

**Loyola Institute for Ministry  
Loyola University New Orleans**

**DRAFT**  
**Subject to change. Full**  
**syllabus available in Canvas**  
**by May 20, 2026**

## **Religion, Crime & Justice LIM-G841-Y1G0E**

**Summer 2026**

### **Course Description**

This course approaches prison ministry not only as a pastoral practice but as a theological and liturgical space in which questions of God, human dignity, justice, and transformation emerge. Drawing on Gospel texts, Catholic Social Teaching, and contemporary scholarship, it examines how incarceration shapes and challenges theological understandings of sin, redemption, suffering, and community. Prisons are explored as sites where meaning, transformation, and hope take distinct form, prompting reflection on how God is encountered within conditions of confinement and marginalization. Engaging historical, social, and institutional contexts, the course critically assesses the relationship between faith-based initiatives and systems of power while imagining alternative practices rooted in dignity, restoration, and solidarity. Emphasis is placed on integrating theological reflection with lived experience, preparing students to engage prison ministry with depth, awareness, and moral imagination.

### **Key Learning Outcomes**

Through participation in this course, learners will develop

- an understanding of the role religion has played in the evolution of the current penitentiary system, as well as American attitudes toward crime, the incarcerated, and the treatment of the incarcerated.
- an awareness of contemporary religious initiatives to serve the incarcerated population, as well as to reform the prison and criminal justice systems.
- conceptual tools for analyzing and thinking critically about the role religion and spirituality play within existing penal institutions, and the possibilities they have for bringing about new perspectives and practices in the criminal justice system.

### **Required Readings**

*Please order the required text as soon as possible from the bookstore of your choice.*

Erzen, Tanya. *God in Captivity: The Rise of Faith-Based Prison Ministries in the Age of Mass Incarceration*. Beacon Press, 2017. Paperback ISBN-13 978-0-8070-4155-0  
List price: \$20.00 / Kindle ASIN B01GYPKJ28 List price: \$15.99

***Selected readings from the following ebooks will be available in Canvas.***

Ellis, Rachel. [\*In This Place Called Prison: Women’s Religious Life in the Shadow of Punishment\*](#). U of California P, 2023. *eBook Collection*, Monroe Library of Loyola U New Orleans.

Graber, Jennifer. [\*The Furnace of Affliction: Prisons & Religion in Antebellum America\*](#). U of North Carolina P, 2011. *Project MUSE*, Monroe Library of Loyola U New Orleans.

Green, Rachelle. *Learning to Live: Prisons, Pedagogy, and Theological Education*. Baylor UP, 2025. Paperback [In process.]

Levad, Amy. [\*Redeeming a Prison Society: A Liturgical and Sacramental Response to Mass Incarceration\*](#). Fortress Press, 2014. *eBook Collection*, Monroe Library of Loyola U New Orleans.

Levad, Amy. [\*Restorative Justice: Theories and Practices of Moral Imagination\*](#). LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC. 2012. eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost), Monroe Library of Loyola U New Orleans.

Price, Melyanda. *At the Cross: Race, Religion, and Citizenship in the Politics of the Death Penalty*. Oxford UP, 2015. [In process.]

Additional readings and media as included in the Canvas course.

## **Evaluation and Course Requirements**

### **Sequence of Topics/Calendar of Assignments**

The work week for classes begins each Tuesday at noon Central Time and lasts through Monday 11:59 pm Central Time.

<b>Session</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
Week 1 May 26– June 1	Calling, Context, and the Reality of Mass Incarceration (May 25, Memorial Day Holiday)	Introduce self, complete readings, media, discussion questions
Week 2 June 2–8	Historical Roots of Prison Religion	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; synchronous class meeting (optional)
Week 3	Sin, Punishment, and Theological	Readings, audios, discussion

