

Loyola Institute for Ministry
Loyola University New Orleans

DRAFT
Subject to change. Full
syllabus available in Canvas
May 20th.

Introduction to Practical Theology
LIM G703-Y1G0E

Summer 2026

Instructor: Francisco Castillo, D. Min.
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Office Hours: By appointment, email
me to set up a meeting

Important! You will be notified by email to your Loyola email address when your course web site is available (normally the week before class begins). Please reply to the instructor's email when you receive it to confirm that you are ready to begin the course.

Course Description

This course seeks to help participants develop a rhythm of disciplined reflection and action for the sake of the reign of God. The sociocultural, personal, and institutional contexts of one's primary ministry praxis along with the Christian tradition form the matrices of practical theology. Communication skills, interpretation theory and social analysis are key components of the conversation in which faith and daily life meet and build.

Introduction to Practical Theology presents a methodological grounding for the entire Master of Pastoral Studies and Master of Religious Education programs at the Loyola Institute for Ministry. It describes key features of practical theology and then presents a model for understanding the contexts that shape our ministries. It also presents a method for reflecting critically on ministerial experiences and on the ideas and social forces that influence our spirituality and interpretations.

Key Learning Outcomes

Through participation in this course, you will gain

- an initial understanding of practical theology.
- a working description of your ministry praxis.
- an appreciation of the dynamic, hermeneutical, critical, and transformative character of practical theology.
- a method for engaging in practical theology.
- some first steps in practicing this method.

Date	Topic	Assignments
Week 1 May 26– June 1	“Doing” Practical Theology (Memorial Day Holiday, 5/25)	Introduce self, complete readings, media, discussion questions
Week 2 June 2–8	Spirituality for Ministry	Complete readings, media, discussion questions
Week 3 June 9–15	The Reflection Process	Readings, audios, discussion questions; Group Dynamics Assignment due
Week 4 June 16–22	The Personal Context (June 19, Juneteenth Holiday)	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; Ministry Praxis Assignment due
Week 5 June 23–29	The Sociocultural Context	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; Personal Context Assignment due
Week 6 June 30–July 6	The Christian Tradition (July 3, Independence Day Holiday)	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; Sociocultural Context Assignment due
Week 7 July 7–13	The Institutional Context	Complete readings, media, discussion questions
Week 8 July 14–20	The Natural World Context	Complete readings, media, discussion questions
Week 9 July 21–27 August 1	Deciding	Complete readings, media, discussion questions
Week 10 July 28–31	Final Assignment and Course Evaluation	Final Assignment due 7/28 by 11:59 pm Central Time; complete course evaluation

Wednesday, August 5: due date for posting final grades

Week One Assignments

- 1) View videos and read overviews in Canvas
- 2) Participate in Discussions on Canvas:
 - Introduce oneself and greet one's fellow students
 - Respond to a Discussion Question
- 3) Read:
 - Fleischer et al., *Introduction to Practical Theology* course book, chapter 1
 - Veling, *Practical Theology*, Preface and chapter 1
 - USCCB, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, Introduction and Part I, Section A, [pp. 3-16](#)

- USCCB, *Intercultural Competencies*, [Introduction and Module 1](#)
- Learning Agreement for Online Course Participation.

Assessment

Each student's final grade will include the following parts:

		Percentage of Grade	
		Graduate	CEU
1	Substantive participation in weekly discussion via online postings	40%	80%
2	Spiritual Formation	5%	5%
3	Group Dynamics Assignment	5%	5%
4	Ministry Praxis Assignment	5%	Not required
5	Personal Context Assignment	5%	5%
6	Sociocultural Context Assignment	5%	Not required
7	Final Reflective Essay	35%	Not required

All students, those seeking graduate credit and those seeking continuing education units (CEUs), must participate in all course activities. This includes the weekly discussions, as well as the three short assignments (Spiritual Formation, Group Dynamics, and Personal Context) that are worth 5% each. Those seeking graduate credit must also complete the Ministry Praxis Assignment, Sociocultural Testing Assignment, and the Final Reflective Essay detailed in the final syllabus in Canvas.

1) Substantive participation in weekly discussion via online postings (40% graduate / 80% CEU)

Each week of this course includes assignments for reading, audio segments (where applicable), videos, and discussion questions. These are provided in the weekly modules in Canvas. In addition to reading all the materials assigned and watching assigned videos, all students will also be expected to participate in the class discussions. This course also offers a combination of the traditional asynchronous online course and synchronous webinars using Zoom. The majority of interaction will take place through threaded discussion, with a number of occasions for live webinars for all students over the course of the semester. Several times throughout the course, you will be invited to enter into a video class discussion in lieu of the written discussion board postings. Note: participation in the whole class video discussions is optional. You will also be asked to participate in one or two virtual small group sessions that you will initiate and assess, which would be part of this participation grading. Specific details regarding the schedule for posting, length requirements, discussion leaders, and small group meetings will be included in the final syllabus posted in Canvas.

