



**Hartford International**  
UNIVERSITY FOR RELIGION & PEACE

**Contemplative Prayer Practices (AM-521)**  
A Hybrid Synchronous Course  
Fall Semester 2022  
**SYLLABUS**

Instructor:

Lisa E. Dahill, Ph.D.

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Cell: 614-338-8130

Office Hours:

To Be Determined

Meeting Dates and Times:

Tuesdays, 4:00-6:50pm

Course Format:

Hybrid Synchronous

Course Description:

This course introduces students to a range of practices of contemplative prayer, centering in a broadly ecological context: both Earth itself as our shared creaturely home and the particular places where students live. Students will engage in experiential elements that are adaptable to the students' own tradition and/or context, including traditional forms like centering/mindfulness, Ignatian Examen, and *lectio divina* as well as social justice/feminist, land-based, shadow- and dream-based practices. Students will have the opportunity to research and present to the class a prayer practice of their own tradition, context, or creative innovation as well.

Course Objectives (*correlating assignment numbers noted after each*): That students

- 1) attend to their relationship with God/the sacred/mystery/Earth's wildness and grow in their capacity both to experience this relationship and to articulate their experience (#1, 2, 3);
- 2) experience new contemplative prayer forms exploring a range of styles, senses, and modes of engagement (#1);
- 3) grow in the practice of contemplative listening: to the holy, to their own experience, and to others both human and not (#1, #3);
- 4) explore three primary strands of prayer and spirituality (apophatic, kataphatic, engaged/worldly), in order to deepen their own preferred approach/es and to experience more fully those less familiar to them (#1, #3);
- 5) deepen knowledge of a particular prayer practice and its contextual grounding and gain experience presenting this prayer form to others (#4).

## Required Texts:

Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet*. New York: HarperOne, 2021. 978-0062954794.

## **Readings in Canvas (noted with \*)**, including selections from the list below (or similar):

- Dahill, Lisa E. *Truly Present: Practicing Prayer in the Liturgy*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.
- Holmes, Barbara. *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, second edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018.
- Kaza, Stephanie, ed. *A Wild Love for the World: Joanna Macy and the Work of Our Time*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2020. 978-1611807950.
- Loorz, Victoria. *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred*. Minneapolis: Broadleaf, 2022.
- Macy, Joanna, and Molly Brown. *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Connect Our Lives, our World*. Gabriola, BC: New Society Publishers, 1998.
- Plante, Thomas G., ed. *Contemplative Practices in Action: Spirituality, Meditation, and Health*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010.
- Rohr, Richard. *Immortal Diamond: The Search for the True Self*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013.
- Vaughn-Lee, Llewellyn, ed. *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, second edition. Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2016.
- Zweig, Connie, and Jeremiah Abrams, eds., *Meeting the Shadow: The Hidden Power of the Dark Side of Human Nature*. New York: Penguin/Tarcher, 1991.

## Assignments and Means of Assessment:

- 1) Attendance and Participation in class, in small group work, and in personal engagement with the weekly readings and practices throughout the semester. This component has to do with presence to the course process and authentic engagement with readings, discussions, daily prayer practices, and one another. The small group time each week will include rotating leadership of a shared contemplative listening process. **20% of grade.**
- 2) Narration of an Experience of God/holy mystery/wildness, due on September 20. Write about a time you experienced a sense of divine presence. Describe where you were (using as many concrete sensory details as possible), who if anyone was with you, what was going on, what of God/mystery you experienced, what you felt in response. Length = 5 minutes *spoken aloud*. To be read out loud in your small group in class on 9/20 and turned in. **10% of grade.**
- 3) Blogs: 10 blog posts (500 words each), due on Sunday by 11:59pm in the weeks they are assigned (see syllabus). This writing is meant as an ongoing *examen* of experience with class time, prayer practices through the week, and readings as they unfold. Simply reflect on what stirs in you, attending to all three of these aspects of the course each week. Rubric will be provided. These entries will be assessed not on the *content* of any spiritual experience described (or its absence!) but on your capacity to articulate your experience with the practices and your encounters with readings and classmates. Thoughtful, well-written entries showing honest engagement with your limits, shadows, and gifts as well as openness to growth and insight are my hope. **40% of grade.**

4) Research and Class Presentation (30% of grade):

