



McMaster Divinity
College

PRACTICES OF FAITH

FALL 2023

PhD MS 6PF6 / DPT MS 5PF5 / MDiv, MTS MS 3PF3 (specializations CS/CW/PS)

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Mondays, 2:00 – 3:50 p.m.

In-Person Course (with Live Stream option) in MDC Boardroom
Course duration: Monday, September 11 to Monday, December 4, 2023.



Photo © Wendy J. Porter

A chipmunk invites you to stop and notice. And so does a practice of faith.
Have you stopped to notice the practices of faith in your own life and theological community?

Invitation to this Course

Practices of faith come to life when you stop to notice them and then begin to invest in them and develop them. Practices of faith are how we live with theological intentionality, whether in pastoral ministry, academic work, professions, life in community, or in our personal lives. Practices of faith are everyday practices that, when noticed and embraced, prompt us to live and minister more fully and effectively. They may not all initially appear to be “spiritual” practices until you develop them as such. They include the things that you do to be in communion with God or develop and maintain spiritual vitality, but they also include the ways we honour our bodies and souls, how we develop the capacity for wonder, and what it means to create space for God, for self, and for others. For instance, the practice of hospitality permeates our places of worship, home, community, and workplace. Some practices are evident in a crisis, such as those

that facilitate healing, or dying well. Some practices indwell our worship spaces but are not confined to them, such as prayer, singing and testimony, observing the Lord's Supper, Sabbath rest. Some influence how we treat God's creation, how we make decisions through gratitude and generosity, how we engage in active and attentive listening. We will focus on some of these in-class, while others will be your choice to investigate.

This course invites us into greater spiritual awareness and day-to-day intentionality in our practices, which should lead us towards deeper personal enrichment, wiser pastoral leadership, more compassionate interpersonal ministry, and greater integration of faith and practice, whether that is in the academy, ministry, other professions, or personal life.

PhD Students: You should be in touch with me in advance of the course starting date to work out relevant research degree-level assignments and further reading that are appropriate for you, your interests, and your program.

DPT Students: Consider how one or more practices of faith fit with your practice of ministry. Select a further course textbook that explores a practice of faith that is relevant to your ministry or work. If possible, shape assignments towards your practice. Contact me prior to or early in the term to discuss your ideas for the assignments.

MDiv and MTS Students: Consider how an assignment could contribute to your specialization. Contact me to discuss your ideas for the assignments.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week	Date	Themes and Meetings	Assignments
1	Monday, Sept 11	Introduction to Practices of Faith, Charting our Course, Skills for a Lifetime of Noticing	
2	Monday, Sept 18	Practices of Communion with God, and Honouring Bodies and Souls	student presentations
3	Monday, Sept 25	Practices of Wisdom and Wonder	student presentations
4	Monday, Oct 2	Practices of Creating Space (some avenues of hospitality)	student presentations
5	Monday, Oct 9	READING WEEK – NO CLASS	
6	Monday, Oct 16	Practices of Solitude and Community	student presentations
7	Monday, Oct 23	Practices of Spiritual Autobiography and Theological Reflection	student presentations
8	Monday, Oct 30	Practices of Active Listening (other avenues of hospitality)	student presentations
9	Monday, Nov 6	Practices of Gratitude and Generosity	student presentations
10	Monday, Nov 13	Practices of Prayer	student presentations
11	Monday, Nov 20	Honouring God's Creation, or Practices of Worship (TBA)	student presentations
12	Monday, Nov 27	Practices of Healing and Dying Well	student presentations
13	Monday, Dec 4	Final Papers or Projects	

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, through thoughtful engagement with the course content, reading, assignments, student interactions, and personal reflection on your own learning, you should...

Knowing:

- Recognize and begin to understand the significance of practices of faith in your life or community.
- Identify where gaps exist between your own faith and practice or in your community.
- Understand practical implications and value and the theological depth of a practice of faith through research or creative exploration.

Doing:

- Research or explore one specific practice of faith that is relevant for you in a class presentation and accompanying paper.
- Research or explore another practice that has potential long-term value for you in a final paper or project.
- Develop the art of conversing and leading learning about a practice of faith an in-class presentation and class engagement.
- Address one or more gaps that you have observed between your own faith and practice or in your community.

Being:

- Locate yourself in relation to practices of faith in your own life and be able to see how these are integral to who you are.
- Recognize the identity of your community in ways that they approach practices of faith.
- Celebrate and embrace one or more practices of faith that draw you and others towards God.

Required Textbooks

Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, eds. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.

Dorothy Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. 2nd edn. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Another textbook may be added prior to the beginning of the course, or opportunity for selection of a specific topic that is relevant for you.

In this course, we will focus on some of the practices featured in the Bass (ed.) book, *Practicing Our Faith*, as well as others as outlined in the tentative schedule above. Final assignments can draw on any relevant practice, but please consult the professor prior to making choices about this. Practices in the Bass book include:

Honouring the Body	Keeping Sabbath	Forgiveness
Hospitality	Testimony	Healing
Household Economics	Discernment	Dying Well
Saying Yes and Saying No	Shaping Communities	Singing Our Lives

Other practices addressed in this course include:

Spiritual Autobiography	Listening	Generosity
Theological Reflection	Practices of Worship	Gratitude

Brief Selected Bibliography

- Bass, Dorothy C. *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- Bass, Dorothy C., Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, and Christian B. Scharen. *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Blount, Brian K., and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds. *Making Room at the Table*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Hicks, Douglas A. *Money Enough: Everyday Practices for Living Faithfully in the Global Economy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010.
- Jipp, Joshua W. *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017.
- Kreider, Alan, and Eleanor Kreider. *Worship and Mission after Christendom*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2011.
- Liebert, Elizabeth. *The Soul of Discernment: A Spiritual Practice for Communities and Institutions*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015.
- Liebert, Elizabeth. *The Way of Discernment*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008.
- Long, Thomas G. *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Miller-McLemore, Bonnie J. *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as a Spiritual Practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- Miller, McLemore, Bonnie J. (ed.). *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. Chichester, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2012.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1975.
- Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley, 2000.
- Paulsell, Stephanie. *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002.
- Pohl, Christine. *Making Room*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Saliers, Don, and Emily Saliers. *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live: Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Whitmire, Catherine. *Plain Living: A Quaker Path to Simplicity*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin, 2001.
- Wolfteich, Claire E. *Lord, Have Mercy: Praying for Justice with Conviction and Humility*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006.

