MI40: Church amidst secularization
(Netherlands Mission Trip; Spring Break 2017)

Course Description:
Dutch society has become highly secularized, with a quarter of the population declaring themselves atheist and only a small percentage participating in church life. In such an environment, how do Christian communities function? What have Dutch churches learned about God, themselves, and their neighbors? What would they like to teach us, and what do they want to tell us not to do? This course, build around a study trip to the Netherlands, engages missional redeveloping congregations, church plants, and immigrant churches. Students will be participant-observers in worship and other activities of these communities, meet with leaders and congregants, and engage in neighborhood exegesis.

Course Objectives:
Students who participate interestedly and actively in the course, complete the readings, and finish all assignments, at the end of the course will:

1. have a theological understanding of God’s mission and the identity of the church in the context of secularization (in support of M.Div. learning outcome 2, 3, and 4; M.A.T.M. learning outcome 1, 2, 3, 4);
2. be able to reflect with understanding on the interaction between secularized and pluralist society and the life of the Christian community (in support of M.Div. learning outcome 3, 4, 7, and 8; M.A.T.M. learning outcome 3, 4);
3. be able to articulate what can be learned from the successes and failures of the missional life of the Dutch church (in support of M.Div. learning outcome 3, 4, 7, and 8; M.A.T.M. learning outcome 3, 6)

(Course objectives will be re-fined based on what academic programs are represented by participating students.)

Prerequisites: none.

Requirements:

(1) Before the study trip: participation in the “mission trip orientations”; reading of the required literature; submission of three page readers’ reports on each of the required texts, focused these questions: What surprised you in this text about (church) life in the Netherlands? What are you curious about? What has this text made you want to learn?
(2) During the study trip: Participate in the mission trip to the Netherlands during the 2017 Spring Break. During the study trip students will engage in all the trip’s activities and reflect thereupon in a journal that will be submitted at students’ return.
After the study trip students will write a fifteen page paper focused on one of the visited congregations, reflecting on questions like: How did this community engage the neighborhood; what do leaders/members of this congregation believe they have learned; what do they wish they had done different; where do they see God at work; How do they discern God’s presence, promise, and direction?

Reading list/overview of activities

General introduction:


Stefan Paas has a chair in missiology and intercultural studies at the Free University in the Netherlands, and experience as pastor of a church plant in Amsterdam. Students will be meeting with Dr. Paas and sit in on some of his lectures, as well as engage with his students.

Church planting in the secular city:


From 2008 to 2013 American historian Russell Shorto directed the John Adams Institute in Amsterdam. In this book he portrays Amsterdam as the font of liberalism – political and economic freedom, as well as a high tolerance for “free thinking” and “free love.”

Students will visit church plants both of the Netherlands Reformed Church (historically, the national church in the Netherlands) and of smaller denominations in the Amsterdam area.

Church planting in the secular county:


Dutch historian Geert Mak uses the history of the place of his birth, Jorwert, a village in the northern part of the Netherlands with a population of 360, as a lens through which to reflect on the challenges of country life at the end of the 20th century. Part of the book are observations about “how God disappeared from Jorwerd” (the title of the original Dutch version of the book). An intended part of the mission trip is a visit to “Nijkleaster,” a church plant in the “new monasticism” tradition that uses the twelfth century church building of Jorwert as its sanctuary.

Missional redevelopment of existing congregations:
Selections from Herman Selderhuis, ed., *Handbook of Dutch Church History* (Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2014). *This text will be made available to students.*

This new English translation of the standard handbook of Dutch church history will help students understand the unique nature of a “nation church,” its relationship to other denominations in the country, and the way this shapes the character of established congregations and their relationships to these churches’ surroundings.

We will visit the Pilgrim Fathers Church in Delfshaven, (Rotterdam), a congregation going back to the fifteenth century and the scene of the departure of the Speedwell on July 22, 1620. The congregation is now located in the center of a multi-cultural neighborhood and nationally known for its missional outreach, as well as dialog with its Muslim neighbors.

**Immigrant congregations:**


Jenkins argues that the story of Christendom in Europe is more complicated than the standard notion fading Christianity and triumphant militant Islam, as a sizable proportion of new immigrants from Africa import flourishing forms of Christian faith and community.

Students will visit one or more immigrant churches in both Amsterdam and Rotterdam.