

**MESOM Introduction to Christian Ethics  
Fall 2019**

**Instructor:** Marvin M. Ellison (mellison122@gmail.com)

**Location:** Maine Conference UCC office, 337 State Street, Suite #3, Augusta 04330

**Dates:** *Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.\**

**Description:**

This course aims to help students strengthen their skills and gain greater confidence for engaging in ethical inquiry within the context of Christian ministry.

By examining several issues that faith leaders confront in congregational and community life (domestic violence, reproductive justice, and sexual ethics), we'll practice "lifting our voices" and "upping our game" as public theologians and advocates for compassion and justice.

The course will be run as a seminar, so the quality of our work together will depend on each person's completion of the reading and writing assignments in advance and on each person's constructive participation in our ongoing conversation.

**Books** (Please purchase in advance):

1. Anthony Weston, *A Practical Companion to Ethics* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2010)
2. Carol Adams, *Woman Battering* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994)
3. Rebecca Todd Peters, *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018)
4. Marvin M. Ellison, *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012)

**About written work:** All writing assignments should be typed double-spaced, using the Times New Roman 12 font, and turned into the instructor on the due date of the assignment (or in advance via email). Include your name and date of submission.

**Grading system:**      Pass with distinction  
                                 Pass/Completed  
                                 DNC (Did not complete)

\* Includes an hour lunch break; please bring a bag lunch.

**SCHEDULE:****Session #1: September 21**

**Topic:** What is ethical inquiry, and how to do it? What makes Christian ethics Christian?

**Readings:**

Anthony Weston, *A Practical Companion to Ethics*

Daniel Maguire, "Ethics: How to Do It" [available as a PDF, so please email the instructor to request your copy]

Marvin Ellison, *Making Love Just*, Introduction ("Where Do We Draw Our Lines, and Why? An Invitation to Ethical Inquiry")

**Writing assignment #1:**

On a single sheet of paper, list reasons why "ethics" or "morals/morality" may be *difficult* to talk about; then, on the same sheet of paper, make a second list with reasons why it's *necessary* to talk about ethics and morality!

**Session #2: October 19**

**Topic/Case study:** Domestic Violence

**Readings:**

Carol Adams, *Woman Battering*

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, Ch. 5 ("Why Don't Batterers Just Leave and Rapists Just Cease and Desist?")

**Writing assignment #2:**

Write a guest editorial (250 words) during Domestic Violence Awareness Month for possible submission to the *Portland Press Herald*, *Bangor Daily New*, or a community newspaper.

Suggested outline:

- Identify yourself. Who are you, and where are you coming from?
- Why are you writing? Who's your audience, and what's your concern?
- What change do you propose, how might this be accomplished, and by whom?

### **Session #3: November 16**

**Topic/Case study:** Reproductive justice and the morality of abortion

**Readings:**

Rebecca Todd Peters, *Trust Women: A Progressive Christian Argument for Reproductive Justice*

Ellison, *Making Love Just*, Ch. 6 (“Is ‘Pro-Choice’ What We Mean to Say?”)

**Writing assignment #3:**

Prepare three-minute written testimony (250 words) for a legislative hearing in Augusta on LD 820 (proposed bill to expand public and private insurance coverage for abortion care). Take a stand for or against, and give your reasons.

(See testimony delivered in Augusta about LD 820 on March 27, 2019 before the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services at <http://legislature.maine.gov/bills/testimony.html?snum=129&PID=1456#>)

### **Session #4: December 14**

**Topic/Case study:** Sexual ethics; interview with the author

**Reading:**

Marvin Ellison, *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times*, Ch. 1-4, 7, and Epilogue – and review Introduction and Ch. 5-6.

**Writing assignment #4:**

1. Write a column for (your) church newsletter (250 words) on why sexuality education should (or should not) be offered at (your) church. Identify likely concerns/objections, and respond to those.
2. In preparation for discussing *Making Love Just* and interviewing the author, prepare three written questions, at least one of which should be about the author’s ethical method.
3. In evaluating this course, in 250-500 words share a few things you’ve learned about doing Christian ethics. How have you “strengthened your skills and gained greater confidence” as a public theologian and advocate for compassion and justice? What issue(s) are you likely to speak up for as a faith leader, why, and how?