



McMaster Divinity College

MS 3XH3/5XH5 Counselling for the Dying and Grieving

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Spring/Summer 2023
May 13th, May 27th, June 10th
9:30am to 4:30pm

COURSE SYLLABUS

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

One of the most frequent roles for the pastor or pastoral counsellor is a call to aid those who anticipate death and those who have experienced loss at the death of someone else. This intensive course is a survey of topics related to counselling the dying and grieving. Class discussion, readings and written assignments are designed to challenge the student in exploring their own beliefs, attitudes and values on death and dying, to begin understanding the end-of-life challenges for themselves and others, and to focus on one particular area of interest in the field of thanatology and/or death and bereavement counselling. Subjects covered will include (but are not limited to): understanding psychological responses to loss, the processes of grieving vs. mourning, end of life issues and choices, MAID, helping children and adolescents, helping survivors of catastrophic loss and suicide (disenfranchised grief), Biblical and Spiritual resources for death and bereavement, handling questions of Theodicy, using Lament in mourning, and gender and cultural issues in bereavement.

3XH3 SPECIALIZATIONS: Counselling and Spiritual Care, Church and Culture, Christian World View

5XH5 Advanced Students: See requirements below.

Prerequisites: While previous coursework or experience in general counselling skills is preferred, it is not mandatory to benefit from this training. If no previous experience, reading the textbook by Norman H. Wright prior to the first class, particularly the first 3 chapters, in addition to the course readings below due before the first class, would be recommended as a general foundation in crisis counselling.

2. COURSE FORMAT

This intensive course is offered in synchronous, online videoconference format, scheduled on 3 full days of instruction every other Saturday in May and June (total 16 hours), supplemented by asynchronous recorded lectures and other videos (total 6 hours). Class sessions will include didactic instruction, video presentations, and small group and class discussion. Since student participation in live discussion is one modality to ensure we reach the goals of the course, therefore attendance and full participation in each of the three class days is required. Also because of the intensive format of this course, readings must be completed before class, including the first day of class.

3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Since this is a practical ministry course, the learning objectives for each specialization are the same.

Knowing

- To identify the experiences and adaptations commonly experienced in response to death and loss
- To identify the behaviors and to understand the deeper emotional dynamics involved in dying and mourning processes, both psychologically and spiritually
- To identify the specific goals, phases, and techniques unique to counselling those experiencing loss, the dying and the bereaved
- To distinguish the developmental, cultural, religious, and gender differences in how people may experience loss, dying and bereavement
- To distinguish the unique challenges and adaptations involved in doing grief counselling online or over the phone
- To become familiar with the ritual mourning practices of other cultures and religions

Being

- To identify our own attitudes, beliefs and values about loss, death and dying
- To explore and discuss for ourselves the important questions involved in coping with loss and with the end of life
- To increase our tolerance in hearing others' pain and being open to the experience of one's own pain.
- To increasingly practice empathic listening skills, effective responses, and appropriate support in all our relationships, especially when these have been affected by crisis and trauma

Doing

- To observe, identify and demonstrate helpful versus non helpful responses in end-of-life situations
- To develop skills in assessing an individual and family's emotional and spiritual well-being, and be able to differentiate normal grief reactions from complicated grief adaptations, and their place and influence in the mourning process
- To apply both psychological and theological perspectives in matching appropriate pastoral and counselling intervention to different types of loss and end of life crises, with different populations, and in different cultural, religious and practical contexts
- To identify and critically evaluate both psychological and spiritual resources (reading, spiritual disciplines, other activities) that can be recommended to the dying and the bereaved to help them in their process, distinguishing between theoretical approaches and evaluating efficacy and appropriateness
- To identify referrals for further psychological and medical help when necessary

4. COURSE TEXTS

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts should be purchased before the first day of class. Please contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

- A. **Required Textbooks:** You must order these before the first class! See reading assignments. These are available in Kindle/digital version from Amazon.

Worden, J. William, PhD. *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 5th ed. New York: Springer, 2018. (309 pp)

Mitchell, Kenneth R., & Anderson, Herbert. *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care*. Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1983. (167 pp).

- B. **Recommended Books:**

Wright, H. Norman. (2011). *The Complete Guide to Crisis and Trauma Counselling: What To Do and Say When It Matters Most*. Bethany House: Minneapolis, MN. (449 pp)

See A2L for extended bibliography of recommended books.

Please read the major written assignment and consider ordering the books you will need for your final project prior to the first class. You can use books on the recommended book list and/or find others on your own.

- C. **Additional Articles:**

To supplement lectures, additional articles are provided on the class website on A2L. Other articles possibly may be added depending on class interest and trajectory. Some are required (see schedule below) while others are posted on A2L as optional resources for the class.