Assignments

Before the Course Begins:

1. Post a 1-2 minute intro video of yourself on Padlet. (Link will be provided to class members at the time.) Tell us your name and a few things about yourself so that we can get to know you. This video will remain available for later reference as well.
2. Think in advance about what you want to do for the two major assignments. Be in touch with the professor early about your ideas for these.

1. In-Class Presentation. 25%.

The in-class presentation is due according to sign-up schedule on the first week.

Choose one of the weeks of this course for an in-class presentation and class activity that fit the topic for that week. Depending on class size, you may work with a partner or do this solo. Present some aspect of the practice to the class and then engage the class in a meaningful activity or interaction. Timing for presentations and class involvement will be based on class size (to be determined in the first week) but expect approximately 20 minutes total (e.g. approximately 10 for presentation and 10 for class interaction).

All presentations, including any media, handouts, etc., must be accessible to students whether they are in-person and livestream. Class involvement must also accommodate both modalities.

2. Accompanying Paper. 30%.

Due 4 days after your in-class presentation, on the Friday of that same week, by midnight.

This paper will explore in a more formal way the same topic that you choose for your in-class presentation. Include more substantive reflection than is possible for a class presentation. Focus on both the practical aspect as well as theological or spiritual implications or nuances of this practice, including its relevance for and impact on a life of faith, including your own or your own community, etc. Consider the skills that are important in terms of noticing and learning from this practice of faith. You are welcome to integrate insights or observations that you gained from the presentation and class involvement.

Papers must follow MDC style. Include at least five to six good bibliographical sources.

Word length for paper: PhD: 4000 words; DPT: 3000 words
MDiv and MTS: 2000 words

3a. Final Paper or Project. 40%.

Due: Friday, November 24, 2023, by midnight.

Choose a different practice of faith that interests you and is relevant for you and/or for your community or ministry or profession (not the same one you chose for your presentation).

Papers must follow MDC style and draw on at least 12–15 credible sources. Explore practical aspects as well as theological or spiritual implications or nuances, relevance for and impact on a life of faith, a community of faith, etc. Consider the skills that are important in terms of noticing and learning from this practice of faith.

Projects must be well-designed and chosen early in the term in consultation with the professor. Projects must also be accompanied by a thoughtful reflection paper on what you learned in the process of doing your project. DPT reflection paper: 1000 words. MDiv/MTS reflection paper: 750 words. Use “I” language to describe what you have personally learned from this.

Risk Factor: Please consider taking some kind of personal risk in your work for this final assignment, whatever kind of qualified risk would be valuable for your own growth and development. It may be a creative risk, a risk in vulnerability, trying to improve your academic level of research, etc. Please mention any risk that you chose to take in your reflection on this assignment, if you choose a project, or as a note at the end of your paper.

Word Length for final paper: PhD: 6000 words; DPT: 5000 words
MTS and MDiv: 3000 words

Projects: to be determined with the professor as to content, quantity, mode of delivery, etc.

3b. Share Your Final Paper or Project. 5%.

Due: Monday, December 4.

In our final class gathering, present briefly and informally something about what you explored and learned through your final paper or project.

A Learning Community

My hope for each class is that we would be a mutual learning community, where each member of our community can grow through positive encouragement, constructive input, and active engagement with each another, with Scripture, with intellectual ideas, and with practice-based insights. I encourage you to take risks in what you explore, share, and submit, and I will try to foster an environment where we can trust each other with those outcomes. We are all people in process. Come with an openness to be challenged, reshaped, or re-formed, and to grow through our mutual learning experience. As professor, I hope to empower each of you to develop as much as you are willing to, and I aim to treat each of you with respect and dignity. I ask for this in return. I am a fellow learner in the community and I will attempt to offer information, reflection, experience, and questions for each of us to reflect on together, and to be hospitable in shaping an environment for each of your contributions. I welcome the responsibility and opportunity to give thoughtful evaluation and feedback to your thinking, both as you offer it to the class and through written work or projects, so that your growth through this class can be maximized as a result of our collaboration. As a responsible member of our learning community, I expect you to commit yourself to the class throughout the semester that we are together. This means not only that in our class interactions you will endeavor to treat each person with respect and dignity, but that you will come prepared to be fully engaged in and with the class. Your weekly participation is required and critical for our learning community to function at an optimal level.

I try to keep class correspondence to weekdays where possible, but I can be reached outside these times and certainly in a crisis. I welcome the opportunity to communicate with you by email or by appointment in an online meeting (Zoom).

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 <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

AODA

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

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, for example, the following: NRSV (2021), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

Bookstore

All required textbooks for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

Deadlines and Late Submission Penalty

Assignments are due on the date and by the time indicated, after which they will be considered late. Late assignments may be docked incrementally up to 2% per calendar day. Assignments are to be submitted electronically to Avenue to Learn or directly by email to the professor.

If there are any issues that could prevent your timely or successful completion of an assignment, please be in touch with the instructor immediately to discuss possible alternatives. Be proactive—do not leave this to the last minute.

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 as necessary.