

**American Baptist Churches of New York State  
Lay Study Program**

**CHRISTIAN ETHICS**

**FACULTY GUIDE**

Curriculum Committee  
of the  
ABC/NYS Lay Study Team

April 5, 2002



## **Course Objective and Description**

This ABC/NYS Lay Study Program course is designed to enable the student to relate Christian ethical traditions to contemporary issues. The course consists of 20 contact hours. As outlined below, the course is formatted for ten 2-hour sessions. Sessions may be re-ordered or taken in groups if matters of scheduling require it. We do not recommend, however, that sessions be divided between meetings, for each session is intended to be taken as a whole.

## **Student Requirements and Assessment**

To receive a passing grade for this course, students are expected: (1) to read the material as assigned, (2) to participate in a minimum of 8 of the 10 scheduled sessions, or to arrange with the instructor a satisfactory make-up for missed sessions, and (3) to complete all assignments and projects as given by the instructor. The instructor is responsible for giving the student both constructive suggestions for improvement and affirmation of progress and achievements. Though the instructor is ultimately responsible for evaluation of student work, feedback from other students in some cases may be useful to the student.

The instructor's assessment of the student's work in the class is based on evaluation of the student's class participation, presentations and projects and written work. The final grade for this and all Lay Study Program courses is pass/fail.

As early as possible, the instructor should distribute the accompanying *Student Guide* to all students along with his or own attachment or hand out listing the specific reading assignments that will be expected of student for each class session given the instructor's selection of text(s) and project choices from the suggestions below.

## **General Texts**

The Lay Study Program allows the instructor to choose the course text or texts, keeping in mind the cost to the students of these materials and their availability. It is to the instructor to judge which texts will offer the best approach, given current events, relevant issues, and teaching style. The instructor may elect to not use any text but to rely on collateral reading and/or handouts, but care should be taken in any event to expose students to the full range of ethical approaches taken within the American Baptist Churches. It is strongly recommended that you select which text(s) you will be using and convey this information to each of the Association Lay Study Committee and known registrants at least three weeks prior to the start of the first class. You should also indicate at this time the specific reading assignments for the course. By doing this, they will have time to secure the material(s) and prepare the readings that you require prior to the first class.

The following texts are recommended. The curriculum committee welcomes suggestions for additional course texts on the instructor's course evaluation.

## General Course Texts

- Beach, Waldo. *Christian Ethics in the Protestant Tradition*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. This text has been used since 1990 with mixed instructor reviews. It presents an adequate set of working definitions of philosophical and theological terms and attempts a balanced treatment of issues current in the late 80's. It tends toward a situation ethic in its resolution of the issues presented.
- Davis, John Jefferson. *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1993. This text takes a conservative evangelical approach. Most issues treated here are related to human sexuality and family, with the final three chapters treating more broadly political and social issues.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986. A highly readable application of the Christian tradition of the virtues (4 Cardinal and 3 Theological), and the Beatitudes as the basis for a Christian ethic. This approach deals less with contemporary issues, focusing more on how the Christian tradition confronts the problem of human sin out of which the issues develop.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1981. A more liberal approach, as the subtitle implies, in which Christian social ethics is developed out of an understanding of the narrative structure of Christian community, and then applied to several modern issues. (This text is the most difficult of these recommendations.)
- Hauerwas, Stanley, and William H. Willimon. *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989. A brief and easily readable application of some of the ideas from *A Community of Character* (see above). This text is more suitable as a supplemental text commenting on familiar church situations, with special attention to some common challenges of pastors and lay leaders in the leading of their congregations.

## SCRIPTURES

Each of the 10 class sessions outlined below includes a list of Bible passages that address in some way the topic or issues of the session. These are provided to give the instructor and students some Biblical reference for classroom discussion. The use of any standard Bible translation is recommended. We recommend using translations (e.g. NIV, RSV, NRSV, NASB) rather than paraphrases (e.g. the Living Bible, the Amplified Bible)

## Class Sessions

### General Note to Faculty

Please remember that we are trying to strike a proper balance between faculty presentation (lecture) and active student involvement. The course is structured in such a way as to allow both teacher and students considerable choice in the projects that will constitute in- and out-of-class activity and student assessment. The instructor may assign other activities or projects within the time constraints and objectives for the course.