5. INSTRUCTOR

Biography: Cathryn Harris, Ph.D. C.Psych. is an Assistant Professor at McMaster Divinity College. She is a Registered Psychologist (CPO) with competencies in both Clinical and Counselling Psychology, a Registered Marriage and Family Therapist, and Approved Supervisor in Marriage and Family Therapy with AAMFT and CAMFT, and a Certified EMDR Therapist. For 35 years, and currently fulltime, she has provided psychotherapy and psychological assessments to individuals, couples, families, children, and adolescents in outpatient private practice. She has also worked in inpatient and day treatment programs, and provided consultation to pastors, teachers, and business professionals on individual and organizational issues. She has been continuously involved in the training and supervision of Christian mental health professionals for over 30 years, beginning as Adjunct Professor at Rosemead School of Psychology and at Fuller Graduate Seminary for a short while, and for the longest time as Clinical Supervisor for a Christian counselling ministry that placed counselling interns in churches throughout Southern California. It has also been her privilege on a few occasions to provide counselling skills training specifically to Pastors, and enjoys being able to do more of

this at MDC. Dr. Harris has been married for over 30 years to another psychologist, and has one adult daughter who has managed to survive that experience.

Contact and Availability: Dr. Harris is available for one-on-one consultation briefly after class and during breaks on the day class is scheduled. Otherwise, students may contact her at drathryn@harris.com. Please make sure you put "Grief Counselling course" in the subject line of any email to rapidly identify your communication.

6. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Class Participation and Asynchronous Activities: All Students - 20% of grade

Attendance and participation in class discussions and activities is very important to the student's learning in this course. In addition, completion of personal reflection papers and other asynchronous activities, such as watching or reading 6 hours minimum of online, asynchronous video material and additional resources, is expected as part of your participation. A self-assessment is part of the evaluation for this part of the grade.

B. Assignments

1. **Personal Reflection Paper: All Students - 35% of grade – DUE June 10th (Last Class)**

A list of 20 reflection questions will be provided on the first day of class. Beginning that first week of the course, write a personal response each day, integrating your reflections with ongoing readings included in the course, and those that you are using to prepare your final paper. These are personal notes (they will be turned in for participation credit, but not read or graded). You should finish by June 3rd. At the conclusion of the three weeks, write a 6 to 10 page paper that integrates what you have discovered about grief in this reflective process about your personal life journey, your understanding of loss and death, and how this will influence your ministry to others and your own life. Include your beginning formulations about an integrative theology of loss and the approach you would like to take in this kind of practical ministry. Turn your paper in by the beginning of the last class on June 10th. Be sure to reference the specific sources used and reflected upon in MDC style (It is not necessary to footnote lecture material or list lectures in the Bibliography; it is enough to mention such in your text).

2. **Research Paper – Integrated Analytical Book Compilation and Review: All Masters level specializations – 45% of grade – DUE June 23rd**

This paper will allow you to focus in depth on the subtopic of your choice within thanatology and/or counselling for the dying and bereaved. You will survey and critically review books you can use in bibliotherapy with dying and grieving clients or congregants. Please review the section in Professor Mutter's paper on writing a Critical Book Review for general guidelines. (posted on A2L).

- i. Chose a subtopic and/or population of interest, or setting. You have in mind the varied situations you may have in a general pastoral ministry, or a hospital chaplaincy for example.
- ii. Research applicable self-help books (books designed to be read by the dying or bereaved) according to your interest. Choose the top 5 you might recommend to clients or congregants. **Choose what collection best suits your needs.** As appropriate for your chosen ministry context, try to include at least one or two that are NOT written for a Christian or religious reader, or possibly include some from other faith traditions, for example, if your ministry context is general chaplaincy. You can narrow down your review to a specific area if you like, for example, working with children and/or adolescents, working with terminal illness, working as Chaplain in a nursing home or Chaplain in a hospital. Or you can survey a wider variety as would prepare you for pastoral ministry in a church, by picking one for each population or situation you might serve.

Option: Choose one source that is a pastoral ministry textbook/resource (from the “For the Pastor, Counsellor and Therapist” section or similar titles) that is specific to your area of interest. See recommended book list or find on your own.

Please consult the Book List posted under "Content" for good recommendations, or if you have others in mind just check with me before you buy.

