This semester we will explore the nature of effective dialogue. Since it is not possible to isolate the art of dialogue from the larger framework of the communication process, we will study the variables needed to “create meaning”; this includes looking at all types of communication (intrapersonal, interpersonal/dyadic, public and mass mediated) and their components (source, message, receiver, channel, feedback, environment/context, interference and more).

This course is designed to help you become a more effective “communicator.” This statement means more than just speaking with others or hearing them speak; there is a significant difference between the physical act of “talking” and the deliberate act of “speaking;” likewise, the ability to physically “hear” another in no way guarantees that “listening” is occurring. To be artful and compassionate communicators, we must understand all the essential variables needed to create meaning and we must be committed to applying them every time we engage in dialogue.

This is a challenging but highly rewarding task; I ask that you approach the material with humility and without preconceived notions of your own communication strengths and weaknesses. The only way to communicate and share the Gospel with clarity, effectiveness and passion is by understanding ourselves (beliefs, values, attitudes) and our limitations (biases). Once we have identified those elements that form the core or our belief system, we can turn outward and attempt to communicate with compassion, sensitivity and ethos. Dialoguing and creating meaning in difficult situations and about complex and controversial issues is not easy but it is an essential skill if we are to carry to others the message of love for one another that is part of all religions.

**Instructor:** Fr. Donald Nesti, nesti@stthom.edu  Maureen Bacchi, LCSW, mobacchi@sbcglobal.net  
**Office:** Maureen Bacchi’s office number, 713-552-9559, ext 2, cell 713-594-5782.

**Required Text**
- Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*  (found online at w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/)

**Additional Course Readings** (I will bring copies of relevant material from these sources)
Attendance and participation is required at each class. Students who miss without consent of the instructors will have their grades adjusted accordingly. There will initially be 5-8 page integration paper due at mid-term. Expectations for the paper will be discussed in the preceding weeks. Students will be required to keep a one page journal entry citing the communication skills they practice between classes.

A final written presentation, to be delivered to the class, addressing some aspect of culture that, in the mind of the student, is calling for dialogue with the “good news” of the gospel. Students will identify why they chose a particular cultural value, practice or position; demonstrate their efforts to understand why this is a prized value, practice or position for another person and/or the culture; finally, describe what the conversation might sound like (verbatim) if they were to engage an individual or group in dialogue with the worldview and values of the gospel. An example of this dialogue with be provided by midterm.

The Art and Asceticism of Dialogue Course Outline

January 24: Introductions.
- Foundations for an understanding of our calling to develop the “art and asceticism” of Dialogue. Highlights of a Church moving towards dialogue:
  - Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis I.
  - How might we envision what “the dialogue between Catholic Faith and American culture” might look like?
- Four types of dialogue identified by the Church

January 31: Initial discussion of The Argument Culture
- Overview of Communication Skills necessary to engage in Dialogue (Egan)
- Dialogue as “Creating Flow” – summary of “On Dialogue” (Bohm)
- “Jesus, God’s Dialogue with Humanity.” A Scripture Reflection

February 7: Creating a Culture of Encounter, Accompaniment, Dialogue and Discernment.
- Reflections from Pope Francis
- Practice in Listening Skills practice

February 14: Receptivity in Dialogue – Contemplation and Centering
- Public Mutuality, Private Vulnerability (Parker Palmer)
- Practice in Listening skills

February 21: Spiritual Disciplines for Dialogue
- Intentionality, Initiating, Attentiveness, Receptivity, Emotional Maturity and Charity
- Practice in skill building
February 28: Self (worldview and values) Disclosure Skills

March 7: Discussion of *Words Made Flesh* (Ferder)
Practice in dialogue skills

March 14: *Spring Break*

March 28: Dialogue around worldviews in tension or conflict
Examples, Role plays, skill building

April 4: Dialogue around values and symbols in tension
Examples, Role plays, skills building

April 11: No Class Cenacle Annual Event - Homework will be assigned

April 18: Dialogue with Institutions (Anchors for the Common Good)
Examples from scripture and U.S. history

April 25: (Open for exploratory conversation and dialogue regarding the class)

May 2: Presentations

May 9: Presentations