## Lesson Plans

The instructor is expected to develop his or her own lesson plan based on the suggestions in each of the following session outlines. Each session outline below includes (1) the session learning objective(s) or topics the instructor is expected to cover; (2) Biblical references which may be used to inform discussion; (3) suggested discussion questions; (4) suggested learning activities; and (5) assignment suggestions. Some have been intentionally left blank, and the instructor is encouraged to add his or her own questions and activities. The instructor should add whatever reading assignments are relevant to the course texts, keeping in mind that the total expectation for out-of-class work should not exceed two hours for each in-class hour.

## Session One

### Preliminary Introductions and Bookkeeping

The first session will likely begin with bookkeeping activities. A Lay Study Program representative is usually on hand to deal with course registrations and paperwork. This time is also the time for greetings and introductions, an overview of the instructor's chosen text(s), course assignments, procedures and expectations.

### Learning objectives

Students will be introduced to the broad outlines of ethics and form a concept of what is distinct about Christian ethics. The students are introduced to the sources and norms used in various traditions of Christian ethics: e.g. Biblical authority, tradition, Christian experience, etc., and how these interact with the broader traditions of ethics present in the western philosophical tradition: e.g. deontological ethics; teleological ethics; situation ethics; social ethics, and utilitarianism.

### Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do the ends justify the means?
2. When does the good of the one outweigh the good of the many? When does the good of the many outweigh the good of the one?
3. Which of the norms for Christian ethics within the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" (Scripture, experience, tradition and reason) carry the most weight? Why?
4. Share a personal experience in which the "good" and the "right" were in conflict.

### Suggested Learning Activities

1. Have the class complete the following statement: What makes Christian ethics distinct from other ethics is .... Ask students to share their answers with the class and explain why they answered as they did.
2. Debate the following: "Answering the question, 'What would Jesus do?' is all that is needed for a Christian to make a good moral decision."

## **Suggested Assignments**

1. Keep a journal of 5 news items you see during the week in the media. For each item, identify the moral questions involved and apply one or more of the sources and norms of Christian ethics to the question and how those help you to come to a decision about what is the best response to the situation.
2. Conduct an interview with two people in your church. Have them tell you whether they agree with the following statement: "the ends justify the means," and why. Write a written summary of the interview that identifies (1) the sources and norms they drew from and (2) the ethical tradition they identified with.

## ***Session Two: Family, Friendship, Sex, Marriage and Divorce***

### **Learning Objectives**

Students deal with the contemporary issues surrounding familial and personal relationships. Christian understanding of covenantal relationship (e.g. God/Israel, Christ/Church) and the distinction of the kinds of love (eros/philia/agape) are introduced.

### **Biblical References**

#### ***Family:***

Genesis 14: 13-16; Genesis 21: 1-21; Genesis 25: 5-6; Genesis 27; Genesis 33:1-17; Genesis 37; Genesis 45; Deut. 5:16; Deut. 21: 15-21; 1 Sam. 1; Ruth 1; Ephesians 6 1-4; Colossians 3: 18-21

#### ***Marriage***

Genesis 2: 18-24; Genesis 16-17; Genesis 29:14b - 30:24; Deut. 22: 13-30; Deut. 25: 5-12; Ruth 4-5; 1 Cor. 7; Eph. 5: 22-33; 1 Peter 3: 1-7

#### ***Sex***

Genesis 9:1; Genesis 19: 30-38; Lev. 18; Lev. 19: 20-22; 2 Sam. 11; Prov. 5; Prov. 7; Matt. 5: 27-30; 1 Cor. 6: 12-20

#### ***Divorce:***

Ex. 21: 7-11; Deut. 24: 1-5; Matt. 5: 31-32; Matt. 19: 1-12; Mark 10: 1-12; Luke 16: 18

### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. Define a "family." What criteria make a family? Kinship or covenant or economic/social expedience?
2. Is the family the "basic unit" of a society, or is the individual?

3. Is marriage a divine institution with state sanction (Calvin) or a state contract with a divine blessing (Luther)?
4. Given the different sayings about divorce within the Biblical witness, and your understanding of Question 3 (above), what is the moral response of the "Church family" in the face of "nuclear family meltdown."

### **Suggested Learning Activities**

Using today's television/movies, discuss how the particular family is portrayed. Does it show a Biblical perspective, a worldly one, or reality? How has the media defined what is family, marriage, and sex?

### **Suggested Assignments**

1. To prepare for the next class, you may divide the class or tell them they must research the opposing side of what they believe. Have them research one of the topics for a debate and discussion. They may bring in articles and an outline of their findings.

