ECMN School for Formation

Syllabus: Christian Spirituality and Practices, October 9—November 27, 2017

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This course will provide an historical context for an experiential approach to different kinds and ways of praying within the Christian tradition, exploring both apophatic and cataphatic understandings of prayer. Origins and impacts of one’s image and concept of God, practical approaches to discernment, and models of faith styles will be discussed.

There will be one all-day gathering on either Saturday, November 4 (Faribault) or Saturday, November 11 (Park Rapids). Sign up for the Saturday gathering you will attend is during course registration.

Required Texts and Readings

Readings will be assigned as the course progresses. Suggestions will be made for supplemental reading. There are three required books for this course. Any versions of the first two texts are acceptable; these texts are widely available in many more modern versions than what I have listed.


Each student will be required to purchase a notebook or bound journal suitable for recording prayer experiences and significant learnings.
Course Goals

- Participants will become familiar with different traditions and methods of Christian prayer
- Participants will deepen their own spiritual practices and self-awareness
- Participants will gain an understanding of the historical origins underpinning different traditions of prayer and spiritual practices
- Participants will continue to develop and expand their understanding of discernment, personal and communal
- Participants will better understand the development of and impact that images and concepts of God have on one’s faith perspective
- Participants will be able to identify their own styles of faith, and understand how differences in faith styles can create barriers in communication
- Participants will be able to utilize different prayer traditions and methods to help deepen and enrich the spiritual journeys within their own faith communities

Method

This course will (hope to!) achieve the goals through:

1. On-line asynchronous (not live) lectures introducing historical background and specific methods of prayer, as well as other topics relevant to course goals.
2. Active practice and participation in daily prayer practices
3. Daily journaling of movements and experiences following times of prayer
4. Journaling of significant learnings
5. Participation in asynchronous on-line discussion forums to share thoughts, ideas, questions, etc.
6. Selected readings to supplement lecture material
7. In-person full day session, which will combine teaching in a retreat-format setting
8. Final reflection paper outlining a retreat experience one would offer to those in their own faith communities

Learning/Prayer Journals

Each participant will be required to have a notebook or journal suitable for making daily entries.

In the journal, you are to record:

1. Brief daily entries that include summaries of your experience during prayer. These do not need to be lengthy, but should note movements such as rushed, deep, consoling, bored, sense of connection to God, sense of distance from God, mind wandered to (fill
in the blank), resistance, etc. Did you notice anything significant while practicing your daily examen, etc.? If you did not enter into a formal period of prayer today, you might note that and give a brief reason (i.e. too busy, too tired, unexpected event).

2. Your prayer experiences also include liturgical practices! Try to pay particular attention during liturgy/Eucharist to your interior movements. Did you feel God’s presence during Eucharist? Mind wandered, bored, God distant, etc? Did you actively participate or were you more of an observer in the liturgy? Be sure to include notes in your journal about your interior movements and feelings during liturgy. Do you notice differences in your response to liturgy when at the altar, from when you are sitting with the congregation?

3. Entries of learnings and insights that are important for you to remember. Did you read or hear something that you would want to be able to return to in a month, year, etc.? Note that this is an effective way of retaining information that might otherwise be lost.

Personal note: I have on occasion returned to my learning journal from my training as a spiritual director in the early 1990’s, as well as my prayer journal begun almost 3 decades ago. Both have provided me with insights that have proved useful to my on-going spiritual journey.

4. You will NOT be required to turn in your journals; they are for your own benefit and can be useful in on-going discernment. I ask that you be faithful to the process throughout this brief period of time that the course will run. Fidelity to the journaling will also be foundational to your discernment process.

On-line Discussion Forums

You are asked to participate at least once/week in the asynchronous (not live) discussion forums by posting a comment, question, thought, etc. that has come up as a result of the lecture or reading material, or as a result of a particular prayer practice. You will also be expected to read other participant postings. Although you may respond to other postings, enter into a dialogue, etc., I would ask that you not criticize or critique one-another’s comments. The forum is meant to be a safe place to exchange thoughts and ideas, and all need to respect each other’s rights to their own views and opinions. Because a significant part of the spiritual journey includes self-awareness, it will be more helpful if you notice your own interior movements and reactions when reading other’s postings. Your journal provides you with a means of recording these reactions.
Schedule

Prior to listening to the first lecture: Listen to the welcome/introductory video on-line. Purchase journal/notebook (see above) and texts.

PLEASE READ AND REFER TO THE SYLLABUS; IT IS YOUR PRIMARY COURSE GUIDE.

