Adult education is at the heart of Christian ministry in our current contexts. Particularly in the U.S., but also in other locations, the kinds of structures and practices that previously existed to initiate and support adult growth in faith are dissolving and re-forming in new and often unanticipated ways. Even religious education for children is heavily dependent on adequate adult support, both within families and in more “formal” contexts in churches. This course will attempt to engage these challenges by considering theories of adult development, exploring principles of adult learning, and investigating various methodologies for understanding specific parish contexts in which adult learning occurs.

Here are some of the assumptions with which I approach the design of this learning experience:

1. Most students in this course will be seniors who have already had a lot of parish experience, and who have developed a basic competence in pastoral theology.

2. One of the key challenges facing educational leaders in communities of faith is evangelism and religious education of and for adults – in particular, reaching out to adults who feel distanced from the church, or who may never have found themselves in a church.

3. There are a tremendous number of books and other resources within church contexts for supporting adult faith development. Students are less likely to have access to the “secular” literature, and therefore most of our time in this class will be focused on these other resources from the educational literatures, and on utilizing students’ already honed theological skills to bring them to bear on the challenge of adult faith development.

4. Understanding, reflecting upon, and being able to move beyond the patterns of one’s own faith development is a crucial key to the ability to support other adults in their journeys of faith.

5. In this context we are all adults, all teachers, and all learners. Collaboration is a key to success in this learning setting.
**Course goals**

1. Provide an intellectual and experiential context in which the encounter with God in the midst of adult educational praxis is respected, honored and critically engaged.

2. Provide conceptual and experiential connections between the scholarly literatures of adult education and the praxis of adult education in parish contexts.

3. Investigate various pedagogical strategies for nourishing growth in faith for adults.

4. Provide resources for identifying and critically engaging one’s own praxis as a Christian educator working with adults.

5. Identify pressing educational challenges faced by specific communities of faith in attending to adult faith development, and locate resources that can engage those challenges constructively.

6. Provide supportive space in which to critically reflect upon the internship experience.

**Course requirements**

- **Attendance** at all class sessions. Please note: life often poses many challenges to participating fully in class. This course has been structured to meet only once a week, so as to make it possible for commuting students to attend more easily. But this format also makes it difficult, if you miss a session, to engage the whole of the learning envisioned by the syllabus. I hope that you will make every effort possible to be with us. I also hope you will feel invited to bring your children with you, particularly if otherwise you would have to miss the session (as I will, if I have days when my children are sick and I can’t find babysitting).

- **Preparation** and revision of personal learning goals (one paragraph) handed in once on September 17, and again on October 15. This requirement is as much for you, as it is for me. For me, it helps me to shape the course more closely to your needs and desires; for you, it supports your intentional reflection on your learning.

- Ethnographic **observation** write-up (3-4 pages) from an adult education event in a particular context, due on October 1. See Appendices 1 and 2 for more details, and we will also discuss this assignment in class.

- Either four short **papers** (roughly one paper a week, at 2-3 pages) based on engaging and integrating the readings, course discussion and your own ministry; OR a **final paper/project** (10-12 pages), due October 15. It is best, if you choose the short paper, to hand one in each week. If you choose the long paper/project, I will need to have a short description of what you intend to work on by October 1st (final paper suggestions are listed in Appendix 3).
Course Texts

Required for course discussion:

*In Over Our Heads: the Mental Demands of Modern Life*
Robert Kegan (Belknap Press, 1995)

*How The Way We Talk Can Change The Way We Work*

*The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults*
Christine Blair (Geneva Press, 2001)

*Lifelong Learning: A Guide to Adult Education in the Church*
Rebecca Grothe (Augsburg Fortress, 1997)
- Please note! I will give out free copies of this book in class.

Highly recommended:

*The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*
Parker Palmer (Jossey-Bass, 1998)

*Studying Congregations*
Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley (Abingdon Press, 1998)

*Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*
Jane Vella (Jossey-Bass, 1994)

10 September: Introductions and orientation

[The Courage to Teach is background for this session]

Introductions

Course orientation, Basic education review/overview, Visual communication/context issues

What is teaching? What is learning? What are the tasks adults face?
How do we begin to think about them?