### ***Session Three: Life, Birth, Abortion, Surrogate Parenthood, Cloning, etc.***

#### **Learning Objectives**

Students deal with the contemporary issues surrounding the beginning stages of life. Students should examine their concept of "sanctity of life" (i.e. the sources from which it is drawn and the ethical framework in which the concept is held) and its consequences.

#### **Biblical References**

Gen. 21: 1-6; Gen. 25: 19-26; Matt. 1;  
Matt. 3: 13-17; Mark 1: 9-11; Luke 3: 21-38

#### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. What is important about the order of birth within the family and the family relationship based upon that order? Discuss both from a Biblical perspective and today's?
2. What specifically does the Bible say about abortion, surrogate parenthood, cloning, etc.?
3. How are we as Christians able to answer why we believe what we do about these issues to a nonbeliever or someone with an opposing view?
4. At what point in our advancement of science have we "gone too far"?
5. How do we balance the scientific help to caring for the sick and the issue of playing God?
6. Are we able to understand the reasons and show compassion to a pregnant teenager who is contemplating an abortion?
7. What are our responsibilities as Christians to the pregnant teenager, the person with Parkinson's, the couple who cannot conceive a child, etc.?
8. Can we or should we make those decisions legally for all in our society?

## **Suggested Learning Activities**

1. Have the students present their findings using a debate format. If choosing the option of having research the opposing view from their own beliefs, ask what they found most difficult and if they have changed their minds or at least have a better understanding of the issue.

## **Suggested Assignments**

1. Ask students to write a reflective paper (3-5 pages) on a personal situation related to death and dying. This is a sensitive issue and needs to be treated as such. Ask the students to explain the situation, express their emotions and thoughts, any dilemmas that occurred around the incident, and how their beliefs played a role.

## **Session Four: Death and Dying**

### **Learning Objectives**

Students deal with the contemporary issues surrounding death. Students continue to deal with the question of "sanctity of life" as it applies to such topics as the death penalty, and euthanasia, life-support options. The Christian doctrine of resurrection should be brought into the discussion, and students should examine how ethical traditions have or have not considered the possibility of afterlife in forming systems moral principles.

### **Biblical references**

Gen. 49: 29 - 50: 14; Gen. 50: 22-26; Deut. 32: 48-52; Deut. 34; 2 Sam. 18; 2 Kings 2; 2 Kings 20: 1:11; Esther 7

### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. At what point does "withdrawing life support" become "euthanasia"? Are there any circumstances in which it is OK to take a life?
2. How should we interpret the commandment "thou shalt not murder" (Exodus 20; Deut 5)?
3. Describe the fallacies involved in the bumper sticker that says, "Kill 'em all. Let God sort them out."
4. How does society and Christians deal with the issue of suicide?
5. How does reality TV treat the dead and dying?
6. What role does video games have on youth and their concept of death/dying?

### **Suggested Learning Activities**

1. Role play the following: A friend (one class member), whose husband has just died comes to you and asks advice (of another class member) on whether she should go through with cremation of the body as her husband had wished because a distant cousin has told her that "the Bible is against cremation."



## Suggested Assignments

2. Watch the movie "Dead Man Walking" on video and write a two page response (or share your response with the class).

## Session Five: Humanitarianism – Caring for Elderly, Poor, Sick, and Other Social Issues

### Learning Objectives

Students should be exposed to the many views of Christian responsibility for others as expressed in, e.g., the tradition of giving alms; of hospitals; ministries such as: Habitat for Humanity, homeless shelters, nursing and elder care facilities, soup kitchens and Christian coffee houses. Modern liberal responses, such as the social gospel; the "preferential option for the poor", etc. should be explored together with the evangelical responses to them.

### Biblical References

Lev. 19: 9-10 ; Lev. 19: 32-34; Lev. 25: 35-43; Ex. 21: 20-27; Deut. 24: 10-19; Deut. 4: 22; Ruth 2; Nehemiah 5;

Matt. 14: 13-21; Mark 6: 30-44; Luke 9: 10-17; John 6: 1-13;

Matt. 15: 29-39; Mark 7: 31-37; Mark 8: 1-10;

Matt. 22: 34-40; Mark 12: 28-34;

Luke 10: 25-37; Matt. 22: 34-40; Mark 12: 28-31

Matt. 5: 38-48; Matt. 6: 1-4; ; Acts 4: 32-37; Col. 3: 22 - 4: 1; Romans 12: 9 - 13: 7; Eph. 6: 5-9; 1 Tim. 5: 3-16; 1 John 3: 11-24; 1 John 4: 7-21

### Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Do you pick up hitch-hikers? Do you stop at accident scenes?
2. How much of this care should be the families or the church in general?
3. How much should the government play a role in the care of the poor, sick, etc.?
4. How does this issue tie in with the earlier topic death and dying?

