

Course Number
Fall Intensive: "Beyond Candles: Public Rituals"
Fall, 2022

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FALL INTENSIVE

"Beyond Candles: Public Rituals"

Mondays, 9:30am – 4pm

September 12, October 10, November 7, December 5 and 19



Most rituals develop around a school shooting or an event like 9/11. Many involve a populist uprising and happen outside in a park or on a street. They are particularly common for the spiritual but not religious crowd or people who say they are none of the above or even post secular. By post secular they mean outside of organized religion or institutional religion.

These rituals are increasingly common. They often involve a chaplain or a religious leader who is called upon to “offer a prayer” or “say a little something.” The people in charge of the ritual will often warn such professionals not to say too much about “g-d.” Interfaith protocols are often stated in very basic ways. “Please don’t offend anyone.”

Enormous piles of stuffed animals created altars on city sidewalks after 9-11. People bring flowers and mark the graves of dozens of children who are shot. The flowers die; the stuffed animals get soggy. Eventually someone picks them up. They are ex cathedra, temples without walls or windows.

When a sudden disaster happens, populist rituals develop almost immediately. Consider January 6, 2021, or the murder of George Floyd or Eric Garner. People took to the streets and created rituals.

In the small town of Greenport near where I live on the eastern end of Long Island, nine people died from laced heroin in “bad drugs.” Immediately a kind of center near a carousel sprouted candles with the names of the chef and the other restaurant workers who died.

Similarly, when activists move into Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan to “Occupy,” they set up food trucks, porta potties and rituals. Notably, the occupy movement hired chaplains or people they called chaplains. The chaplains were a kind of spiritual police, keeping homeless people out of the Occupy camp while helping the mentally ill who were also protesting. The camp existed for hundreds of days and was finally cleaned out by the police at 4 AM one day. Populist rituals – and candles – proliferated.

There’s nothing wrong with candles. Simultaneously, at periods of great public crisis and gathering, often outside as opposed to in sanctuaries, the opportunity for learning and religious development is extraordinary. It is a time that religious people call Kairotic or special or Sabbath time. We are doing religious education on the street.

This course appreciates, analyzes, and prepares people for a more sophisticated understanding of the kind of religion the public wants and creates for itself. It is especially for chaplains and religious professionals and likewise for public ritual makers or democratic citizens themselves. You will leave a more experienced maker of rituals, one that uses ancient as well as contemporary methods.

The role of professional chaplains, as in paid certified chaplains, is little understood in these popular and populist rituals. However, you will rarely find one of these without clergy. Clergy will be asked to peripherally pray or preach or preach. We will be asked to wear our special clothing, our vestments and to show up. If we have a choir, we bring it, like Rev. Billy's "Stop Shopping choir."

Occupy had a service every Sunday at 6 PM on site. The Newtown Connecticut clergy were not just involved virtually in that disaster but ongoing. The disaster in the Charlestown church, when a gunman shot up a Bible study, and the congregants prayed for him later and say they forgave him, remains archetypical. The pope himself came to New York City on the 10th anniversary of 9-11 and led over 1000 clergy in a multi faith service to mark the event. A very famous prayer was given to open the service by Khalid Latif, a chaplain at NYU who is Muslim. That prayer will be studied as part of this course as emblematic of the best we can do in public rituals.

This course explores the role of chaplains and other religious leaders in populist ritual. It shows the delightful public necessity of interfaith life and living. It also examines what will be needed going forward in a post-secular world where more crises can be anticipated. Hurricanes, floods and other natural disasters will also be discussed as well as the occasional joyful gathering when a good thing happens.