- iii. Read these books in *entirety*.
 - iv. Write a 15-20 page paper, reviewing the self-help books you have chosen. Write in professional style, from a third person perspective (not first person narrative), as if you were submitting this to a journal.
 1. Introduce: the subtopic or population you have chosen and its relevance for ministry.
 2. For *each* book:
 - a. List the book, in appropriate bibliographic reference style
 - b. *Summarize* the main themes and elements of the book.
 - c. *Analysis*: Discuss how it would address the needs of the dying or bereaved individual specifically. Eg. What mourning tasks does it address? What grief counselling principles does it aid? Demonstrate your understanding of grief and the mourning *process* as you have learned it in this course in your discussion, as well as *counselling* theory (but don't just summarize the course content!). You can reference a source or reference as context (with footnote reference), then highlight how this book illustrates something consistent or contradictory. Eg. “Although so-and-so¹ suggests there are 4 phases of mourning, this book suggests to the reader 6 phases which are”
- Option:** for a pastoral ministry resource, how does this book differ from or

¹ So and So

complement the main text of the course in terms of understanding the grieving process? What further details or emphases does it give that are helpful?

- d. *Integration*: Discuss its best application - what kind of client or congregant it would be most helpful for, how and when you would use it in your bereavement counselling (Eg. Early, middle, end stage of mourning) and why. Demonstrate your knowledge of the *counselling theory* you have learned in this course in your discussion (but don't just summarize the course content!). Option: for pastoral ministry resource, how does this book differ from or complement the main text of the course in terms of counselling theory? What further details or emphases does it give that are helpful?
 - e. *Critique and Summarize*: What are the most helpful, unique elements of the book? What is missing? Is there any situation in which it would be contraindicated/not helpful?
3. Summarize your review: In comparing and contrasting these books with each other, what stands out? Egs. What common themes did you notice? Which seem the most or least suited for particular situations? If you could only recommend one, which would it be?
 4. Bibliography: List reference sources you may have used to introduce your topic or in your critical review. You do NOT have to list the books in your review again here.

**3. Research Paper - Special Topic and Application to Ministry:
DPT /PhD Students – 45% of grade – DUE June 23rd**

This paper will allow you to focus in depth on the subtopic of your choice within thanatology and/or counselling for the dying and bereaved.

- i. Choose your topic: a specific population or ministry context, or an issue surveyed in the course. Examples of topics: Pastoral Care of the Dying Child, Bereavement Counselling after the Loss of a Child, Helping Adolescents in Parental Loss, Counselling Survivors of Suicide, Coping with death due to Domestic Violence, Coping with Loss of a Spouse, etc. PhD students may choose a theoretically oriented topic within thanatology (clinical or integrative, not just theological). *Approve topic with instructor before proceeding.*
- ii. Choose bibliography. Include in your reading at least one textbook or monograph specific to the topic (Eg. see recommended texts list), with an additional 7-10 professional articles from pastoral counselling, theological, or social science peer-reviewed journals. *Approve bibliography with instructor before proceeding.*

- iii. Write a 25-30 paper on this specific topic.

Theoretical Thanatology topics: Approve outline with instructor.

Clinical Application topics: Follow this general outline -

Assume the reader has a general knowledge of grief counselling principles. What else would they need to know specifically in addressing this context, population, or issue? Integrate your discussion with the course content to demonstrate your understanding of the grieving/mourning process and relevant counselling theory, but DO NOT simply summarize what is in the course content already. Rather, focus on what is unique or specific to this subtopic, drawing out the themes and issues that are of particular relevance, and comparing/ contrasting it to the general content and principles of the course. Eg. You can reference a source or reference as context (with footnote reference), then highlight how your research illustrates something consistent or contradictory. Eg. "Although so-and-so² suggests there are 4 phases of mourning, this survey suggests to the reader 6 phases which are³"

- A. **Introduction** – Definition of focus, relevance to ministry, demographics/epidemiology of population or problem focus, etc.
- B. **Assessment Issues** – Eg. What are the most important themes, questions or issues for individuals in this situation and/or at this stage of development? What does the typical grieving trajectory look like for this population? What specific risks might you need to screen for?
- C. **Applicable Interventions** – be specific and give your rationale, give a range of choices for different situations
- D. **Follow-up Considerations** – what are the elements of and an appropriate timeline for pastoral and/or clinical follow up
- E. **Resources for Referrals and Readings for the Client** – include at least 3 community resources and at least 3 books for the client or client's family
- F. **Bibliography**

7. COURSE ADMINISTRATION

College Style for Submission of Written Work: 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

<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

² So and So

³ Such and Such

Statement On 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 ~ <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>

Gender Inclusive Language: McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

Submission of Written Work:

Submit online through Avenue to Learn on class page. 50% loss in points for late submission.

Due: 1st assignment – Saturday May 29th 9am. Due: 2nd assignment – Friday June 11th 9am.

Cell Phone/Computer Policy: Students are to refrain from texting or conducting cell phone conversations while class is in session. Should you need to maintain contact with family members and/or your church or ministry, please turn off the ringer so as to avoid disturbing others; upon receipt of an urgent call, you may discretely excuse yourself from the classroom. The same policy applies to all computer generated sound schemes or other electronic announcement systems.

