

TPM 618: Contemplative Listening
Virginia Theological Seminary, 2nd Quarter Fall 2012
Dr. Joyce Ann Mercer

Monday & Thursday, 9:00-10:20 am, Addison 109

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Course Description: This course serves as an introduction to one aspect of the ministry of pastoral care, concentrating on listening as a foundational skill for such ministry. We will learn and practice a simple process of listening attentively to others, grounded in spiritual/ecclesial practices of contemplative prayer. We will also explore the art of pastoral conversation as the general context for such listening. Course participants will focus on becoming more aware of their own styles/patterns of engaging others and of responding to difference, as a crucial aspect in the use of the self in pastoral care.

Course Objectives: Participants in this course will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of contemplative listening as self-emptying attention to the other for the other's sake, and be able to ground this understanding in Christian theological and spiritual tradition;
2. Utilize/integrate literature from the fields of pastoral care and Christian spirituality with the pastoral practice of contemplative listening, toward deepening the knowledge and practice of listening in ministry.
3. Learn a process called "contemplative listening" and demonstrate the ability to engage in this practice at an "advanced novice" level of skill as a pastoral care-giver & listener with multiple others individually and in small groups.
4. Develop beginning skills for pastoral assessment through listening.
5. Show a basic awareness of how dynamics of difference (gender, age, race, class, sexual orientation, religious tradition, etc.) may influence pastoral encounters and experiences of listening to various "others."
6. Attend more deeply to one's own life experience as a basic resource in pastoral care, deepening self-understanding.
7. Demonstrate appropriate use of boundaries, confidentiality, and respect for others in pastoral encounters; begin to monitor personal anxiety in the practice of pastoral conversation.

Expectations of Learners:

1. Attend class regularly, ready to participate in pairs and small group processes. This course involved experiential learning, and missing class

means missing practice/reflection on practice that cannot be re-cooped by borrowing someone's notes. Also, activities for this class are planned with particular groupings of participants, so your absence will affect the whole class. Please email Dr. Mercer before class if at all possible in the event of unavoidable absence due to emergencies/illness.

2. READ.
3. Come to class on time and prepared, meaning that reading and written assignments have been completed prior to the start of class to facilitate engaged participation. We will begin most class sessions with an experience of contemplative prayer, and if you are late it may disturb others.
4. Maintain confidentiality of contents of sharing.
5. Observe seminary policies on intellectual integrity/plagiarism: students are expected to provide appropriate citation for sources, including internet sources, in written materials.
6. Recognizing the power of language to both express and shape reality, students are expected to use gender inclusive language in speaking and writing about persons; and to utilize a variety of forms of speech referencing the Divine. See Handbook of Academic Regulations and Policies, pp. 25-26 for guidelines.

LAPTOPS AND CELLPHONES: This is a small class where face-to-face relationships are both our reality and in an important way, our subject matter--and we are meeting in a Wi-Fi environment, where temptations to wander off into cyberspace are rife. Laptop computers and Wi-Fi have transformed the way that we study, listen, write and know. But in a course like ours, laptop use can be distracting both to the instructor/students trying to make eye contact with you and to the computer-less student sitting next to you. We will be moving around the classroom in role plays, pairings, etc. and you may or may not be near an electrical outlet. So please, for the 85 minutes that we are together, go ahead and use your laptop for the work of the course, but please do not visit unrelated internet sites, and remember that we are all in this discussion together. If you have a cell phone, kindly set it to "stun" mode during class or turn it off.

Students with documented learning disabilities please make this known to the professor early so that appropriate plans may be made for addressing learning needs.

Assignments:

1) A short essay (no longer than three pages) answering the question, "What is Contemplative Listening and How Do I Practice It?" This essay should be your response to this question, engaging as resources the Burghardt article, the Johnson article, and Stairs (to date). Due electronically **November 8th**.

2) A brief written verbatim account of a pastoral conversation from your contemplative listening practice with a classmate, and your analysis of this account, written in conversation with course readings (a full description of this assignment to be given in a handout, posted on website). Due electronically **November 21nd by 5 pm.**

3) Each class member will write two 2-3 paragraph narrations of an experience, in preparation for sharing in a pair or small group in class.

(a) The first of these should be a recent experience (last few months) recounting a meaningful or significant event (**bring to class, Monday, Nov. 5**),

(b) the second should deal with an experience of grief, loss, or transition that has been important in your life's journey (**bring to class Monday, Dec. 3**).

4) Complete a "grief time line" (template and instructions are posted on class web site) to bring to class (date tba—this assignment is in relation to the session for which we will schedule a makeup time); following the class session, write a short essay (3-5 pages) reflecting on your experience as a contemplative listener, and as a narrator, in relation to grief and loss. This essay should engage and is due electronically on **Monday, Dec. 10** by midnight.

4) Final oral exam in small groups. [as arranged by registrar]

Texts:

A. Required Text Books:

1. Anderson, Herbert and Edward Foley (1998). *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

2. Holmes, Barbara A. (2004). *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

3. Stairs, Jean. (2000). *Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press.

B. Recommended texts from which we will use selections:

Merton, Thomas (1965). *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions.

C. Articles (see course website):

1. Burghardt, Walter. "Contemplation," *Church* (Winter 1989): 14-18.
2. Johnson, Jan. "Being Present to Others," *Weavings* 12 (Sept/Oct 1997): 27-34.
3. Audette, D. Elizabeth "Confidentiality in the Church: What the Pastor Knows and Tells," *The Christian Century*, Jan 28, 1998, Vol. 115:3, pp, 80-85.
4. Nesson, Craig I., "Confidentiality: Sacred Trust and Ethical Quagmire," in *Journal of Pastoral Care*, Winter 1998: Vol. 52, No. 4, pp. 349-357.
6. MacIntosh, Peggy, "'White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies,'" in *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*. Ed Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1995, pp 76-87.

