

Ordaining Women in America

REL 291 - Spring 2021

Meetings: T, TR; 1:40 - 2:55 pm EST
<https://smith.zoom.us/j/99358504061>

Instructor: Dr. David J. Howlett, Mellon Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion
dhowlett@smith.edu

Office Hours: TW, 3:00 - 4:30 pm EST
<https://smith.zoom.us/j/5134381984>

Course Description:

In the 1970s, many Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist communities in America began ordaining women as ministers, rabbis, priests, and teachers. This change in policy provided women long-denied vocational paths, necessitated new theological self-understandings and inclusive rituals, and served as a proxy for larger culture war divisions in America. While focused on the last fifty years, this course provides a wider historical context for these developments, from the bold revivalism of colonial-era women preachers to anti-racist activism by contemporary Zen senseis. As part of a larger project, students will conduct interviews with ordained women and construct podcast episodes from these interviews.

Course Objectives:

Students will leave class with...

- an ability to engage secondary historical sources in a mini-research paper.
- an ability to write an Op-ed article.
- an ability to use readily accessible software to write and produce a podcast episode.
- an understanding of the history of women's ordination in America.
- an appreciation for the diversity of experience between and within Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist groups around women's ordination.
- an awareness of how the experiences of ordained women have shaped and been shaped by cultural constructions such as race, gender, sexuality, age, and class.

Final Class Grade:

- Journalistic Article 25%
- Op-ed Article 25%
- Interview Summaries 5%
- Podcast 35%
- Participation and Moodle Posts 10%

Class Participation: To facilitate engaged learning, better discussions, and better comprehension of the material, each class will have a daily question or exercise that students are expected to complete at the beginning of each class. Daily questions will be collected at the midpoint of the semester and at the last class of the semester. In addition, you will post about each week's readings on Moodle. These posts may address your thoughts, questions, or epiphanies generated by the texts and should be, at minimum, 200 words. Each week, half of the class will post on the Tuesday reading (due on Monday night) and half of the class will post on the Thursday reading (due on Wednesday night). You may skip posting for two weeks at any point in the semester.

Journalistic Article: By the end of the first month of class, you will write up a short background article providing the history of women's ordination and leadership for the group you will study in the podcasting project (see below). For this, you will use at least one article or chapter from the syllabus, as well as two outside scholarly sources. Your article will be written in an accessible, journalistic style and be between 800 and 1000 words. Further details for this assignment, as well as suggested secondary sources, will be provided in class (due by the end of week 4).

Op-ed article: By week twelve of class, you will construct an Op-ed article that addresses a selected question on women's ordination and its social effects in twenty-first century America. A rubric detailing question options and the Op-ed style will be handed out in class.

The Women's Ordination Project--A Podcast: Our class will be contributing to a pilot project to document the experiences of ordained women through a podcast series. This project consists of three parts.

Transcribed Interview and Summary: You will conduct two interviews with selected ordained women recorded via Zoom. In class, we will agree upon common questions, and you will ask additional questions of your own choosing. Then, you will obtain a media release form from your interviewee, set up a time to interview her by Zoom, and conduct your interview. Once your interview is complete, you will upload your recorded interview to a common google folder, turn in the questions you asked, transcribe your interview, and compose a one-paragraph analysis of how your interviewee's story relates to any of the secondary source material encountered in class (due by the end of week 8).

Script for Episode the Podcast Episode: You and a group member will take your recorded interview and edit it into a podcast episode that follows a story arc. This episode will be one of three episodes we will release for our podcast *Women's Rites: A Podcast about Women's Ordination*. Each episode will be about a different group. With your partner, you will access the transcripts and audio of other interviews gathered by the class

and construct a script for your episode. The narrative for the script will combine key quotes from the interviews, as well as your own narration to stitch the story together (due by the end of week 10).