Copyright: *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.*

8. COURSE OUTLINE (see next page):

8. COURSE OUTLINE: LECTURES, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

(Due on class date indicated)

DAY ONE: Saturday May 13th - Understanding Grief, Mourning and the End of Life Process

Class Preparation Assignments: (see resources on A2L for Day One)

Read Worden – Introduction and Chs. 1 through 3 plus Ch. 5

(**For those with no previous training in counselling, please also **Read Wright**, Chs 1-3)

Read Syllabus

Read Handout on Small Group Practice

Schedule:

Lecture Topics:

9:30 am BEGIN **Introductions and Introduction to the Course & Assignments**

10:10 (5 min break)

10:15 **Basic Definitions and Concepts**

10:55 (10 min break)

11:05 **Understanding Normal Grief and Mourning**

11: 45 (5 min break)

11: 50 **Understanding Complicated Bereavement**
Questions

12:30 LUNCH – 60 mins

1:30 pm BEGIN **Understanding the Dying Person**

2:10 (5 min break)

2:15 **Making Meaning: Common Spiritual and Theological Questions**
of the Dying and Bereaved

2:55 (10 min break)

3:05 **Your Role in Grieving and Mourning: Presence**

3:30 Small group practice and processing

4:15 Debrief and wrap up

4:30 END

DAY TWO: Saturday May 27th - Clinical and Pastoral Intervention for the Dying and Bereaved

Class Preparation Assignments: (See A2L, Day Two)

Read Mitchell and Anderson – Chs. 1-5 should be completed by now

Read Worden – Chs. 4 and 6

Review/Read: (on A2L, see “Day 2” module):

1. “How do we serve the dying?”, web blog, for discussion in class
2. “Pastoral Care for the Terminally Ill”, web article, for discussion in class

Watch videos: posted on A2L

Schedule:

Topics:

9:30 am BEGIN **Check in: Reflections and Questions since Last Class**

10:10 (5 min break)

10:15 **Listening to Grief: Grief Counselling Principles**

10:55 (10 min break)

11:05 **Listening to Meaning: Understanding Spiritual Crises**

11:45 (5 min break)

11:50 **Encouraging Resiliency: Spiritual Interventions**

12:30 LUNCH – 60 mins

1:30 pm BEGIN **A Live Interview with a Front Line Worker (*tentative scheduling)**

2:10 (5 min break)

2:15 **Listening to other Languages: Pastoral Care in Diversity**

Listening through Technology: Telephone and Online Counselling

2:55 (10 min break)

3:05 **Case Study: Small Groups Discussion and Processing**

3:45 (5 min break)

3:50 **Class Discussion and Questions**

4:30 END

READING:

Saturday June 3rd – Mitchell & Anderson Chs. 6-8 and personal reflection questions should be completed by now; start preparing 1st Personal Reflection paper

DAY THREE: Saturday June 10th - Specific Situations and Populations

**** FIRST WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE – PERSONAL REFLECTION PAPER****

Class Preparation Assignments:

Read Worden – Chs. 7 through 9

Read Other Articles: (see A2L, “Articles” in “Day Three” module)

Abraham, E. & Wakem, M. (2021, unpublished) “*Medical Assistance in Dying*”. (17pp)

Dykstra, Robert C. (1990). “*Intimate Strangers: The Role of the Hospital Chaplain in Situations of Sudden Traumatic Loss.*” (18pp)

van Deusen Hunsinger, Deborah. (2011) “*Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral Care.*” (18pp)

Veritas Publications. “*End of Life Care: Ethical and Pastoral Issues*”, Bishops Committee on Bioethics. Ireland: 2002.

Watch videos: posted on A2L

Schedule:

Lecture Topics:

9:30 am	BEGIN	End of Life Choices: Life Sustaining Measures, Medical Assistance in Dying
10:10	(5 min break)	
10:15		An interview with a Front line worker: Handling End of Life Moments in a Hospital Setting (*tentative scheduling)
10:55	(10 min break)	
11:05		Disenfranchised Grief: Pregnancy Loss, Suicide, Other Situations
11: 45	(5 min break)	
11: 50		Class Discussion and Questions
 12:30 LUNCH – 60 mins		
1:30 pm	BEGIN	Traumatic Death: War, Catastrophe, Murder, Domestic Violence
2:10	(5 min break)	
2:15		Listening to other Languages: Mourning in Children and Adolescents
2:55	(15 min break)	
3:05		Self-care: The Effect of Loss on the Pastor and Pastoral Counsellor
3:45	(5 min break)	
3:50		Wrapping up: Course Evaluation, Class Discussion and Questions
4:30	END	

Friday June 23rd 8am: SECOND WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE – INDIVIDUAL INTEREST PAPER