

## Mercer School for Ministry Early Christianity: The First Five Centuries

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**Purpose:** This is the first of four courses which aim to place the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement in the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island in its historical context. This semester we will focus on: the formation of a distinct Christian identity; the development of Christian ministries and institutions; statements of belief, patterns of worship, models of holiness, and major issues and personalities in the Church during the first 500 years of the “Christian” Era (CE). Throughout this program we will develop an Anglican approach to understanding and communicating the rich tradition of the Christian faith. Our purpose is to prepare you to use history pastorally in various ministries and settings.

### **Approach:**

- Make you comfortable with the main themes, events, personalities, controversies, movements, and issues in the history of global Christianity from an Anglican perspective;
- Help you to become familiar with the basic tools needed for researching historical questions that may arise in your ministries and future studies and how to use them;
- Enable you to identify and assess the impact of various aspects of our history on current issues facing the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

**Process and Schedule:** Assigned readings are to be completed prior to each class meeting. NOTE: Postulants will prepare a short reflection paper based on the readings to be handed in at the beginning of each session. The additional readings are listed on the next page of the syllabus. Reflection paper topics for the following session will be emailed immediately after each class meeting. There will also be a final project that will be due by January 31, 2020.

1. **Session 1 (9/28):** Course overview and earliest “Christianities.” The rationale and requirements for the course and review of the syllabus. Based on the readings assigned we’ll look at several aspects of the early Christian movement in the first century CE. Read: Cooper, “Why We Study Church History”; Lyman, Ch. 1-2; *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Digital copies of these readings will be posted under the CH1 course description in “Courses of Study” under “School for Ministry” on the Mercer School website ([mercerschool.org](http://mercerschool.org)).
2. **Session 2 (10/19):** Christian “unity amid diversity” in the second century. Regional styles of ministry and oversight. From marginality to significance; increased conflict with governmental authorities leading to persecution. Cultural differences reflected in theological disputation and strife. **Read:** Lyman, Ch. 3; Ignatius, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*; *Didache* (emailed).
3. **Session 3 (11/23):** Christianity in the third century. The Christian movement progresses from marginalization, to toleration, to conflict. Persecutions. **Read** Lyman, Ch. 4-5; *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* (emailed).

4. **Session 4 (12/15): Christianity in the fourth century.** “The Imperial Church.” Theology disputed in the marketplace. Bishops, Councils, Emperors and Empresses. **Read** Lyman, Ch. 8; BCP, Apostles and Nicene Creeds and the Baptismal Covenant.
5. **Session 5 (1/19/2020): Christianity in the fifth century.** Early development of the papacy, Models of holiness. Benedictine monasticism. **Read:** Lyman, Ch. 8; Patricius, *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus* (emailed) the translation of the “Rule of St. Benedict” in *Wisdom from the Monastery*; David Knowles outline of the daily life of a monk (emailed).

### **Required Texts:**

Lyman, Rebecca. *Early Christian Traditions*. Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1999.

Barry, Patrick, et al, *Wisdom from the Monastery*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005. [An accessible version of the Rule of St. Benedict. Given the wide influence of the rule in the Middle Ages and beyond, you should be familiar with it].

### **Required for postulants:**

#### **Supplemental Readings:**

Irvin, Dale T. and Sunquist, Scott W. *History of the World Christian Movement, Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001

Session 1: Ch. 1-3 - pages 1-44; part of Ch. 9 - pages 93-5 (“Thomas and the mission to India”);

Session 2: Ch. 4-9 - pages 47-96;

Session 3: Ch. 10-13 - pages 99-152;

Session 4: Ch. 14-16 - pages 155-183;

Session 5: Ch. 17 and 20 - Pages 184-94; 220-239.

#### **Other Sources:**

You should also have handy a copy of the *1979 Book of Common Prayer* and become familiar with *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2018* (<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21034>).

You can find texts for many of the documents and individuals referred to in the course at the Early Christian Writings website (<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/index.html>).