Small groups will be assigned this week to help us walk through each of the Kegan challenges.
17 September: Adult development: challenges and supports

J A. Swanson visit this afternoon!

What are the challenges adults face? What does it mean to provide sufficient support and sufficient challenge in a faith context? What are the cultures in which adults are embedded? What are the tasks adults face? How do we begin to think about them?

In Over Our Heads
Robert Kegan
Please finish reading Parts I and II (that’s chapters 1-4) before you come to class.

Bring in to share: your ideas/comments/ reflections upon visiting the Swanson artwork in the campus center.

Learning goals statement due today.

Reflection paper, possible topics to consider (you don’t need to write on any of these, or you may choose just one, or allow them to suggest something else to you):

What are the milestones of your own journey in faith? How have specific people supported and/or challenged your own understanding of your faith, of your vocation? How have various cultural contexts supported and/or challenged you?

24 September: Adult development: providing continuity

Each of the six small groups will have ten minutes of the class today to “report/engage” around their section of Kegan’s work.

In Over Our Heads
Robert Kegan
Please finish reading Parts III and IV (that’s chapters 5-10) before you come to class.

Reflection paper possible topics:

How does Kegan’s description of the challenges our culture provides to adults resonate with you, or not? What does it mean to provide continuity in learning? In what ways does Martin Luther’s description of family devotion engage, resist, confront, or otherwise “play with” a person’s “embeddedness” in specific cultural contexts?

Bring in to share: poetry, music, film, other examples of artistic creativity that could contribute to shaping a more biblically centered spirituality -- particularly for people who are alienated or distanced from traditional institutional religious contexts
1 October: Exploring and evaluating learning events/environments for adults

Read *How The Way We Talk Can Change The Way We Work*
Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey
Jossey-Bass, 2000

Ethnographic observation due (see Appendices 1 and 2 for information on how to go about doing this).

Come to class prepared to make a brief (no more than 5 minutes) presentation on the adult learning event you attended.

*Studying Congregations is background to this exercise*

Reflection paper possible topics:

How does your own personal “immune system” operate? Can you think of a specific theological issue that engages that system for you? How does Kegan/Lahey’s language for criticism invite you to consider a specific conflict in your congregation differently from how you have in the past?

October 8: Exploring and evaluating curricular materials for adults

What are some of the best resources for adult education, for nurturing adult discipleship/spirituality?

Read *Lifelong Learning: A Guide to Adult Education in the Church*
Rebecca Grothe
Augsburg Fortress, 1997

Read *The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults*
Christine Blair

Bring in to share: some piece of adult education curriculum you’ve encountered in a context in which you’ve been a member and/or a leader, or something you’ve discovered in the Resource Center that you think could be effective.

Reflection paper possible topics:

What would you identify as the three most important issues a congregation faces in supporting adult faith? What has been the biggest challenge to your own adult faith? Identify and engage some “big assumptions” that exist theologically in your context.
October 15: Issues from context

Please resubmit your learning goals, with a brief (no more than 2 paragraphs) assessment of how you worked with them.

Bring in some kind of food to share that has helped to shape your faith identity (and come prepared to explain how it has!).

Final paper due (Appendix 4 for ideas)

Reflection paper possible topics:

In what ways has the material we’ve worked with in this class contributed to your own educational leadership? In what ways has it detracted from it?

Appendix 1 -- Ethnographic Observation

Begin by choosing an adult education event in which you would like to be a participant observer. Approach the sponsor of the event in advance, and ask permission to attend as a participant observer. (Be aware that you might have to wait until the event itself to receive permission from those gathered, and that you could legitimately be denied that permission. Be prepared with alternatives!) Ask the sponsor to sign a consent form that you develop (there is an example in Appendix 2).

