238
*Email: dbjorlin@northpark.edu
Virtual Office Hours: By appointment

**preferred method: barring any unforeseen circumstances, I will respond to any emails within 48 hours.*

Course Description:

Theology and Practices of the Sacraments will first develop a sacramental theology rooted in the doctrines of creation and the incarnation and embodied in the Christian tradition. Further, it will examine the historical and theological foundations of baptism, communion, weddings, and funerals and how these foundations can shape liturgical leadership of these sacraments/sacramentals.

Digital Technology Policy

Because the sacraments are fundamentally embodied, experiential, and relational, the class will attempt to model a sacramental pedagogy by maintaining a screen-free zone—meaning no computers or phones (or slides!) during class unless you have an accommodation letter. I hope you can see this as a potentially liberative practice in a screen-filled world!

Course Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Define sacramental theology employing both theological and historical sources.
2. Demonstrate how sacramental theology can inform their theology and praxis around contemporary ethical issues (e.g., creation care, sexual ethics);
3. articulate key issues (historical, theological, ecumenical) pertaining to the sacrament of baptism and the eucharist and the sacramentals of weddings and funerals;
4. Exhibit competent liturgical leadership in presiding at communion, baptism, weddings, and funerals;
5. Design a baptismal, communion, wedding, or funeral service that takes into account historical, theological, social/pastoral, and cultural factors;
6. Analyze the cultural factors that influence sacramental theology and praxis.

Required Texts

1. Maxwell Johnson, ed. *Sacraments and Worship: The Sources of Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012.
2. Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*. Translated by John Drury. Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1987.
3. James White (edited with added contributions by Ed Phillips, Karen Westerfield Tucker, Todd Johnson, and Khalia Williams), *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 4th edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2023. (chs. 7-10)
4. Mary McGann, *The Meal That Reconnects: Eucharistic Eating and the Global Crisis*. Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020.
5. Thomas Long, *Accompany Them with Singing*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009.
6. *Covenant Book of Worship*. Chicago: Covenant Publications, 2003.

Assessments

Feedback/Grading Timeline

For all assessments besides online discussions (which is discussed below), you can expect written feedback and grades within a week of the due date and/or submission.

Grading

Assignment Type:	Weight:
Participation	15%
Introductory Essay – What Is a Sacrament?	15%
Student Review and Presentations	20%
Sacrament and Ethics Essay	25%
Sacramental Service Design	25%

The grading scale for the course will be as follows:

A	100-93%
A-	92.9-90%
B+	89.9-87
B	86.9-83
B-	82.9-80%
C+	79.9-77%
C	76.9-73%
C-	72.9-70%
D+	69.9-67%
D	66.9-63%
D-	62.9-60%

Late Policy

With exceptions for sickness and emergencies, assignments turned in late will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., a B will drop to a B-) for each day over the deadline. After a week, the highest score you can receive on an assignment is 50%.

Participation (20%)

Modeled on the sacraments themselves, this class is designed to be highly participatory. As such, it is expected that you will attend every class session during the week. You cannot pass the class if you miss any more than one morning or afternoon session during the intensive week (which should be an excused absence). Participation grades will also include peer evaluations of your sacramental leadership.

Introductory Essay – What is a sacrament? (15%) – Due. June 1

Based on your personal experience and introductory readings, write a 1500-word essay that:

1. Describes your experience and theology of the sacraments in general, and baptism and communion particularly—prior to beginning the course (no more than 500 words).
2. Explains how your theology of the sacraments has been challenged, reinforced, and/or revised by the pre-class readings using at least three sources.
3. Give your working definition of the 1) sacraments, 2) baptism, and 3) communion.

Book Review and Student Presentation (20%) – Due: Day after presentation (you will sign up before the class begins)

Each student will choose one book from the list below (or another one approved by the instructor) to write a short review using the following format:

1. Give a summary of the book's main thesis (150-200 words)
2. Engage in the 3-2-1 Method of Reader Review (500 words):
 - 3 main points or concepts from the reading;
 - 2 connections to other readings from the class;
 - 1 way the text could inform your ministry and/or spiritual formation.
3. Provide three questions to guide classroom discussion.

Your presentation should be approximately 20-25 minutes—the first half giving an overview of the main arguments of the book and the and the second half leading classroom discussion around the three questions you provided in your paper.