Producing a Podcast Episode: You will then take your script and produce an audio episode using the audio from your interviews, as well as the relevant source material recorded by your group and your classmates. Dan Bennett of the Smith Learning, Research, and Technology Team will provide an in-class workshop on podcast editing. Your finished podcast episode should be between 15 to 20 minutes in length. We will listen to your preliminary podcast on our final day in class (week 13), and you will have a chance to make final edits before you submit your revised episode during finals week .

Assessment of Student Work: Students will be subject to a standard grading scale as follows:

A 94-100
A- 90-93
B+ 87-89
B 84-86
B- 80-83
C+ 77-79
C 74-76
C- 70-73
D+ 67-69
D 60-66
D- 56-59
F 55 and below

There is no curve for this class. A student will receive the grade they earn.

Classroom Procedures and Policies:

Academic Dishonesty: The Student Handbook notes the following:

Students and faculty at Smith are part of an academic community defined by its commitment to scholarship, which depends on scrupulous and attentive acknowledgement of all sources of information and honest and respectful use of college resources.

Smith College expects all students to be honest and committed to the principles of academic and intellectual integrity in their preparation and submission of course work and examinations. All submitted work of any kind must be the original work of the student who must cite all the sources used in its preparation.¹

¹ “Student Conduct & Social Responsibility: Academic Honor Code,” Smith College, accessed September 3, 2019, <https://www.smith.edu/sao/handbook/socialconduct/honorcode.php> .

If you have questions about what might constitute inadvertent plagiarism, please consult me before you hand in your work.

Late Assignment Policy: Any assignment not turned in on the due date is late and will have its grade automatically dropped by five percent per day late. If you foresee needing an extension due to extenuating circumstances, you must see me during my Zoom office hours or contact me by email before the scheduled deadline.

Accommodations for Students: If you have a disability or a personal circumstance that you think will affect your learning in this course, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss the best ways to meet your needs. Students who need accessibility accommodations are also encouraged to contact Disability Services (www.smith.edu/about-smith/disability-services) and obtain an official letter of accommodation. Furthermore, if anyone in the class has ideas about how the structure of the course and general classroom interactions could be altered to encourage greater inclusion and participation, please let me know. You all deserve a safe and comfortable learning environment.

Title IX Rights and Responsibilities: The Smith College Title IX website notes the following: Gender-based and sexual misconduct is any unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior that significantly interferes with a student's success or access to educational opportunities at the college. A student with a complaint alleging gender-based and sexual misconduct should report it to the Title IX Coordinator (Amy Hunter, ahunter65@smith.edu). Complaints regarding sexual violence (sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, and stalking) may also be reported to the Campus Police Department or the Dean of Students Office (Marge Litchford, mlitchfo@smith.edu). Complaints of gender-based or sexual misconduct between Smith College students or where the individual allegedly committing the misconduct is a Smith College student are governed by the Smith College Student Code and applicable state and federal laws.

Beyond this policy, you should know that I am a mandatory reporter at the college. In the event that you experience a Title IX violation, you may talk to me, and I will keep your information private to the greatest extent possible. However, as a professor, I have a responsibility to report any information regarding sexual misconduct and crimes that I learn about to make our campus a safe place for all. For further information about Title IX rights and related all-college policies, as well as support services, please consult the following webpage:

<https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/title-ix>

Work Expectations: Students should expect nine to ten hours of outside preparation work for class each week. On written assignments, successful students distribute their workloads over the course of a week rather than cram their writing into the night before the due date. Be a successful student.

Land Acknowledgements: Smith College is on the land of the Nonotuck people. To our East are the Nipmuc and Wapanoag. To the South are the Mohegan and the Pequot. To the West are the Mohican. And to the North are the Abenaki.