### Suggested Learning Activities

1. Have someone from a local nursing home or mission center come and speak with the class about the concerns in your community.

### Suggested Assignments

1. The student must visit a hospital, nursing home, food bank, mission center, or other caring organization for at least two hours. Write a two page report on what was experienced. What did they do while there, what was the response of the people (both staff and clients), and what did the student learn/feel during the experience?

## **Session Six: Race, Class and Social Divides**

### **Learning Objectives**

Students explore how the principle of Christian unity is applied to a church and community that is racially, socially and economically diverse. Students should deal with the examples of racism within the Biblical witness and Church history.

### **Biblical References**

Ex. 7:6 - 11:10; Deut. 16: 18-20; Deut. 25: 1-3; John 4: 1-26; John 5: 1-9; Eph. 2: 11-22; 1 Peter 1: 13-25;

Luke 6: 27-36; James 2; Matt. 5: 39-42;

Luke 6: 37-42; 1 Peter 5: 1-11; Matt. 7: 1-5

Luke 7: 36-50; Matt. 26: 6-13, 18: 23-34; Mark 14: 3-9; John 12: 1-8

Luke 11: 37-44; Luke 12: 13-21; Luke 18: 9-14; Luke: 18: 18-30

Luke 19: 11-27; Matt. 25: 14-30

Titus 2; 1 Peter 3: 8-9

### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. Can a biblical case be made for financial reparations to be made to African Americans in consideration of slavery and segregation in US history?
2. How literally should the church take Jesus' saying that the rich young man give all his possessions to the poor?
3. Should a local church in a racially changing neighborhood seek intentional integration? What about the church growth experts who say that a homogeneous congregation is more likely to grow numerically?
4. How do we incorporate those who are socially, racially, and ethnically different than us in our Sunday School and Church services? How are they treated when they enter the sanctuary?
5. What are the responsibilities toward the Native American Peoples in the State of New York?

### **Suggested Learning Activities**

1. Read a section of the novel *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin and discuss the issues the main character had to deal with as an African-American.

### **Suggested Assignments**

1. Research the last budget approved by your church. How was money used and how much went to missions? Using the amount tithed and the average number in attendance on Sunday morning, what is the percentage/amount per attendee? Where do you find your church lacking or having an over-abundance? What does your church support in the local community, the state, and the world? What

does your church believe about stewardship? What do you believe? How would you improve your churches situation? How does the youth and the congregation in general learn about stewardship? Write 2-4 pages.

## ***Session 7: Stewardship, Money, Environment***

### **Learning Objectives**

Students deal with issues of stewardship, for the individual believer and for the church. Stewardship's many dimensions should be explored: fiscal, environmental, volunteerism, etc.

### **Biblical References**

Gen. 1: 28-30 ; Gen. 2: 15; Gen. 3: 17-19; Gen. 9: 2-6; Deut. 26: 12-15; Matt. 6: 19-24; Luke 21:1-4;

Luke 16: 1-15; 1 Tim. 6: 3-10, 17-19; Titus 3: 1-11;

Mark 10: 17-31; Matt. 19: 16-30; Luke 18: 18-30;

Luke 20: 20-26; Matt. 22: 15-22; Mark 12: 13-17

### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. Should a small congregation with a big historic building keep the building or move to a more manageable structure? Does the presence of a sizable endowment change your answer? Why?
2. At what point do you draw the line when the consequences of what you do as your job is at odds with your faith convictions?
3. Would you go to a church that required you to tithe and to show proof of that by turning in a copy of their income tax return? If not, why? (You probably see what the pastor makes each year in the annual report! Is that fair?) What is the Christian's financial responsibility to the community of faith?
4. What is our responsibility to the environment and should that come before the needs of people?
5. What are other ways of giving other than financially? How can this be justified when bills need to be paid?

### **Suggested Learning Activities**

1. Discuss students papers, sharing ideas of improving stewardship both personally and within the church.

## **Session 8: Church, Fellowship, Discipleship**

### **Learning Objectives**

Students deal with the issues of life together in the church and the role and ethical responsibilities of the individual believer and the church in the world. Attention should be given to all levels of Christian discipleship: individual, local church, denominational, and interdenominational.

