

Dancing With Mortals: Ministry in the Face of Death and Grief

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Dates (Summer 2015): **Saturday May 23** **9:00-4:00**
 Saturday May 30 **9:00-4:00**
 Saturday June 6 **9:00-4:00**

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this world, to live is also to die. The reality of death dramatically informs our living, and yet it is a reality that we can tend to ignore until forced to consider it. It is vital for ministering persons to grapple with the reality of mortality, their own and others, and to develop means of caring equal to the complexity and mystery of death and grief. This course will explore the reality of death, and the nature of ministry to those who are dying and bereaved. Theological, spiritual, psychological, and ethical dimensions of death, dying and bereavement will be discussed. All with a view to preparing students to embrace more deeply the reality of their own mortality, and to equip them to care for others in the face of death and grief.

SPECIALIZATIONS

Pastoral Studies

As a Pastoral Studies course, students will be encouraged to consider the way in which mortality informs our life and ministry, and will be helped to develop ethics and pastoral skills, grounded in a Christian worldview, necessary for providing care to those facing death and bereavement.

Christian Worldview

As a Christian Worldview course, students will have the opportunity to explore death and grief from a Christian perspective, and will be encouraged to consider this perspective in relation to other contemporary worldviews of death and grief.

Church and Culture

As a Church and Culture course, students will be encouraged to assess North American culture(s) in relation to death and grief, and to consider contemporary issues related to death and dying from a Christian point of view.

Counselling and Spiritual Care

As a Counselling and Spiritual Care course, students will be helped to develop theological, spiritual, practical and ethical resources necessary for caring for those facing various situations of death and bereavement.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Knowing:

1. To deepen appreciation for various perspectives and attitudes towards death, dying and bereavement.
2. To help students develop a robust theological, psychological and spiritual perspective of death, dying and bereavement.
3. To facilitate reflection upon some of the ethical and legal issues that can arise in the face of death.
4. To foster an appreciation for the complexity and mystery of death and dying.

Being:

5. To help students gain a greater awareness of their own perspectives and attitudes towards death, dying and bereavement.
6. To facilitate the student's development of theological and spiritual resources for dying and bereavement.
7. To deepen the student's appreciation of their own mortality, and the way in which our mortality gives shape to the way we live and minister.

Doing:

8. To help students minister effectively with those who are dying and bereaved.
9. To equip students to use theological, psychological and spiritual resources appropriately in the care of those who are dying or bereaved.
10. To foster the development of ways of living and ministering that embraces the reality of mortality.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Callanan, Maggie, and Patricia Kelley. *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, needs, and Communications of the Dying*. New York: Bantam Books, 2008.

Kelley, Melissa M. *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Nolan, Steve. *Spiritual Care at the End of Life: The Chaplain as a 'Hopeful Presence.'* London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

Kellehear, Allan. *The Inner Life of the Dying Person*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Swinton, John, and Richard Payne eds. *Living Well and Dying Faithfully: Christian Practices for End-of-Life Care*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

Worden, J. William. *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*. 4th ed. New York: Springer, 2008.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- May 23** **9:00-12:00**
-Introductions
-The process of dying
-A theology of death
- 1:00-4:00**
-Human life as mortal life
-The implications of our mortality in terms of the Christian life and ministry
-A spirituality for ministry in the face of death and dying
- May 30** **9:00-12:00**
-Worldviews and Cultural perspectives
-Christian and alternate worldviews of death, dying and grief
-Cultural practices with respect to death dying and grief
-Acknowledging our personal worldview and attitudes and practices with respect to death, dying and grief
-Implications for care
- 1:00-4:00**
-The Life Cycle and death
-Death in the lives of children, adolescents and adults
-Difficult deaths (miscarriage, stillbirth, SIDS, abortion, suicide, sudden or violent death, prolonged death)
-Contemporary ethical issues (assisted death, withdrawal of care, advanced planning, DNR)
-Implications for care—walking with people in death and dying
- June 6** **9:00-12:00**
-Grief theory and the tasks of grieving
-Grieving and lament and depression
-Anticipatory, complicated and disenfranchised grief
-Gender and grief
-Implications for care—walking with people in grief
- 1:00-4:00**
-The congregation and care
-Bringing closure and end-of-life rituals
-Continuing to care
-Grief and self-care for the ministering person

COURSE REQUIREMENTS SUMMARY

1. Personal Reflection on Death, Dying and Grief			
Part 1:	3-5 pages	15 marks	Due: May 23
Part 2:	3-5 pages	15 marks	Due: July 4
2. Research Paper	10-12 pages	35 marks	Due: June 27
3. Interview or Case Study	14-16 pages	35 marks	Due: June 27

COURSE REQUIREMENTS DESCRIPTION

Assignment I: Personal Reflection on Death, Dying and Grief

This assignment consists of three parts. The overall aim is to aid personal awareness. To minister well with those who are dying or grieving, and/or to converse well with others about issues related to death and dying and grief, it is important to know ourselves and our own response to death and grief. The instructor will keep everything shared by the student confidential. Students are encouraged to only share that which they feel comfortable sharing.

Part 1:

Reflect upon your personal experiences with death and grief (or lack of experience with death and grief). How have these experiences have informed your perspectives of and attitudes towards death and grief? **Note this assignment is due the first day of class, as it is meant to represent your reflections prior to taking the course.**

The following questions are offered for the purpose of aiding the reflective process. Students may choose to answer these questions as a way of framing their response to this assignment, however they are not required to do so. Students are free to frame their response in a way that best expresses their personal awareness.