June 9–15	Justifications	questions; synchronous class meeting (optional)
Week 4 June 16–22	The Prison as a Theological and Liturgical Space (June 19, Juneteenth Holiday)	Complete readings, media, discussion question; synchronous class meeting (optional)
Week 5 June 23–29	Education, Formation, and Transformation	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; small virtual group meeting (required)
Week 6 June 30–July 6	Institutional Religion and Carceral Power (July 3, Independence Day Holiday)	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; synchronous class meeting (optional)
Week 7 July 7–13	Gender, Embodiment, and Lived Faith	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; synchronous class meeting (optional)
Week 8 July 14–20	Race, Religion, and the Politics of Death	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; small virtual group meeting (required)
Week 9 July 21–27 August 1	Restorative Justice, Vocation, and the Future of Prison Ministry	Complete readings, media, discussion questions; Spiritual Formation Journal; synchronous class meeting (optional)
Week 10 July 28–31	Final Assignment and Course Evaluation	Final Assignment due 7/28 by noon

**Final Grades Due:** August 5, 11:59 PM CDT

### Week One Assignments

- 1) Read and sign the Learning and Group Process Agreement
- 2) Read overview in Canvas
- 3) Participate in a Discussion on Canvas by introducing yourself and greeting your fellow students
- 4) Indicate your preferences for synchronous class meetings (attendance is optional).
- 5) Complete the assigned readings, video, and discussion questions.

### Assessment

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

		Percentage of Grade	
		Graduate	CEU
1	Substantive Participation via Weekly discussion via online postings	60%	90%
2	Spiritual Formation	10%	10%
3	Final Paper, 10 page paper	30%	–

**1) Substantive participation in weekly discussion via online postings (60% graduate / 90% CEU)**

Each week you will be able to earn 5 points for each Discussion Board question.

For each weekly discussion, your participation includes your original post in response to the assigned question(s), as well as the comments you are asked to make on your colleagues' posts. There are specific directions posted about these requirements each week in Canvas. Postings should address the question(s) for the session, respect the word limit posted for each week's question(s) and demonstrate some interaction with course materials for that session.

In addition to addressing the question(s) for each week, you are also asked each week to comment on the postings of your colleagues in this course. This comment should also be substantive: "I agree" or "I like what you posted" is not a substantive comment. Please articulate what about their posting is compelling to you, and why you consider their comment relevant, challenging, important, etc. There is no word limit requirement to comment posts.

Asking Questions: One of the most effective tools of a good online discussion is the question. Communication in the online medium can be easily misinterpreted; conversely, it can be challenging to effectively convey tone and nuance in an online discussion. This can lead to misunderstanding, conflict, and frustration in the learning group.

When in doubt about the meaning of a posting, a good strategy is to pose a question about it, and to avoid making assumptions or jumping to conclusions. Even if the meaning seems straight-forward, it is good practice to ask follow-up questions and/or questions for clarification. My hope for our discussions is that we will rely on the question as a standard tool for effective communication.

Discussion Leaders: Each week there will be one or two Discussion Leaders to help initiate the flow of our conversation. The task of the Discussion Leader is simply to post first. He or she will essentially begin the conversation around the given question(s) for the week by posting their response to the session question by Wednesday at 8pm Central of each week. Others will then be able to respond to this initial posting and engage in a thread. All subsequent postings in the conversation, both for the Discussion Leader and the rest of the class will be due the following Monday at 12 Noon Central. Each week's session will

follow this general format.

I will plan for and post a schedule of Discussion Leaders for several weeks ahead of time in Canvas. If you are unable to lead the week you are scheduled, please let me know as soon as possible.

### **Directions for Weekly Posting in Discussions**

Please note: All times are Central Time.

For each Discussion assignment, students are required to make three (3) posts: a major post of 200-400 words in which they respond to the question posted, and two (2) minor posts of no more than 150-200 words each in which they respond to two (2) of the major posts made by their fellow students. In weeks where there are two discussion board questions, students are required to make one major post and two minor posts for each question (totaling 2 major, 4 minor posts). Our weekly sessions will run from Tuesday to Monday.

#### ***Beginning Each Tuesday***

- Read the overview for the week's work and begin individual work for the week. Questions that arise about the material may be addressed to the professor in the Question Board or via email.
- Contributions to Discussions should reflect critical engagement with both the required readings as well as any other assigned material and should demonstrate itself as such.

#### ***By Thursday, 11:59pm CT.***

- When there is an assigned group leader, beginning several weeks into the semester, the first major post to the weekly discussion question is due by Thursday night for group leaders and by Saturday night for everyone else. Some weeks require students to answer more than one question as a major post.
- Groups will be created and assigned several weeks into the semester. When this occurs, the group discussion leader posts a response to the discussion question by Thursday night. This initial post by the group discussion leader should also raise a question for the group to consider and be between 200- 400 words (Major post).