D. Also Useful:

Justes, Emma (2006). *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press

Taylor, Charles W. (1991). *The Skilled Pastor: Counseling as the Practice of Theology*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press.

Butler, Sarah (1999). *Caring Ministry: A Contemplative Approach to Pastoral Care*. New York: Continuum. [BV4012 .B987 1999]

Purnell, Douglas (2003). *Conversation as Ministry: Stories and Strategies for Confident Caregiving*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press. BV 4011.3 P985 2003.

Schedule of Work:

Session 1: Thursday, Nov 1: Introduction to the course and each other

What the course involves—learning goals and expectations for participation; Defining contemplation; establishing frameworks for the relationship between "contemplation" and "listening" and their place in pastoral care; covenanting together. Introduction to the process of contemplative listening

Read: Jan Johnson, "Being Present to Others" (course web site)

Session 2: Monday, Nov. 5th Contemplation and Listening

Introducing the practice of Centering Prayer (a contemplative prayer form); debrief together. A theological basis for listening contemplatively.

Read: (A) Stairs pp. 1-72; (B) Burghardt, "Long, Loving Look at the Real" (article on course web site). (C) Thomas Keating, "Appendix: The Method of Centering Prayer", in Butler, Sarah, pp. 151-156.

**Practicing contemplative listening in roles of narrator, listener, observer—using your first written narration (2-3 paragraphs) of a recent experience as *preparation* for sharing with others. Debriefing.

Session 3: Thursday Nov. 8th

Contemplative listening practice and pastoral presence

Review of the steps leading to contemplative listening

Read: (A) Stairs, pp.107-153; (B) Merton, pp. 1-37, 239-244.

Also recommended: (1) Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Listening with the Heart*; (2) Merton, pp. 203-224

Session 4: Monday, Nov. 12th

Boundaries, Intimacy, Pastoral Self Care and Pastoral Care Deepening listening skills and capacities through contemplation, as we also attend to boundaries, intimacy, and self care within pastoral relationships—more practice.

Read: (1) Audette; (2) Nesson (3) Fortune [articles available on course website];

Session 5: Thursday, Nov. 15th

The power of story

Myth, parable, and contemplative listening.

Read: (A) Anderson and Foley, pp. ix-54; (B) Holmes, pp. 1-67

Recommended: Holmes, pp. 119-137

Session 6: Monday, Nov. 19th

Listening and Responding: Pastoral Conversation

Today we will not meet during our regular class time, in order to allow time (either during our class time, or as arranged) for class participants to hold "pastoral conversations" in pairs, toward the verbatim assignment.

There is no specific reading assignment for today. However, if you would like to read more about the nuts and bolts of engaging in pastoral conversation prior to your "verbatim meeting," the following are recommended/suggested resources:

Haugh, *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart*

Douglas Purnell, *Pastoral Conversation*

Thursday, Nov. 22 No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday

Session 7: Monday, Nov. 26th, Human beings and change

Listening contemplatively amidst change and continuity

Read: (A) Stairs, pp. 155-186; (B) Anderson and Foley, pp. 57-96; (C) Holmes, pp. 67-89

Session 8: _____Makeup Class for Thursday, Nov, 29**Listening and Loss: Contemplative Listening in Times of Grief**

Contemplative listening as accompaniment through loss; Praying aloud with and for others as part of listening. Transference and Counter transference.

Read: (A) Anderson and Foley, pp. 97-122; (B) Stairs pp. 73-106; (C) Holmes, pp. 90-118; .

**Bring completed grief time line to class*

Session 9: Monday, Dec. 3rd *Practicing contemplative listening in “3’s” (listener, narrator, observer), using 2nd written narration of experience of loss/grief/transition as preparation.

Session 10: Thursday, Dec. 6th: Crisis and Suffering

How contemplation contributes to listening in crisis situations; Sustainable pastoral care.

Read: (a) Cooper-White, Suffering (B) Stone, Crisis Ministry

Session 11: Monday, Dec. 10th

How do our various differences affect our capacity to listen well? How can contemplation assist listening in and through differences?

Read: (A) Peggy MacIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege”; (B) Holmes, pp. 119-137; (C) Swinton, “Disability, Ableism, and Disablism”

Recommended: Mercer, “Economics, Class, and Classism”

Session 12: Wednesday, Dec. 13th Prayer, Care, and Action

Contemplative Listening, Prayer, Action, and Liturgy

Read: (A) Stairs, pp. 187-202; (B) Anderson and Foley, pp. 125-186; (C) Holmes, pp. 138-186.

Final Exam: Tuesday, December 18th, 9:00-11:45 45 minutes per small group, times to be arranged.

A Brief Bibliography of Additional Resources:

Callahan, William R. (2008). *Noisy Contemplation: Deep Prayer for Busy People*. Brentwood, MD: Quixote Center.

Hunsinger, Debra van Deusen (2006). *Pray Without Ceasing: Revitalizing Pastoral Care*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

Nolasco, Rolf R. Jr. (2011). *The Contemplative Counselor: A Way of Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Patton, John. (2005). *Pastoral Care: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press.

Purnell, Douglas. (2003). *Conversation as Ministry: Stories and Strategies for Confident Caregiving*. Cleveland, Ohio, Pilgrim Press.

Savage, John (1996). *Listening and Caring Skills: A Guide for Groups and Leaders*. Nashville: Abingdon.