- What experiences have you or someone you know had with death and grief?
- How did these experiences affect you physically, emotionally, cognitively, and/or spiritually?
- Would you say your response was healthy and helpful? Would you have liked to have been able to respond differently?
- How did these experiences affect those around you, and how did their response to death and grief impact you?
- Would you say their response was healthy and helpful? Would you have liked them to have been able to respond differently?
- If you have had very little experience with death and grief, how has this fact shaped your attitudes and perspectives of death and grief?
- What fears do you have as you think about future experiences with death and grief?
- What hopes do you have as you think about future experiences with death and grief?

This paper should be 3-5 double-spaced pages, and will be worth 15% of the final course grade. Due May 23.

Part II:

Reflect upon the experience of participating in this course. How has this course challenged and/or confirmed your perspectives of and attitudes towards death and grief. How has this course challenged and/or confirmed your perspectives and attitudes towards life and ministry in the face of our mortality?

This paper should be 3-5 double-spaced pages, and will be worth 15% of the final course grade. Due July 4.

Assignment 2: Research Paper

Write a research paper on a topic of interest pertaining to death and/or grief. Topics are to be approved in advance by the instructor. Include material from course textbooks when relevant. Students are encouraged to choose a topic that pertains to their area of ministry specialization. Some possible topics are:

- The role of Christian practices in supporting people facing death and/or grief
- Cultural attitudes towards death and grief.
- Comparative worldviews of death and grief
- Grieving practices
- Psychological responses to grief
- Theological responses to grief
- Ethical issues in death and dying
- The needs of those facing a life-limiting illness
- Suffering in the dying process

This paper should be 10-12 double-spaced pages, and will be worth 35% of the final course grade. Due June 27.

Assignment 3 Interview or Case Study

The student will prepare an in-depth case study based either on the interview of a person who has lost a loved one, or a first person narrative about grief.

Option 1:

Suggested for students specializing in Pastoral Studies and Counselling and Spiritual Care.

Students may choose to interview a person or interact with a written first person account of grief that represents a similar worldview and/or cultural perspective to their own.

Suggested written accounts include:

- Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. New York: HarperOne, 2009.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Lament For A Son*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.

Option 2:

Suggested for those students specializing in the areas of Christian Worldview and Church and Culture.

Students may choose to interview a person or interact with a written first person account of grief that represents a similar worldview and/or cultural perspective to their own.

Suggested written accounts include:

- Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2007.
- Green, Karen. *Bough Down*. Los Angeles: Siglio, 2013.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. *A Widow's Story: A Memoir*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011
- Mathieu, David J. *Way of Wakan: Reflections on Lakota Spirituality and Grief*. Createspace, 2013.
- Wood, Dana. *Mama I'm Not Gone*. Victoria BC: Friesen, 2014

Description of Assignment

This is a culminating assignment. The student is expected to draw upon the course lectures, texts and their own research project in the writing of this paper.

Guidelines regarding the choice of a suitable interviewee, and ethical issues pertaining to the protection of the interviewee will be discussed in class.

1. Write a summary of the person's experience and relate it to what has been learned throughout the entirety of the course. Include an assessment of the person's worldview and cultural approach to dying, death and grief, as well as an assessment of where the person is in his/her grief process. Also draw upon the person's experience to critique the course material. Does the person's experience seem to fit with what has been learned and discussed in the course about the process of dying and bereavement? Did you find any contradictions between the material and the person's experience? To what might you attribute the contradictions—to a difference in worldview, culture, something else? (3-4 double-spaced pages)
2. Pay attention to and write about your own reactions, feelings, responses and/ or any surprises that were elicited by the interview or book. Did you have any strong reactions? Did you have a surprising lack of response? Did issues arise that touch on your own experience with death and grief? What do these responses tell you about how you might respond in future situations of ministry with the dying and bereaved. How will you care for yourself as in you seek to offer this kind of care? (2-3 double-spaced pages)
3. What are the major worldview and/or cultural themes raised by this person's story? What are the major theological and/or spiritual themes raised by this person's story? As best you can, describe the person's worldview of death and grief. Describe any spiritual issues and/or sources of hope that emerge. Describe your

own worldview and/or cultural perspective of death, dying and grief. What spiritual issues and/or sources of hope have been raised for you by the person's experience. In what ways is your worldview and cultural perspective and spiritual understandings similar to and/or different from theirs? (3-4 double-spaced pages)

4. Considering the similarities and differences between you and this person, how would you minister to them? Drawing upon all that you have learned in the course, about this person's experience, and about yourself, how would you seek to care for them? Conclude with some thoughts about what you still feel you need to learn in relation to death and grief and the care of those experiencing it. (2-3 double-spaced pages)

This paper should be 10-14 double-spaced pages, and will be worth 35% of the final course grade. Due June 27.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

TEXTBOOK PURCHASE

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

LATE POLICY

Assignments must be submitted on the day they are due before 11:59 pm via email in word or PDF format. Assignments submitted after the due date will be considered late and will incur a late penalty of 1% per day (not including weekends).

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence 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 one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~

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

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings 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 and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

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.

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 to and including the first day of class.