#### ***By Saturday, 11:59pm CT.***

- Other members of the group respond to the discussion question by the end of Saturday night with a major post between 200-400 words. Either this initial post or a subsequent minor post should also address the group leader's question.

***By Monday, 11:59pm CT.***

- All students respond to two other member's posts in 150-200 words by Monday night (Minor posts).
- All members should have a total of three discussion posts by Monday night (one Major, two Minor) for each discussion board question.

***Contents of Discussion Post***

To earn full credit, you should do the following things:

- post and respond by the deadline;
- adhere to word length requirements;
- refrain from inappropriate posts (words/tones that diminish the character and community of the course) Practice using "I-statements," avoid generalizations by qualifying your words;
- provide content of substance based on the course material—that is, not comments such as “I agree wholeheartedly,” but rather content that offers an original and informed contribution to the discussion, either as an opening or as a response, and reference course material;
- integrate (reference/cite) what you have read, how you understand the material, your experience, the remarks of your colleagues, and the course material;
- posting fully addresses the weekly questions and stimulates substantial follow-up postings;
- write in accessible prose—that is, not necessarily formal academic prose, but prose that is as clear and correct as you can make it, citing material not your own, and avoiding “text-speak” (using complete sentences rather than abbreviations and emoji to make your point, for example).

I look forward to seeing your comments and insights in the discussions.

**Small Group Meetings (required):**

Students will work in small groups during two dedicated sessions in weeks 4 and 8 to develop their final project in stages. Complete directions can be found in Canvas.

**Synchronous Virtual Classes (optional):**

There will be optional opportunities to meet synchronously as a whole class through Zoom, available through Canvas during the course of the semester. These sessions, scheduled in Weeks 2–4, 6–7, and 9, are an excellent time to ask questions, build community, and engage more directly with course material and one another. Each session will last approximately 1½ hours. In the Week 1 module, you are invited to complete an availability

survey so that meeting times can be scheduled to accommodate as many students as possible. Once responses are collected, an announcement will be shared with the confirmed dates and times.

**2) Spiritual Formation (10% graduate and CEU students)**

This course’s spiritual formation includes engaging in prayer and offering a brief synthesis of your experience in the form of a 250-500 word posting. Complete directions can be found in Canvas.

**4) Final Paper (30% graduate students)**

For the final project, students will write a 10-page theological praxis paper or complete a creative project that develops a concrete vision or model of prison ministry in response to a specific issue within the carceral system (such as education, gender, death penalty, restorative justice, etc.). Complete directions can be found in the final syllabus posted in Canvas.

**Grading Scale**

<b>A</b>	93-100	<b>B-</b>	80-82.9	<b>D+</b>	67-69.9
<b>A-</b>	90-92.9	<b>C+</b>	77-79.9	<b>D</b>	60-66.9
<b>B+</b>	87-89.9	<b>C</b>	73-76.9	<b>F</b>	0-59.9
<b>B</b>	83-86.9	<b>C-</b>	70-72.9		

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.

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Quality Points</b>	<b>Characteristics of Student Work</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>4.0</b>	Work done with distinction. An outstanding use of all four evaluation criteria as a catalyst for critical reflection.
<b>A-</b>	<b>3.7</b>	Work done with distinction, with a few minor corrections needed.
<b>B+</b>	<b>3.3</b>	Work of very good quality. The assignment is addressed in an exceptional manner with a good balance of personal insight and academic documentation.
<b>B</b>	<b>3.0</b>	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>B-</b>	<b>2.7</b>	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.

<b>C+</b>	<b>2.3</b>	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.
<b>C</b>	<b>2</b>	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.
<b>C-</b>	<b>1.7</b>	Below average, grade does not count towards graduation.
<b>D+</b>	<b>1.3</b>	Minimally passing, grade does not count towards graduation.
<b>D</b>	<b>1</b>	Minimally passing, grade does not count towards graduation.
<b>F</b>	<b>0</b>	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 & 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, artificial intelligence (AI), accessible education, and more.