September 12 9:30am – 4pm

Day One: Land Acknowledgements as New Forms of public prayer

On this first day, students will be assigned to read these five articles and to be prepared to discuss them on the first day of class. They will also be a writing exercise during the class in which students will write their own personal land acknowledgment and share it with each other.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/02/23/professors-land-acknowledgment-sparks-controversy>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/against-land-acknowledgements-native-american/620820/>

<https://www.opb.org/article/2021/12/08/as-land-acknowledgments-become-more-common-indigenous-people-grapple-with-next-steps/#:~:text=As%20land%20acknowledgments%20have%20become,in%20and%20of%20themselves%20as>

<https://theconversation.com/land-acknowledgments-meant-to-honor-indigenous-people-too-often-do-the-opposite-erasing-american-indians-and-sanitizing-history-instead-163787>

<https://www.hcn.org/issues/53.5/indigenous-affairs-perspective-so-you-want-to-acknowledge-the-land>

October 10 9:30am – 4pm

Day Two: “Father, would you say a few words”?

This day will involve the preparation of prayers and statements at public rituals and will teach how to pray in interfaith multi faith. A handout of prayers given at public rituals of all kinds will be given to the students. The assignment will be to write five different kinds of prayers, normally less than five sentences, more like a collect than a unison prayer.

November 7 9:30am – 4pm

Day Three: Spirit guides and populist chaplains

Students will watch Whoopi Goldberg in the movie *Star Trek* as she creates a role for herself in outer space. The assignment will be to come prepared to class to analyze how she does it and do use that analysis in a public ritual, one you have already participated in or can imagine participating in in the future. Additionally, we will study chaplains who are unique in their roles in businesses, movements and more.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guinan_\(Star_Trek\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guinan_(Star_Trek))

December 5 9:30am – 4pm

Day Four: Father Paul Mayer, *Wrestling with Angels*, the story of a life on the street, creating rituals.

Students will also watch an in-class video with Father Mayer, at age, 70, climbing over a fence during Occupy on Good Friday in order to open the gate for the protesters to move their encampment into a safer place. He was joined by several other bishops and clergy.

The assignment will be to point out the ritual aspects of this fence climbing in a two-page paper to be shared with the class. All written materials are due one week after the class and will be followed by a Canvas conversation where students read and comment on each other's work as though they were the professor. We will practice populism.

https://wipfandstock.com/9781725270114/wrestling-with-angels/?fbclid=IwAR1R4GUtbzVa4ufs3k7xMJyvwUISIX6SNWbYyV_NUqA0Jay4PV52B_ETz4Y

December 19 9:30am – 4pm

Day five: Putting it all together: defining ritual, defining public, defining lament, defining celebration.

The assignment will involve a review of “Joys and concerns,” a website that uses the spiritual practice of joys and concerns or prayer requests in an ordinary worship service as a template for advertising for social good.

Joys and Concerns is a showcase of ad campaigns for social good that were created by students in "Advertising for Social Good," a course taught by Jean Railla in the department of Media, Culture, and Communication at the Steinhardt School of New York University in the Fall of 2021.

Outcomes

Students will learn the life of a ritual in virtual as well as “real” space.

Review of additional public liturgies such as tying yellow ribbons around trees, the international nature of street altars, Guardian Angels in New York City, nightly cheer for healthcare workers around the world, the ringing of church bells, reviving gestures of solidarity from WWII, how parades are celebrations, public art to memorialize, and more.

Public liturgies also include the dedication of a new wing in a hospital or the falling of a 300 year old tree in the front yard of a church or a funeral for a college president or other “events” in the life of an institution that involve everyone.

Grades

- 20% of the grade, should the student choose a grade, will be class participation.
- 20% of the grade will be preparation for each of the five classes in the form of a two page learning summary or paper for the day, due one week after each class.
- 20% of the grade will be joining conversations on Canvas and reading other students learning summaries, due two weeks after each class. Students will be expected to learn from each other.
- 40% of the grade will be the final project:
- Design, implement and evaluate a public ritual, of your choosing and develop a “how to” list for doing public ritual, which includes beginning, middle and end. How will you follow up with participants? How will you engage participants at the outset? What will be the religious content or spiritual content of the experience? What impact did it have? How did you use social media or manage the press in alerting non-participants about what you did and why you did it? How did you “advertise” the event? The art of making a good flyer is like the art of making a good bulletin or order of service.
- Students can work in teams or separately.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Did you use candles?