Antonio Alonso, *Commodified Communion: Eucharist, Consumer Culture, and the Practice of Everyday Life*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2021.

Claudio Carvalhaes, *Eucharist and Globalization: Redrawing the Borders of Eucharistic Hospitality*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013.

Louise-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001.

Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994.

M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010.

James Empereur and Eduardo Fernández, *La Vida Sacra: Contemporary Hispanic Sacramental Theology*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006.

Kimberly Bracken Long, *From This Day Forward: Rethinking the Christian Wedding*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016.

Thomas G. Long and Thomas Lynch, *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013.

Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Marcia W. Mount Shoop, *A Body Broken, a Body Betrayed: Race, Memory, and Eucharist in White-Dominant Churches*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015.

David C. McDuffie, *Nature's Sacraments: The Epic of Evolution and a Theology of Sacramental Ecology*. n.p.: Top Hat Books, 2021.

Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*. West Germany: Herder and Herder, 1963.

Melanie Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology*. New York: Continuum, 1998.

Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1963.

Juan Luis Segundo, *The Sacraments Today*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974.

Kristine Suna-Koro, *In Counterpoint: Diaspora, Postcoloniality, and Sacramental Theology*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017.

Sacraments and Ethics Essay (25%) Due: June 23

As modeled in McGann's book, the sacraments/sacramentals are not only an origin of personal and social edification or even theology, but they can also be a source for a distinctive Christian ethic. With this example in mind, write a 2000-word essay that describes how a sacramental theology can inform such a distinct Christian ethic around one of the following issues: racism, poverty, consumerism/consumer capitalism, environmental degradation, sexuality, sexism, or another topic chosen in consultation with the instructor.

Your paper should include the following:

- A short introduction explaining the current state of the ethical issue;
- how a sacramental theology could help reframe the ethical issue and our current biblical or theological constructs;
- a discussion of how one of the sacraments or sacramentals studied in class—baptism, eucharist, weddings, or funerals—could particularly inform ethical discussions around your topic;
- two recommendations for how the practices of your chosen sacrament/sacramental could possibly be adjusted to make this ethical connection more obvious.

Your essay should use at least six sources, three of which can be from required readings.

Sacramental Service Design in Unusual or Extenuating Circumstances with Commentary (25%)– Due: June 28

Choose one of the sacraments/als from the class—baptism, communion, wedding, or funeral—and one possible unusual and extenuating circumstances that might arise. For example, a communion service in the midst of a church conflict; an interfaith wedding; a funeral for someone who died by suicide; an infant and adult baptism on the same Sunday; etc.)

1. Before the annotated service itself, give an introduction that explains the context in which the service is being held. This should include the tradition/denomination of the church, congregational demographics (age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.), the difficult or unusual circumstances of the service, and how you are framing the service to address the circumstances (500 words)
2. The service will include:
 - a. Two biblical passages;
 - b. two *original* prayers (invocation, opening prayer, thanksgiving, confession, intercession)
 - c. a two-paragraph summary of the sermon focus;
 - d. at least three songs;
3. Provide the complete text of the liturgy as the worship leader(s) would have it (first line titles and tunes for all hymns/songs, full wording for all other elements). It is not necessary to type out hymn/song texts, ecumenical creeds, and scripture lessons. Basically, you should be able to give this order of worship to another pastor, and they should be able to preside at the service.
4. For each element of the service, your commentary should include:
 - a. Why a particular element is placed where it is in the order (e.g., How does it relate to that which precedes and follows? How does it fit into the overall framework of the service?)
 - b. Why the content of the element is appropriate to the service (e.g., why a particular hymn or song was chosen)
 - c. How the element might be particularly suitable for the circumstance you chose.

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

Students who believe they may have experienced sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking should contact the Title IX Coordinator (773) 244-5664 or TitleIX@northpark.edu to learn more about reporting options, resources, and support services.

As members of the North Park faculty, we are concerned about the well-being and development of our students and are available to discuss any concerns. Faculty members are private resources meaning we are legally obligated to share information about the behavior reported above with the University's Title IX coordinator. If you are unsure whether you want your concerns disclosed to the Title IX Coordinator, we encourage you to contact Counseling Support Services at (773) 244-4897 or counseling@northpark.edu.

Please refer to North Park's [Safe Community](#) site for reporting, contact information, and further details.