Required Texts (available for purchase at the Grécourt Bookstore, Campus Center)

Kim-Kort, Mihee, ed. *Streams Run Uphill: Conversations with Clergywomen of Color*. King of Prussia, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2014.
ISBN: 978-0817017439

Knoll, Benjamin and Cammie Jo Bolin. *She Preached the Word: Women's Ordination in Modern America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
ISBN: 978-0190882365

Nadell, Pamela. *Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889-1985*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.
ISBN: 978-0807036495

SCHEDULE OF WEEKLY TOPICS & STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENTS

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REL 291 - Spring Semester 2021

All assignments are to be read by the beginning of each class. The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the reading schedule. Should changes be made, students will be informed in advance.

Week 1: Overview: Women's Ordination in Contemporary America

2/16 -- [Gina Ciliberto, "Resist a White, Male Way of Leading, Trail-blazing Leaders of Faith Advise Harris," *Sojourners*, January 13, 2021.](#)

2/20 -- Catherine Wessinger, "Women's religious leadership in the United States," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. by Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1996): 3-38.

Eileen Campbell-Reed, "The State of Clergy Women in the US: A Statistical Update, October 2018."

Guest Perspective: Rev. Anna Woofenden, Amherst College Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and Zion Lutheran of Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Recommended Reading: Catherine Wessinger, "Introduction," in *Theory of Women in Religions* (New York: NYU Press, 2020), 1-18.

Week 2: Women's Religious Leadership in Nineteenth Century America

2/23 -- Catherine A. Brekus, "Harriet Livermore, the Pilgrim Stranger: Female Preaching and Biblical Feminism in Early-Nineteenth-Century America," *Church History* 65.3 (1996): 389-404.

[Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Including an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* \(N.p.: Philadelphia, 1849\), 1-13.](#)

2/25 -- Pamela S. Nadell, "'Could not -- our women-- be ministers?': Raising the Question of Women's Rabbinic Ordination" and "'Make a highway for woman': Rising Expectations for Women's Ordination, the 1890s," in *Women Who Would be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889-1985* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 1-60.

Week 3: Women as Ministers and Rabbis? : Late Nineteenth-century and Early Twentieth-century Debates

- 3/2 -- Jenny Wiley Legath, "Introduction" and "Deaconesses and Ordained Ministry," in *Sanctified Sisters: A History of the Protestant Deaconesses* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 1-13, 131-159.
- 3/4 -- Nadell, " 'Women cannot be denied the privilege of ordination': 1922" in *Women Who Would be Rabbis*, 61-117.

Week 4: Women's Ordination and Leadership in Early Twentieth-century Pentecostal Churches

Journalistic Article Due (3/11)

- 3/9 -- Lisa P. Stephenson, "Prophesying Women and Ruling Men: Women's Religious Authority in North American Pentecostalism," *Religions* 2 (2011): 410-426.
- 3/11 -- Anthea D. Butler, "Calling" in *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 32-54.

Week 5: Second Wave Feminism and Women's Ordination, 1960s and 1970s

- 3/16 -- Nadell, " 'An idea whose time has come': 1972" in *Women Who Would be Rabbis*, 118-169.
- 3/18 -- Mark Chaves and James Cavendish, "Recent Changes in Women's Ordination Conflicts: The Effect of a Social Movement on Intraorganizational Controversy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36.4 (1997): 574-584.

Week 6: Retrenchment and Rejecting Women's Ordination, 1980s and 1990s

- 3/23 -- Eileen Campbell-Reed, "(Sub)ordination: How Clergywomen Embody Schism in the Southern Baptist Convention," in *Anatomy of a Schism: How Clergywomen's Narratives Reinterpret the Fracturing of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2016), 25-46.

Guest Perspective: Prof. Eileen Campbell-Reed, Union Theological Seminary

- 3/25 -- Mark Chaves, "Inerrancy, Sacramentalism, and Women's Ordination," in *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 84-129.

Week 7: Women's Ordination in a Polarized America, 2000s-Present

- 3/30 -- Knoll and Bolin, "Women's Ordination in America: A Contemporary Perspective," in *She Preached the Word*, 21-46.
- 4/1 -- Kate Bowler, "The Preacher" in *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 21-64.

