

**(ETH 650) COMMENSAL THEOLOGY:
FAITHFUL EATING FOR A NEW CREATION**

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Time: Monday-Friday, 8am-4pm

Course Description

Commensality (from Latin *com-* together + *mensa* table) relates to the practice of eating together, especially in forms of companionship absent competition or harm. Eating in any form is an inescapably relational, cultural, ecological, economic, and political act, which means it is also inherently theological. This intensive course will integrate a constructive theological exploration of key doctrines of the Christian faith, a critical ethical examination of the global economy with a focus on food production and consumption, and an active spiritual engagement with alternatives to capitalism's table practices. Through classroom learning via lectures, media presentations, and discussion combined with outdoor visits to Chicago area urban gardens, permaculture sites, food cooperatives, and more, participants will be immersed in the questions, dynamics, and struggles bound up in efforts for a more ecologically sustainable, economically just, and politically democratic food economy.

Course Objectives

Knowing – To understand the economic logics, industrial processes, political dynamics, and environmental implications of our present food system, as well as the holistic perspectives and practices of the emerging alternative food movement.

Being – To deepen one's appreciation for the limits and needs of the good creation, the power of healthy interrelationships, and the mysteries gathered up in the food and fellowship we eat.

Doing – To gain basic practical knowledge about common land ownership, holistic gardening techniques, cooperative business models, integrative production design, and ecological food ministries.

Required Course Texts

Berry, Wendell. *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, Norman Wirzba, ed. Counterpoint, 2003 (ISBN: 9781593760076, Price \$12.74 at www.barnesandnoble.com).

Chappell, M. Jahi. *Beginning to End Hunger: Food and the Environment in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and Beyond*. University of California Press, 2018 (ISBN: 9780520293090, Price \$17.50 used at www.barnesandnoble.com).

Nembhard, Jessica Gordon. *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014 (ISBN: 978-0271062174, Price \$21.49 ebook at www.barnesandnoble.com).

Méndez-Montoya, Angel F. *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2012 (ISBN: 9780470674987, Price \$24.67 used at www.barnesandnoble.com).

Shiva, Vandana. *The Vandana Shiva Reader*. University Press of Kentucky, 2014 (ISBN: 978-0813153292, Price \$21.22 at www.barnesandnoble.com).

Wirzba, Norman. *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*. Cambridge University Press, 2011 (ISBN: 9780521146241, Price \$16.25 used at www.barnesandnoble.com).

Recommended Course Texts

Eberhart, Timothy. *Rooted and Grounded in Love: Holy Communion for the Whole Creation*. Wipf & Stock, 2017 (ISBN: 9781498209625, Price \$10.49 ebook at www.barnesandnoble.com).

Hemenway, Toby. *Gaia's Garden: A Guide to Home-Scale Permaculture, 2nd Edition*. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2009 (ISBN: 9781603580298, Price \$23.11 at www.barnesandnoble.com).

Course Requirements

1. Reading of all assigned literature.
2. Active participation in class discussions.
3. Submission of one substantive question per assigned reading per day. **Due May 20.**
4. Final Paper (12-15 pages). Framed throughout by a theology of food, provide a critical analysis of one area of our present agro-economic system as well as a constructive and practical vision for how people of faith might participate in the emergence of a new food economy. **Due June 4.**

Time Commitment

Those enrolled for full credit should expect to engage in reading for the course at least ***one month before*** class, setting aside the ***full week prior*** to class for final preparations, making time ***each night during*** the class to review assigned readings for the next day, and setting aside the ***full week after*** class for final paper research and writing.

Daily Schedule and Logistics

Class Time: Class each day will include a lecture, the discussion of assigned readings, the viewing of a documentary, a shared meal over the noon hour, and an afternoon field site visit.

Meals: We will incorporate additional course conversation and reflection over lunch. You will be responsible for either bringing or paying for your meals.

Site Visits: Class participants will be responsible for transportation to and from the sites. Site locations with addresses will be provided prior to the start of the course.

Attire: Feel free to dress comfortably for class. For a few of the site visits, we will be engaging in some garden/farm work at the respective locations, so you will want to dress appropriately (e.g. proper footwear, gloves, hats, sunscreen, etc.).

Final Grading

1. Class Participation – 40%
2. Reading Questions – 10%
3. Final Paper – 50%

Grading Criteria for Papers

1. You accomplish what the assignment asks of you.
2. Your paper offers a clear thesis statement, follows a logical organization, is well developed, and is free of grammatical and spelling errors.
3. You enter into intelligent, critical conversation with the course texts and lectures.
4. You demonstrate a depth of insight in your theological and ethical claims.

Grading Criteria for Class Participation

1. You attend every class period and are on time.
2. You demonstrate familiarity with the assigned readings for the day.
3. You listen carefully to the instructor and to your classmates.
4. You are an active participant in the class discussions.

Course Schedule

May 21: Jesus Christ Invites All: Land, Soil, and Access

Shiva, 55-69
Chappell, 34-65
Nembhard, 1-20
Berry, 35-64
Méndez Montoya, vi-44
Wirzba, 35-70

(Hemenway, 3-12, 71-95)
(Eberhart, 43-69)

Site Visit: Community Gardening, United Church of Rogers Park Community Garden, Rev. Wesley Dorr (ucrogerspark.org)

May 22: The Holy Spirit Joins Everyone Together: Community of Creation

Shiva, 113-138
Chappell, 66-100
Nembhard, 27-47
Berry 93-134, 144-158
Méndez Montoya, 45-76
Wirzba, 71-109

(Hemenway, 21-67)
(Eberhart, 70-95)

Site Visit: Ecological Design, Evanston EcoAcre Food Forest, Ken Kastman (edibleevanston.org/EdibleEvanston/dr)

May 23: The Father/Mother Nourishes Every Body: Economics for the Earth

Shiva, 239-276
Chappell, 101-131
Nembhard, 126-147
Berry, 207-235
Méndez Montoya, 77-112
Wirzba, 1-34, 110-143

(Hemenway, 96-172)
(Eberhart, 96-120)

Site Visit: Integrative Production, Plant Chicago Tour, Circular Economy Lab (plantchicago.org)

May 24: The Triune God Arranges Guests as Companions: Cooperative Power

Chappell, 132-174

Nembhard, 172-187

Berry, 195-204, 236-261

Wirzba, 144-178

(Hemenway, 175-229)

(Eberhart, 121-150)

Site Visit: Cooperative Enterprise, The Dill Pickle Food Coop, Sharon Hoyer (dillpickle.coop)

May 25: The Lord God Grants Permission to Begin: Feasting toward a New Creation

Shiva, 277-297

Chappell, 175-200

Nembhard, 213-237

Berry, 81-90, 293-327

Méndez Montoya, 113-160

Wirzba, 179-234

(Hemenway, 230-272)

(Eberhart, 151-179)

Site Visit: Food Justice, Trinity UCC George Washington Carver Garden at 423 W 95th, Paula Anglin (faithinplace.org/news/green-haven-trinity-united-church-christ)