2) Spiritual Formation (5% of graduate and CEU student evaluation)

Spiritual formation is an essential element of preparation for ministry. The LIM program attempts to integrate the spiritual growth of students into their theological education in a way that enriches their relationship with God and enlivens their ministry. Students will be given two prayer exercises, as well as other subject matter for prayer, and a minimum of two journal entries are required in Canvas. Detailed instructions in Canvas.

3) Group Dynamics Assignment (5% of graduate and CEU student evaluation)

Students are asked to watch a series of video segments and comment accordingly. Due at the End of Week Two. Detailed instructions in Canvas.

4) Ministry Praxis Assignment (5% of graduate and CEU student evaluation)

Present your description and initial understanding of a concern related to your ministry praxis, or a concern that you feel called to address; this short assignment is due during Week Three. You will have an opportunity to revise it and submit it for credit in Week Four. Detailed instructions in Canvas.

5) Personal Context Assignment (5% of graduate and CEU student evaluation)

Presenting in writing feedback on communication skills and reflection on personal gifts. Due at the end of Week Five. Detailed instructions in Canvas.

6) Sociocultural Context Assignment (5% of graduate student evaluation only)

Presenting in writing a “testing” or analyzing of your initial assumptions (as contrasted with “telling” or describing) based on relevant data and course material. This draft will be revised and incorporated into the final reflective essay. Detailed instructions in Canvas. Due at the end of Week Six.

7) Final Reflective Essay (35% of graduate student evaluation only)

Using the reflection method and contextual model of practical theology presented in this course, reflect on your understanding of the concern you identified early in this course. The paper should present a critical reflection on your understanding the dynamics influencing this concern and of the Christian Tradition’s implications regarding this concern. Full directions will be included in the Canvas course.

Grading Scale

A	93-100	B-	80-82.9	D+	67-69.9
A-	90-92.9	C+	77-79.9	D	60-66.9

B+	87-89.9	C	73-76.9	F	0-59.9
B	83-86.9	C-	70-72.9		

Overall Grading Scale

Please note that the LIM grading scale uses B as the standard for graduate-quality work. A and B+ indicate graduate work done with distinction, with B- and below signifying levels below graduate standards.

Letter Grade	Quality Points	Characteristics of Student Work
A	4.0	Work done with distinction. An outstanding use of all four evaluation criteria as a catalyst for critical reflection.
A-	3.7	Work done with distinction, with a few minor corrections needed.
B+	3.3	Work of very good quality. The assignment is addressed in an exceptional manner with a good balance of personal insight and academic documentation.
B	3.0	The standard for the master's degree. The assignment is adequately addressed in a clear and concise manner with appropriate documentation. If subsequent work meets this standard of quality, the degree will be awarded.
B-	2.7	The work is slightly below the standard for master's level work. The assignment is addressed, but a number of corrections is needed to address the assignment in a clear and concise manner. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.
C+	2.3	Substandard graduate work. Evaluation criteria are not adequately met in the assignment. Moderate improvement is needed. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.
C	2	Less than graduate-level work. Evaluation criteria are not met. If subsequent work continues at this level, the student may not continue in the degree program.
C-	1.7	Below average, grade does not count towards graduation.
D+	1.3	Minimally passing, grade does not count towards graduation.
D	1	Minimally passing, grade does not count towards graduation.
F	0	Assignment not addressed at all, incomplete assignment, or not submitted on time.

Course Policies

Incomplete Grade Policy

Students are subject to the university policy regarding incomplete grades with the following additions to university policy. Grades of Incomplete are given at the instructor's discretion. Students must complete LIM's Incomplete Grade Request Form found in the Resources, Policies, Forms, & Services section of their Canvas course. Students should first inquire of their instructor whether or not they are eligible for an incomplete; this must occur with sufficient time to complete the process explained here. To be eligible, students may not have received an Incomplete in the previous semester, must have completed at least 75% of the course work to date, and must have at least a C or above in the course. After the instructor makes an initial assessment of eligibility, including checking with the

LIM Office to ensure there was no Incomplete in the previous semester and finds the student eligible, by the due date of the course's final assignment, a student must complete and obtain all signatures for LIM's Incomplete Grade Request Form found in the Resources section of their Canvas course and submit it to their instructor, who will forward a copy to the LIM Director. LIM graduate students may not receive Incompletes in LIM courses in consecutive semesters.

Attendance and Participation

Students are subject to the university policy regarding attendance found online in the Bulletin. Students in online courses communicate their presence by active participation in weekly discussions. Each course's instructor sets requirements for how many times students must post on the Discussion Board in Canvas. Failing to post during the first week of class may result in removal from the course. If you foresee that you will be unable to post in a given week, please contact the instructor ahead of time. Extensions for posting are given at the instructor's discretion and for a valid reason may be granted if arranged ahead of time. In extraordinary circumstances, students may arrange with their instructor to post up to two weeks after a deadline, though this may entail a grade reduction. Posts and other assignments submitted more than two weeks late may be subject to a grade of zero. If students do not post in a given week, they are considered absent. Absence for more than one week without contacting the instructor may result in removal from and failure of the course.

University Policies

Please read Part 2 of the syllabus (located in Canvas) for university policies on plagiarism, AI, accessible education, and more.