

**Perspectives on Christian Spirituality**  
**MS 3XM3/6XM6**  
**CC/CS/CW/PS**  
**Winter Semester 2016**

**\*Those taking the course for MA or PhD credit will construct a different syllabus (in consultation with the instructor) that is in keeping with the direction of your individual course of research. Please contact the instructor to begin this process.**

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Location: TBA (various locations)  
Time: 4 Saturday's: Jan. 16, Feb.13, Mar.12,  
Apr. 2; 9:00 am - 4:00 pm.

### **Course Description**

The aim of this course is to help students cultivate an integrated Christian spirituality that brings together the pragmatic demands of "doing" ministry with the internal desire to be centered in Christ and to cultivate a growing intimacy with him. How can we cultivate a life that is rooted in Christ and provides us with the inner resources that enable us to live compassionately? Administrate with satisfaction? Enter into leisure joyfully? Lead with courage? Deal with conflict effectively? While the course will explore many different dimensions of Christian spirituality it will seek to stay deeply rooted in the realities of Christian ministry. While the course will address some issues unique to professional ministry, it will be broad enough in scope to benefit any Christian involved in ministering with others, and/or seeking to deepen his/her spiritual life.

### **Course Objectives**

#### **KNOWING**

1. Students will gain a broader understanding of Christian spirituality and how the practice of various spiritual disciplines helps to enable Christian spiritual formation.
2. Students will gain insight into the special challenges of living the spiritual life as a ministering person whether ministry is done professionally or as a layperson.
3. Students will develop an enhanced perspective on how to integrate their spiritual life with the realities and challenges of living in a Post-Christian culture.

#### **BEING**

1. Students will be given opportunity to reflect on their own approach to the spiritual life and how their spirituality can be integrated with their lives as ministering people.

2. Students will be given opportunity to reflect on the ways God is inviting them grow spiritually.

## **DOING**

1. Students will begin to consider ways to include new spiritual disciplines and perspectives into their daily lives and the work of ministry.

2. Students will develop a strategy for ongoing spiritual formation for their lives.

A core value of our class is that it is a “learning community,” designed to be a place where each member of the community can grow through positive affirmation and constructive input. We should all come to the community as people in process, open to be deconstructed and formed through our mutual learning experience.

As professor it is my responsibility to empower each class member as a learner by treating each student with respect and dignity. I come to position myself as a fellow learner in the community and to offer information, reflection, experience and questions for us to reflect on together. Further, it is my responsibility to give good evaluation and feedback to your thinking, both as you offer it to the class in our discussions and through written work so that your growth through this class can be maximized as a result of our collaboration.

As a responsible member of our learning community you will be expected to commit yourself to the class throughout the semester that we are together. This means that in our class interactions you will endeavor to treat all members of our class with respect and dignity. Your attendance is required as your presence is necessary for our community (that is our class) to function at an optimal level. Assignments should be handed in on time and in good order either in hard copy or electronically in a word document (please avoid pdf's if at all possible). All late assignments will be subject to a penalty of 2% for each day (including weekends) that it is late.

I am not only available but also welcome and enjoy connections with each of you outside class time. If you would like to meet together please feel free to make an appointment with me for a time that works for both of us.

### **\*Additional Course Fees**

An additional fee of \$35.00, payable to the College, will apply to cover the cost of the one day retreat and additional course fees.

## **Course Outline**

Each week we will meet in a different location (all within the Hamilton area) in order to explore the specific emphasis of that week's class. Week one we will meet at the Divinity College, week two we will meet in a downtown Hamilton location, week three we will meet at a local retreat center, week four we will meet in a local church. Weeks two through four will follow the same format each week;

- Book club: discussion of assigned text
- Lecture and discussion of that week's topic
- Experiential learning exercise and debriefing discussion
- Lecture, application, and discussion.

**Week One: Discovering the Dimensions and Diversity of Christian Spirituality (Jan.16)\*Class meets at McMaster Divinity College Rm# TBA**

**Week Two: Relational Spirituality: Finding God in the people and places we serve (Feb. 13) \*Meeting place TBA**

**Week Three: Personal Spirituality: Cultivating the habits of the inner life (Mar. 12)  
\*Meeting place TBA**

**Week Four: Spirituality in the Rhythm of Ministry: Finding God in the routine (Apr. 2)  
\*Meeting place TBA**

## **Required Texts**

- Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*. Harper Perennial, 2004.
- Henri Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery*. New York: Doubleday, 1981.
- Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