Academic Honesty

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 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. Using one's own work from previous assignments or other class assignments.
5. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.
6. Use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software to impersonate individual assignments.

In the special instance of group work, the instructor will make clear their expectations with respect to individual vs. collaborative work. A violation of these expectations may be considered cheating as well.

For further information on this subject you may refer to the Academic Dishonesty section of the University's online catalog.

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 page 15 of the [Seminary Academic Catalog](#).

Schedule

Pre-Reading: Before the class begins, you should read the following:

- Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments* – whole book (about 100 pages)
- James White, "God's Love Made Tangible" (ch. 7) in *Introduction to Christian Worship*
- Maxwell Johnson, ed. "Sacraments in General and Sacramental Theology" (ch. 1) in *Sacraments and Worship*
- Yolanda Pierce, "Sacraments" in *In My Grandmother's House* (Canvas)
- Mary McGann, *The Meal That Reconnects* – the entire book should be read by Wednesday, June 12 for class discussion so I would advise reading as much as possible before class begins.

Day 1: Sacraments and Sacramentality and Baptism

Required Readings: Pre-class readings listed above

Day 2: Baptism (cont.), Baptism Practicum, and Eucharist

- White, "Christian Initiation" (ch. 8) in *Introduction to Christian Worship*
- Johnson, "Sacraments and the Rites of Christian Initiation" (ch. 3) in *Sacraments and Worship*
- Claudio Carvalhaes, ed. "Part Four: Liturgies of Baptism and Eucharist," in *Liturgies from Below*
- Su Yon Pak, Unzu Lee, Jung Ha Kim, and Myung Ji Cho, "'Ricing' Community," in *Singing the Lord's Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith*

Practicum Field Trip: Infant and Believer Baptism practice (local church - bring clothes/swimsuit you can get wet!)

Day 3: Eucharist (cont.), Eucharistic Practicum, and Eucharistic Ethics

- White, “Eucharist” (ch. 9) in *Introduction to Christian Worship*
- Riley, “Memory,” in *This Here Flesh* (Canvas)
- Johnson, “The Eucharist” (ch. 4) in *Sacraments and Worship*
- Juan Luis Segundo, excerpt from *The Sacraments Today* (pp. 37-40) (Canvas)
- McGann, *The Meal That Reconnects* (entire book)

Practicum: Presiding at the Table (Isaacson Chapel)

Day 4: Weddings and Wedding Practicum

- White, “Christian Marriage” (304-16) in *Introduction to Christian Worship*
- Kimberly Bracken Long, “The Christian Wedding,” in *From This Day Forward* (Canvas)
- Rebecca Mead, “You’re Getting Married: The Wal-Martization of the Bridal Business,” *The New Yorker* (Canvas)
- Johnson, “Christian Marriage” (pp. 292-312)

Practicum: Running a Wedding Rehearsal and Wedding (Isaacson Chapel)

Day 5: Funerals and Funeral Practicum

Required Readings:

- White, “Care of the Dead” (327-36) in *Introduction to Christian Worship*
- Long, *Accompany Them with Singing* (whole book)
- Johnson, “Christian Burial” (pp. 336-41) in *Sacraments and Worship*
- Atul Gawande excerpt from *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (Canvas)
- Watch: Christine Turner, *Homegoings* (Canvas)

Practicum: Visit to local funeral home

Bibliography

Cláudio Carvalhaes, ed., *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2020.

Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*. New York: Metropolitan, 2014.

Kimberly Bracken Long, *From This Day Forward: Rethinking the Christian Wedding*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016.

Rebecca Mead, “You’re Getting Married: The Wal-Martization of the Bridal Business.” *The New Yorker*, April 13, 2003, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/04/21/youre-getting-married>.

Su Yon Pak, Unzu Lee, Jung Ha Kim, and Myung Ji Cho, *Singing the Lord’s Song in a New Land: Korean American Practices of Faith*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.

Yolanda Pierce, *In my Grandmother's House: Black Women, Faith, and the Stories We Inherit*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2021.

Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories That Make Us*. New York: Convergent, 2023.

Juan Luis Segundo, S.J., *The Sacraments Today*. Translated by John Drury. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974.

Christine Turner, dir. *Homegoings*. Peralta Pictures, 2013. <https://vimeo.com/426527472>.