Do you now own battery operated candles?

In other words, did you move beyond candles into a more sophisticated ritual experience?

Do you know what makes a good ritual?

How does a ritual improve over time?

Can you pray outside? What are the guidelines for prayer in public? Define multi-faith in prayer.

Would you know how to do different kinds of rituals as a result of being in the class and learning from each other and from the content and course materials?

MAC COURSE GOALS LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of taking this course, students should be able to:

- § To articulate a working knowledge of their **integrated model of intervention**
- § To develop **theological resources for addressing individual and communal experiences of the subject matter**
- § To gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter from **a variety of clinical and theoretical perspectives**
- § To **provide a working vocabulary and theological lens for addressing situations of the subject matter**
- § To assist students in navigating pressing issues from **multiple theological perspectives**
- § To provide students with the **necessary skills and vocabulary to do effective and passionate cross-disciplinary work**
- § To provide students with **resources and insights for developing constructive theological proposals** and reflections
- § To work more **effectively with care providers, through an ability to integrate the theological and the clinical discourses** of the subject matter
- § To **produce a constructive plan of care that will make a direct contribution to a particular community in which the subject matter is a central issue**

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Required Reading for Final project: Choose two from the list below and show evidence of understanding the main argument of the piece in your final project.

*Acknowledging Indigenous Peoples and Lands;
This Land is Their Land; and
This Land is My Land. Larry Beck*

Mantle of Mercy: Islamic Chaplaincy in North America.

Mantle of Mercy – Desk Copy

Review and analyze this prayer vigil:

Prayer Vigil Sat 2/26 1pm, honoring Christina Yuna Lee



Trevor Agatsuma

Sat, Feb 19, 8:45 PM (2 days ago)

to PLANchaplains

NYU PLAN SLAs,

As you have probably been feeling or seeing in others. This latest tragedy has shaken a lot of people. So we are holding a prayer vigil in response the murder of Christina Yuna Lee. This is hosted by a newly formed group called the Coalition for AAPI Churches. One of the Coalition members knows a childhood friend of Christina's who is helping to host. This friend said her family is fairly private so that is why her name is not on the flyer.

We aim for this to be a time of lament, remembrance, healing and hope. Rallies have their place but this gathering will stay in the spirit of a vigil. We hope this can be accessible for everyone but this will be a time of looking to God who is Emmanuel.

Please come and feel free to invite your fellowships.

Prayer Vigil for Our Sisters

Saturday February 26th 1pm

Grand St Basketball Courts, Sara D Roosevelt Park

Black Spirituals as Poetry and Resistance

These songs — the oldest musical expressions of the slave experience in this country — still have a lot to teach us about how we think about death and dignity.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/05/t-magazine/black-spirituals-poetry-resistance.html?smid=em-share>

Restorative Circles get over the secular/spiritual binary. Vassar.

The Three Elements of Ritual by Todd Bison

Beyond Climate Grief: Cultivating Aliveness in A Time of Change

Hosted by The Cincy Hive

Brock, Rita Nakashima and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

Disaster Spiritual Care: Practical Clergy Response to Community, Regional and National Tragedy. Ed. Williard W.C. Ashley Sr. and Stephen B. Roberts. 2nd ed. Nashville: Skylight Paths, 2017.

Everly, George S. and Jeffrey M. Lating. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Psychological First Aid* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), Kindle edition.

Mehr-Muska, Tracy W. *Weathering the Storm: Simple Strategies for Being Peaceful and Prepared*. Searcy, AK: Resource Publications, 2019.

Mosher, Lucinda. *Personhood, Illness and Death in America's Multifaith Neighborhoods: A Practical Guide*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018.

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How is a public ritual a clearing?

“The Clearing” by Martha Postlethwaite.

Do not try to save

the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create
a clearing
in the dense forest
of your life
and wait there,
Patiently,
until the song
that is your life
falls into your own cupped hands and you
recognize it and greet it.
Only then will you know how to give yourself
to this world
so worthy of rescue.