

**AT 34: CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY:
PRACTICING FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION**

Thursday 2:00-4:50pm
Addison 207 and as
directed

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Course Description: 1.5 credits

This course explores Christian spiritual practices in relation to the church's work of forgiveness and reconciliation. The healing of brokenness and binding up of the wounds of conflict, betrayal, oppression, and alienation, are central to the church's mission in the world. And yet, an often-neglected area of pastoral leadership is the engagement of resources from within Christian spirituality to invite and assist such healing. How can Christian prayer practices participate in processes of forgiveness and reconciliation where relationships are fractured interpersonally, between groups, within organizations, or in wider communities? The course is intended for persons who wish to deepen their own prayer practices as part of preparation for ministry, as well as for those interested in a basic introduction to the relevant literature from the academic field of Christian spirituality. It therefore combines experiential learning (engaging in prayer practices individually and in a group) with intellectual inquiry (through readings and critical reflection on practice).

Course Objectives: Participants in this course will:

1. Develop experiential knowledge of a variety of Christian spiritual practices by
 - Participating in specific practices during class time
 - Engaging in these practices outside of class at least two other times during the week
 - Reflecting on these experiences in writing and within a group, both in terms of one's own experience and in terms of implications for ministry

2. Articulate a theological understanding of the Christian spiritual practices engaged in the course and their relationship to forgiveness and reconciliation by
 - Participating in discussions in class
 - Writing in a journal weekly
 - Writing a final integrative essay

3. Demonstrate understanding of the dynamics of forgiveness and their implications for pastoral ministry by
 - Engaging in case study/role plays and other class activities
 - Writing a journal weekly in reflection about ministry implications

4. Communicate a coherent understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Expectations of Learners:

1. Attend class regularly, ready to participate in pairs and small group processes as narrator, responder, and observer. 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 a prayer/spiritual practice, 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.

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 and write. 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 participating in a variety of practices requiring different seating arrangements in the classroom, and you may or may not be near an electrical outlet. So please, for the brief time that we are together, go ahead and use your laptop if you, but please stay off the Net, 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.

Assignments:

1. Keep a journal reflecting on your practice in relation to the readings of the week. Journals should be via word processing/typed, double spaced paragraphs 12 point font and standard 1-inch margins. The process of the journaling is as follows:
 - a. Participate in the practice—once in class, at least once outside of class.
 - b. Reflect on your experience: what happened? What was challenging for you in this practice? What were the "gift moments" in your practice? Jot down some notes, a paragraph or two, to help you recall your experience.
 - c. Do the readings assigned for the day in connection with the practice. Take notes on the key points of the readings (you should be able to answer the question, "What does the author say in this chapter/book/essay?").

d. Think about the text in relation to your practice: how do they inform each other?

e. Write. (Each week's journal should be 1-2 pages.)

2. Commit to participation in the particular practice that is our focus for the week at least one other time in addition to our class time, and journal on that experience.

3. Write a final, integrative essay to conclude your journal. Your previous journal entries are the basis for this 3 page essay, in which you will articulate your understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation in their relationship to Christian spiritual practices.

Text Books: Required Texts for All to Read:

L Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1995.

Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation : Mission And Ministry In A Changing Social Order*. (Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books), 1992.

Dennis Linn, Matthew Linn, Sheila Linn, *Sleeping With Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press), 1995.

Gustave Reinenger, ed. *The Diversity of Centering Prayer*. (New York: Continuum), 1999.

Additional Recommended or Suggested Texts for Further Reading:

William Callahan, *Noisy Contemplation: Deep Prayer for Busy People* (Washington: Center of Concern), 2008.

Margaret Guenther, *The Practice of Prayer* (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley), 1998.

Arthur Holder, *Christian Spirituality: The Classics* (London/New York: Routledge), 2009.

Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 2008.

Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Herder and Herder), 1969.

Basel Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: Crossroads), 1998.

Schedule of Work:

Session I: Thursday, November 5th

Introduction to the course and one another:

Practice: Centering Prayer I

Reading: Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* Part I (pp. xi-98)
Philip Sheldrake, “What is Spirituality?” (Handout)

Session II: Thursday, November 12th

Practice: The Examen

Reading: Linn et. al., *Sleeping With Bread*;
Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* Part II pp. 101-204
McIntyre, “Accountability Before God: The Examen”, in Mass and O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Blackboard)

Recommended: Campolo and Darling, “Moving From Self-Awareness to God-Awareness,” Ch. 6 in *The God of Intimacy and Action* (Blackboard)
Bedolla and Totaro, “Ignatian Spirituality” in Mass and O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Blackboard)

Session III: Thursday, November 19

Practice: Service

**Our class session will take place at the Carpenter’s Shelter

Reading: Jones, Part 3 (pp. 207-302); Battle, selections TBA (Blackboard)
Recommended: Margaret Miles, “Gratitude and Responsibility: Service” from *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (Blackboard)

Session IV: Thursday, December 3

**Practices: Labyrinth/Pilgrimage
The Jesus Prayer**

Read: Callahan, *Noisy Contemplation* (selections TBA);

Craig Wright, “The Theology of the Maze,” in *The Maze and the Warrior: Symbols in Architecture, Theology and Music* (Blackboard)

Session V: Thursday, December 10

Practice: Centering Prayer II

Read: Reininger, ed. *The Diversity of Centering Prayer* (entire)
Schreiter, *Reconciliation* (pp. 1-62)

Session IV: Monday, December 14**Practice: Lectio Divina**

Read: Schreier, *Reconciliation* (pp. 63-82);

Peterson, *Eat This Book*, Chapters 6 & 7 (Blackboard) ; Guthrie, “Anglican Spirituality: An Ethos and Some Issues” in Collins, *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader* (Blackboard)