Week 1: 10/9/2017—10/15/2017  Spirituality, Prayer, Ignatius of Loyola: Background, Examen

1. Listen to video lecture as early in week as possible.
2. Read “Comments about prayer” (on-line)
3. Read Examen (on-line)
4. Begin daily practice of Examen, followed by journaling of interior reactions and movements. Record consolations/desolations during the day, or during your prayer time (i.e. experiences of God’s presence, experiences of joy, peace, or movement towards God/experiences of movement away from God, lack of sense of love or joy or peace, sense of God’s absence). Be sure to include observations/reactions about other prayer experiences, including Eucharist, liturgy, etc.
5. Visit on-line forum to share thoughts, ideas, observations, or to ask a question. Read other participant postings, responding to others as you choose. This is your opportunity to enter into dialog with your class-mates about course content.
6. Record significant learnings in journal/notebook.

Recommended Books/Readings:


Week 2: 10/16/2017—10/22/2017  Our Image of God: Origins/Implications

1. Listen to video lecture as early in week as possible.
2. Continue daily practice of Examen/journaling. Be sure to include in your journal/notebook reflections about how you image God. What is your God-concept? What is your God-image?
3. Read article about our image of God.
4. Visit forum to post comments, and read other’s comments.

Recommended Books/Readings:


Week 3: 10/23/2017—10/29/2017  Faith Styles: Ways People Believe

1. Read Mabry’s Faith Styles
2. Listen to video lecture about developmental models of faith, and styles of faith
3. Identify the style of Faith with which you most closely identify. Similarities? Differences?
4. Continue practice of Examen, Journaling
5. Visit forum to post comments and to read other’s comments

Recommended Books/Readings:


Week 4: 10/30/2017—11/5/2017  Teresa of Avila and the 4 Waters

1. Listen to video lecture about Teresa of Avila
2. Read Teresa of Avila’s “The Four Waters” from the Book of Her Life
4. Visit forum to post comments and to read other’s comments.
Saturday, IN-PERSON Gathering (11/4/2017 in Faribault, or
11/11/2017 in Park Rapids)

Topics to include:

1. Benedictine spirituality, Lectio Divina
2. Discernment: Practical Application
3. Body prayer
4. Centering Prayer
5. Apophatic/Cataphatic Prayer: Discussion
6. Spiritual Direction
7. Faith-styles discussion
8. Questions and discussion about course: how have you experienced the course?

Note: Bring your journals to the Saturday gathering.

If you are able, read the Burough’s Article “Using Ignatian Discernment” in preparation for Saturday’s class.

Recommended books/readings:


**Week 5: 11/6/2017—11/12/2017  The Jesus Prayer: To Pray Without Ceasing, Orthodox Prayer: The Way of a Pilgrim**

1. Listen to video lecture about The Jesus Prayer
2. Continue daily Examen/journaling
3. Try the Jesus Prayer several times/day, or substitute your own mantra (for example, the Serenity Prayer: “God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” The invitation is to have a prayer mantra that you repeat throughout the day and evening as you are able. Journaling might include your initial thoughts at the beginning of the week about this assignment, and whether or not you noticed anything different about it at the end of the week (assuming you were faithful to the assignment!)
4. Read The Way of a Pilgrim. Note: This is considered a classic text in the Orthodox Tradition.
5. Begin consideration of writing final assignment, to outline a retreat experience one would present in their faith community. This assignment will be turned-in (deadline Tuesday, November 28, 2017). You may wish to view the week 7 video “Practical Suggestions for Facilitating a Retreat Experience” ahead of time.
6. Visit forum to post comments and to read other’s comments.

**Recommended Books/Readings:**


**Week 6: 11/13/2017—11/19/2017  Evelyn Underhill: Practical Mysticism**

1. Listen to video lecture about mysticism and Evelyn Underhill
2. Continue daily Examen/journaling
3. Read as much of Underhill’s book as you are able. Pay attention to your feelings, inner movements and reactions as you read. Be sure to include them in your journaling. What responses/reactions do you have to her comments about mystical prayer? Does anything you read resonate with your own experience?
4. If you haven’t yet started your final assignment, begin drafting a retreat experience for your faith community. Refer to week 7 for guidelines.
5. Visit forum to post comments/read other’s comments.

**Recommended Books/Readings:**

Visit the Evelyn Underhill Association Web site at evelynunderhill.org
Week 7: 11/20/2017—11/26/2017 Practical Suggestions for Facilitating a Retreat Experience

1. Listen to video lecture about considerations for facilitating a retreat
2. Review/read your journal entries throughout this course.
3. Design a retreat experience for your community that draws from, but is not limited to, learnings and experiences in this course. You only need to write it in outline form. What would you include? What is your goal, or hope?
4. Read retreat suggestion sheet for tips and ideas about putting together the retreat.
5. **Submit your retreat outline NO LATER THAN Tuesday, November 28, 2017.**
   No credit will be given for course completion until the final assignment has been received and evaluated. You must also have participated in the majority of forums to receive course credit.