Make sure that you introduce yourself and the observation goals at the beginning of the event. Assure people that you will respect confidentiality and anonymity. Participate and observe the event, taking notes in whatever way is most effective for you. (This could mean taking notes while you’re present, or taking copious notes just after the event is over.)

Write a brief (3-4 pages) paper that describes and then analyzes the adult education event in which you did your observation. Be sure to include the name of the sponsoring institution, its physical location, the number of people involved in the event, and your best guess at the ages, cultures, abilities, and so on of those present. Work with at least the following questions in your analysis:

What definition of adult education was operative in this event?

What questions did people bring to the process?

What learning goals did the presenters of the event seek to support?
Who had authority over the ideas and materials in question?

What “texts” were used? (Including, but not limited to, published curricula, music, etc.)

What was the explicit theological framework of the event (if there was one), and what were the implicit and/or null theological assumptions?

How did the process of the event shape your own learning during it?

What questions remain with you from this event, and what are your primary insights from it?

Appendix 2: Participant Observation Consent Form

(Please note: this is just an example! A completed form should be attached with the short paper you write up after the event, and handed in.)

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

By my signature below, I agree to allow [your name] to participate in [name of adult education event] as a participant observer.

In agreeing to this participation, I understand the following:

1. That [your name] will be observing this event for the purposes of analysis in her/his Education 2 course at Luther Seminary.

2. That [your name] will protect the confidentiality and anonymity of other participants in the event, unless they specifically give permission for her/him to quote them with attribution.

3. That I may at any point during the event revoke my permission, and ask [your name] to cease taking notes, or to leave the event.

4. That I am invited to remain in communication with [your name] following the event for her/his reflections upon it, and that I may at any time also contact Dr. Mary Hess, the instructor for CE3520, with any questions and concerns (651-641-3232).

5. That I can receive a copy of any research report generated as a result of this participant observation.

Date:__________ Signature of event organizer: _______________________

Date:__________ Signature of student observer: _______________________
Appendix 3: Final paper ideas

Identify a compelling theological question that has been raised in your own life as an adult, and investigate the various curricular resources available for engaging that question in a specific parish context. In what ways do these resources function well, and in what ways do they fall short of what is necessary? How might you implement a specific resource constructively in your contextual education setting to support an adult such as yourself? How might you implement that same resource in support of an adult very different from yourself? (Note: these questions require you to identify your own learning style, and then to choose a style very different from your own with which to engage this question. This essay also requires you to put together an annotated bibliography of the resources you’ve found in your context, even if you’re not speaking directly to them in your paper)

Choose a scriptural passage that is compelling to you. Imagine the multiple ways in which this passage might be encountered in your parish (contextual education site, etc.) (in a hymn, through the lectionary, in a sermon, during a bible study, as a quote beneath a picture, on the edge of a bulletin, in a Lenten or Advent study resource, in the context of prayer, in a children’s book, etc.). Develop a brief educational intervention for each such encounter (Vella’s principles provide a nice heuristic for doing this) that would be appropriate in your setting. Be sure to develop at least five examples of ways to encounter your passage.

Choose a bible study or other adult education curriculum that is pre-packaged, and in use in a setting with which you are familiar (you could use your internship setting, or your current place of worship, etc.). Attend to how that curriculum structures the learning it proposes to facilitate. How, if at all, does it respond to the challenges that Kegan identifies? How does it engage race, class, gender? What other elements of the context in which it is used are not adequately present in the curriculum?

Choose one of the pressing adult educational challenges we have discussed in class or propose another one that you are convinced is at the heart of your own ministry. Prepare an annotated bibliography, with at least twenty entries, that: 1) provides a conceptual framework for approaching the challenge, 2) identifies significant constructive resources with which to address the challenge in a specific ministerial setting, and 3) is informed by a specific theological standpoint. This bibliography should be presented in a format and with clarity of language that would make it possible for you to give it to a Christian educator in a parish to use as a resource.

Propose your own topic.