## Assignments

### 1. Reading Journals

Keep a journal for each book while reading the required course texts (three different journals in total). Each journal should record your response to and personal interaction with the book throughout your reading of it. These journals are designed to be personal reflections on the things that stand out to you in your reading, are helpful to you, salient points to remember, and spiritual insights you gained. Also, any ways that you did not find the book helpful or satisfying can also be included. Each journal should be personal and reflective on the content of the book. It should also demonstrate ways that the book engages and informs your particular specialization. Thus pastoral studies specialists should reflect on how the book informs pastoral practice, church in culture specialists should reflect on ways that the book engages with and/or critiques contemporary culture, worldview specialists should consider the ways the books inform worldview and counseling/spiritual care specialists should reflect on ways the book might inform these disciplines. The should be submitted in electronic format and are designed to help prepare you for the book club discussions that are part of weeks 2, 3 &4.

**Each journal should be aprox. 3-5 pages (double spaced), although length is flexible depending on the format used. Each journal (3 in total) is worth 10% (for a total of 30%) of the course grade.**

**Due Dates: Gilead (Feb.13, 2016)**

**The Genesee Diary (Mar. 12, 2016)**

**Working the Angles (Apr. 2, 2016)**

**\*\*Because of the class discussions that are connected to this assignment there will be no extensions on these projects. Late papers will gladly be accepted but no extensions will be granted after the due date and papers will be subject to the late penalty as specified in the syllabus.**

### 2. Book Club participation

At the beginning of class 2, 3& 4 a guided discussion on the assigned book for that particular week will take place. Further direction on preparing for these discussions will be given in class.

**Participation in the book club discussions will constitute 15% of the course grade.**

### 3. Engaging with a new spiritual discipline

Choose a classical spiritual discipline that you have not engaged in regularly throughout your life and begin practicing it on a regular basis. Write a paper that explores the history and practice of this discipline in Christian spirituality and also chronicles your own experience of practicing it in your own life. The paper should be part research on the discipline and part personal reflection on your own practice of it throughout the semester. Thus, provide some referenced research into the

background of the specific discipline that you have chosen and also provide reflection on your experience of practicing it over the course of the semester.

**The paper should be 8-10 pages in length (double spaced) and will constitute 25% of the final course grade. Due Date: Apr. 2, 2016. Developing an introductory theology of spirituality**

#### **4. Specialization Paper: An applicational Theology of Spirituality**

This first part of this paper (aprox. 7-9 pages) should explore the biblical, historical and theological foundations of Christian spirituality. What are some key biblical themes and texts? What does church tradition offer to our understanding of spiritual formation? What doctrines or attributes of God are key? What practices do you think are essential to spiritual formation? The second part of the paper should address the issue of how these foundational concepts of Christian spirituality relate to your specialization (aprox. 3-5 pages). The following ideas should be considered;

Church and Culture: What message does Christian spirituality have to offer to contemporary Canadian culture? How does a philosophy of Christian spirituality and its practices engage with contemporary culture and where do you see possible connections that Christian spirituality has to offer to the culture?

Counseling and Spiritual Care: How does Christian spirituality influence counseling and/or spiritual care? Articulate a cogent vision for the way that Christian spirituality and spiritual practices can/should be integrated into the work of counseling and care.

Christian Worldview: How does Christian spirituality differ from at least one other form of spirituality that is a part of the current Canadian landscape? Compare and contrast another religion and its vision for spiritual formation with that of Christian spirituality.

Pastoral Studies: How will your ministry be influenced and informed by Christian spiritual disciplines? Offer an overview of the role that spirituality will play in your ongoing ministry. Articulate a plan for your own ongoing spiritual development in light of the various demands of Christian ministry.

It is understood that this paper will not be comprehensive, but it should offer a good beginning engagement with the concept of Christian spirituality from a theological perspective and offer some beginning reflection on how it relates to your particular specialization.

**This paper should be 10-15 pages in length (double spaced) and is due on Apr. 11th, 2016. This paper will constitute 30% of the course grade.**

## **Additional notes:**

**Academic Dishonesty** – Academic dishonesty is a serious offence in the academic world that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on the transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the McMaster Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty located at

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>

**Style** - All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses

<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

**Inclusive Language** ~ McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV is a good example of the use of inclusive language. It is expected that all students will use inclusive language in all MDC assignments.

**Sexual Harassment** ~ Sexual harassment is a violation of the integrity of persons in the form of unsolicited, unwelcome, verbal or physical behavior, which discriminates on the basis of gender about a person's body, attire, gender, marital status or economic status. Among faculty, staff, and students, sexual harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.

**Disclaimer** ~ This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up until the first day of class.