### **Biblical References**

Deut. 30:11-20	Matt. 18: 12-14	Matt. 28: 16-20
Isaiah 65-66	Luke 15	Mark 16: 9-20
		John 13: 1-17
Matt. 10	Matt. 19: 13-15	John 15
Mark 6: 7-11	Mark 10: 123-16	John 17: 20-26
Luke 9: 1-6	Luke 18: 15-17	Acts 2
Matt. 4: 18-22	Matt. 13: 2-23	Mark 3: 16-19
Mark 1: 14-20	Mark 4: 1-20	Luke 6: 14-16
Luke 5: 1-11	Luke 8: 1-15	
John 1: 35-43	Luke 10: 4-12	Romans 1: 8-17
Matt. 8: 19-22	Luke 14: 25-35	Romans 6: 1-14
Luke 9: 57-60	Luke 16: 19-31	Romans 7: 1-6
Eph. 6: 10-18		
Col. 4: 2-6		
1 Tim. 5: 17 - 6:2		

### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. What is a disciple? What are the duties or requirements of a disciple?
2. What was the role of the disciple in the Bible?
3. What role do we have in the discipleship of others in our family, church, community, and the world?
4. What are some obstacles that prevent discipleship and how can they be overcome?
5. How, if at all, has discipleship changed since biblical times?

### **Suggested Learning Activities**

- 1.

### **Suggested Assignments**

1. Bring in news articles relating to the topic of war and/or peace.

## **Session 9: War and Peace**

### **Learning Objectives**

Students deal with the many ways Christian faith has responded to situations of national conflict, from pacifism to militarism. Students should explore the relationship of nationalism, patriotism, and the conviction of the Christian's citizenship in the Kingdom of God, and what it means to live faithfully as a Christian citizen of a worldly kingdom.

### **Biblical references**

Ex. 7: 14 - Ex. 14; Joshua 5: 13- Joshua 12; Joshua 22; Judges 2: 16-23; Judges 7 - Judges 8: 28; Judges 20; 1 Sam. 4 - 5; Sam. 11, 14, 17,27, 30; 2 Sam. 2: 8 - 3: 6; 2 Sam. 5: 17 - 25; 2 Sam. 8: 1-15; 2 Sam. 10; 2 Sam. 15-18, 24; 2 Kings 11: 26-40; 2 Kings 25; 1 Chron. 18-21; Luke 12: 49-53; 2 Cor. 10: 3-6; Eph. 4: 1-7

### **Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. If it comes down to a matter of God or country, which do you choose and why?
2. What is the role of Christian civil disobedience?
3. Christians have responded to war by pacifism, militarism, and everything in between. Where do you stand, and on what do you base that stand?
4. Can might make right?
5. Relate to the first session's discussion of the ends justifying the means.
6. Will there ever be peace created by "human means" rather than Divine means in the Middle East?

### **Suggested Learning Activities**

1. Discuss the various articles brought in by the students. Are these situations any different than those of biblical times? How so? Why or why not?

### **Suggested Assignments**

- 1.

## **Session 10: Last Thoughts and Loose Ends**

### **Learning Objectives**

The last session is short due to the necessity of bookkeeping (see below). The time may be used to complete topics, have students present papers, or debate issues of interest to the class. You may also use this time to discuss topics not already discussed in course.

### **Final Assignment**

The instructor may make a final assignment or not depending on the amount of written work that was required. A five to ten page paper on a topic either of the

instructor's or the student's choosing is within reason, but other creative assignments can also be undertaken.

1. Student writes a letter to a congressional representative expressing a view, with a well-reasoned argument, on a contemporary piece of legislation, sending a copy to the instructor.
2. Student participates in the denominational "Statements of Concern" process within his or her congregation, and reports to the instructor on the activity and results.
3. Student reviews a contemporary New York Times best-seller (fiction or non-fiction), drawing out the ethical issues raised and implications of the book.
4. If a long paper is desired, the following format may be helpful:
  - a. Introduction: Introduce topic and state the ethical dilemma.
  - b. Body: Discuss what the scriptures have to say about the issue. Use other resources to show the relevance to today's society.
  - c. Conclusion: Based upon your research, give your belief and reasons for this opinion.

### **Bookkeeping and Farewells**

A representative from the Lay Study Program will generally be on hand to have the students complete the course and instructor evaluations, and to receive comments about the course from students and the instructor. Allow the final hour for filling out the necessary paperwork, for celebrating the learning accomplished, and for saying good-bye.