

## Who is Responsible?

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# WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

During a time in which the lines between church, state, and social welfare blur, who is responsible for helping the vulnerable among us?

This is a fundamental question for Professor of Social Work Dr. Abby Foreman's course "Church, State, and Social Welfare." Examining historical moments, biblical teachings, and contemporary societal challenges, students consider the biblical call to care for our neighbor.

"I want students to come away with a better understanding of how they would answer the question of who's responsible for those in need around us," explains Foreman.

Foreman and her students explore both the impact of past decisions and the potential for future change. They study Reformed concepts like sphere sovereignty as well as Christian traditions like Lutheran and Anabaptist to understand perspectives on the relationship between the state, church, and society. They also analyze historical events such as the Orphan Train and Deinstitutionalization movements, which influenced approaches to social welfare. The group discusses religious freedom, including recent Supreme Court decisions regarding social service organizations.

"Understanding the historical context doesn't mean we have to stay with the



JAMIN VER VELDE '99

**Dr. Abby Foreman also serves as Dean for Social Sciences, where she provides leadership for programs such as criminal justice, education, political science, and business.**

same solutions; there could be creative ways to solve problems that have been around for a while," says Foreman.

In one assignment, Foreman asks students to propose an intervention that might change something they're interested in.

"For example, I had a business major who wanted to research the purpose of having tax exemptions for non-profits and charitable deductions," she says. "If you think about it, there's a message behind why we would

have that in place to benefit non-profits to do the work they do, and to incentivize people with resources to give."

Joya Breems, a senior community development major, appreciates being able to talk about the Reformed perspective of sphere sovereignty.

"It was interesting to consider in which areas, like relationships, the church excels, while in other areas, like providing tax credits and welfare programs, the government is better equipped," Breems says. "I love learning about how different systems interact, and this class helped me grow in both my professional knowledge of how our government welfare systems work and in my faith commitments to care for vulnerable people."

Ally Munsterman, a senior criminal



justice major, says that the course has allowed her to draw connections to how the government steps in and helps those who are vulnerable, while also balancing the church and state separation that the United States Constitution upholds.

"As someone going into law enforcement, I have found it valuable to see the extent of what assistance programs our government provides so that when I come in contact with those who are struggling, I will be better equipped to direct them to those who can assist them," adds Munsterman.

It's important for Christians to care for the vulnerable, says Breems. "I didn't realize before this class how important justice is to Levitical law through practices like the year of jubilee, gleaning, and sanctuary cities," she says. "Those commands continued into the New Testament through Jesus' example of loving and dining with the outcasts. As Christians, we are called to follow Jesus' example and be informed about the best ways to love these populations without causing more harm."

Foreman hopes students come away from the class recognizing that "they have agency to be able to change things."

"What I want them to recognize is that, even though things are a certain way right now, that's not how they have to be. It could be different. They could be integral in solving a problem in a new way. We have a lot of freedom in the United States through our non-profit structure that we can start new organizations, work within existing church ministries, and make change happen.

SARAH MOSS ('10)



JAMIN VER VELDE ('99)

"I also appreciate Dr. Rose's commitment to preparing us well, encouraging us, and of course making sure everything was organized," says Ella Jahn.

## FAITH, EXCELLENCE, AND A PRESTIGIOUS INVITATION

Being asked to perform at the Iowa Bandmasters Association (IBA)'s Annual Conference is a huge honor, says Dr. Onsby Rose, director of instrumental activities. "Performing at this conference is our championship; it is very prestigious to be selected to perform at the state conference."



Onsby Rose

And perform they did: days after the spring semester ended, members of the Wind Symphony piled into a bus at 5 a.m. and headed to Des Moines. They arrived early so they could set up and practice prior to their performance at 11 a.m.

Ella Jahn was one of the students who performed that day. "I appreciated the excitement each member in the band had knowing they individually contributed to us making it to this event. It's neat to see Dordt's music programs get better each year, with the current

ensemble building on the hard work of the members before."

"Over the past five years, the Wind Symphony has continued to gain musical depth and experience that qualifies them to be selected to perform at a conference of this magnitude," says Rose. "Through diligent work of both our students and music faculty, our students hold music in high regard and strive to put forth the same excellence as students at any state institution."

Only 10 percent of Dordt's Wind Symphony are music majors; the other 90 percent have chosen to major in other fields but are still playing at the same level as a music major.

"That is God's hand at work through our students and faculty," says Rose. "I am convinced we are able to achieve what we achieve because we place our trust in God for all that we do, and He leads the students and faculty to excellence."

SARAH MOSS ('10)