Week 8: Women's Ordination and Race in America

Interview Transcripts and Reflections Due (4/6)

- 4/6 -- Mihee Kim-Kort, ed. "Introduction," "Embracing Womanhood: The Struggle with Sexism," and "Where Are You Really From?: The Struggle with Racism," in *Streams Run Uphill: Conversations with Clergywomen of Color*, ed. by Mihee Kim-Kort (King of Prussia, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2014), 1-31.
- 4/8 -- Mihee Kim-Kort, ed. "We Need You: The Struggle with Tokenism," "The Other Pastor: The Struggle with Legitimacy," and "Here I Am: The Struggling with Calling," in *Streams Run Uphill*, 58-65, 78-88, 117-127.

Tweedy Sombrero, "Two Paths," in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religion in the United States and Canada*, ed. by James C. Treat (New York: Routledge, 1995), 232-235.

Guest Perspective: Rev. Mihee Kim-Kort, PhD candidate, Indiana University; First Presbyterian Church, Annapolis, Maryland

Week 9: Buddhist Women as Priests and Chaplains

Podcast Script Due (4/15)

- 4/13 -- Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Buddhist Women in the West," in *Women in Buddhist Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 92-107.

[Chenxing Han, "Be the Refuge': Reflections on Karma & Gratitude, Suffering & Spiritual Friendship," *Institute of Buddhist Studies*, June 14, 2017.](#)

Recommended Reading: Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Buddhist Women and Religious Leadership," in *Religious Leadership: A Reference Handbook*, ed. by Sharon Henderson Callahan, (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE, 2013), 302-307.

Guest Perspective: Prof. Joy Brennan, Kenyon College, Mount Vernon Zen Community

- 4/15 -- Podcast editing workshop with Dan Bennett

Week 10: Mormon Women's Ordination / Modern Orthodox Rabbis

4/20 -- Lorie Winder Stromberg, "The Birth of Ordain Women: The Personal Becomes Political," in *Voices for Equality: Ordain Women and Resurgent Mormon Feminism*, ed. by Gordon Shepherd and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2015), 3-26.

Guest Perspective: Prof. Nancy Ross, DSU; pastor of Southern Utah Community of Christ congregation

4/22 -- Judith Frishman, "The Ordination of Women and the Question of Religious Authority," in *Gender and Religious Leadership: Women Rabbis, Pastors, and Ministers*, ed. by Hartmut Bonhoff, Denise L. Eger, Kathy Ehrensperger, and Walter Homolka (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2019), 289-305.

Week 11: Catholic Womenpriests / Women-church

4/27 -- Rosemary Radford Ruether "Should Women Want Women Priests or Women-church?" *Feminist Theology* 20.1 (2011): 63-72.

4/29 -- Jill Peterfeso, "Called" in *Womanpriest: Tradition and Transgression in the Contemporary Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 20-32.

Guest Perspective: Prof. Jill Peterfeso, Guilford College

Week 12: What difference does women's ordination make?

Op-ed Article Due (5/6)

5/4 -- Knoll and Bolin, "Clergywomen and Young Girls: The Importance of Role Models," in *She Preached the Word*, 119-146.

5/6 -- Sarah Sentilles, "A Church of Her Own" and "Afterword" in *A Church of Her Own: What Happens When a Woman Takes the Pulpit* (Boston: Mariner, 2009), 290-309.

Week 13: Why do clergywomen matter?

5/11 -- Knoll and Bolin, “The Effect of Clergywomen: Religious Empowerment and Mobilization” and “Conclusion: Clergywomen Matter” in *She Preached the Word*, 167-218.

Guest Perspective: Cammie Jo Bolin, PhD candidate, Georgetown University

5/13 -- Listen to podcasts in class

Finals Week -- Final Edits to Podcast Episodes Due