- a. **Topic:** Choose a spiritual practice of your tradition (your religious or spiritual community) and/or your *context* (your particular congregation or denomination within that larger tradition, your place of ministry, your city or town or language/ethnicity/culture in a place, your watershed or larger bioregion, etc.). The spiritual practice you choose can be either
- i. an existing practice you would like to know more about, with some relation to your ministry context (*especially MAP*) and/or your scholarly journey (*especially MA and Ph.D.*)
    - Example: learn about the development of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* and their contemporary use in prison contexts
  - ii. *or* a contemplative practice you sense the need for, that you would like to create
    - Example: design a weekly nature-immersion program for the women struggling with PTSD you work with

Please schedule a conversation with the professor to take place **by September 20, 2022**, to discuss your proposed topic: **1/6 of project grade or 5% of course grade.**

- b. **Research:** Conduct research using scholarly and, if relevant, non-scholarly sources to learn more about your topic. In the above examples, you would research i) studies of the spirituality of the Ignatian *Exercises* and of their use among incarcerated populations; or ii) impact of Nature Deficit Disorder and the healing effects of nature immersion in relation to trauma. Create a bibliography (rubric will be provided) of eight high-quality sources [*Ph.D. students: twelve total*], at least four of them scholarly [*Ph.D. students: at least ten scholarly sources*], **due October 25, 2022: 1/3 of project grade or 10% of course grade.**
- c. **Class Presentation:** Create a 15-minute presentation to be given in class at the end of the semester. This presentation will show us what you learned in your research (perhaps, if applicable, also invite us to experience something of this topic), as well as showing its significance for your present or possible ministry focus and/or your scholarly journey. Rubric will be provided. Note that the rubrics for options i and ii above will be slightly different to recognize the relatively stronger scholarly focus of i and the explicit creative dimension included in ii. *Note too that this is my first course here at HIU and I will be learning with you this semester. I anticipate everyone presenting will get an A on this piece of the course (assuming devoted work on your project) since I am still figuring out how to frame this assignment in this new teaching context: I therefore want to make it as low-stress and fun or collaborative as possible for you. We will discuss these questions together as we go along and may come up with better ways of framing the assignment.* Regardless of which option you choose, see how creatively or interactively you can present what you have learned. Give us a taste of your subject – see if you can help us experience how it works or why it matters. These presentations will take place in Weeks 12 and 13 of the semester: **November 29 and December 6.** Please submit your PowerPoint or Prezi via Canvas by the beginning of the class session at which you are presenting. **1/2 of project grade or 15% of course grade.**

## CALENDAR

WEEK	TOPIC	READINGS OR DUE DATES (at the <i>beginning</i> of class that week)
Week 1: <i>Tuesday, September 6, 2022</i>	<b>Introduction to Course, Topic, and One Another</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Examen</i>	<i>No reading due in advance</i>
Week 2: <i>September 13, 2022</i>	<b>Ecological and Social Contexts: Our Larger Home</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Long, Loving Look at the Real</i>	<b>Blog 1 due</b>  <u>Readings for Week 2:</u> TBD
Week 3: <i>September 20, 2022</i>	<b>The Sacred</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Lectio Divina</i>	<b>Experience of [God] Narration due</b>  <i>No reading this week</i>
Week 4: <i>September 27, 2022</i>  <i>Week of Rosh Hashanah</i>	<b>Holy Words</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Reading the Book of Nature</i>	<b>Blog 2 due</b>  <u>Readings for Week 4:</u> TBD
Week 5: <i>October 4, 2022</i>  <i>Week of Yom Kippur</i>	<b>Holy Ground</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Silence and Centering/Meditation</i>	<b>Blog 3 due</b>  <b>RESEARCH TOPIC conversations due!</b>  <u>Readings for Week 5:</u> TBD
Week 6: <i>October 11, 2022</i>	<b>Silence</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Walking Meditation/Labyrinth</i>	<b>Blog 4 due</b>  <u>Readings for Week 6:</u> TBD
Week 7: <i>October 18, 2022</i>	<b>Pilgrimage/Journey</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Outdoor Play <u>or</u> Listening to Bodies (of all kinds)</i>	<b>Blog 5 due</b>  <u>Readings for Week 7:</u> TBD

Week 8: <i>October 25, 2022</i>	<b>Body/Healing</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Collage</i>	<b>Blog 6 due</b>  <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY due!</b>  <u>Readings for Week 8:</u> TBD
Week 9: <i>November 1, 2022</i>	<b>Imagination/Vision</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Tracing Your Desires</i>	<b>Blog 7 due</b>  <u>Readings for Week 9:</u> TBD
Week 10: <i>November 8, 2022</i>	<b>Desire/Justice</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Dream Work</i>	<b>Blog 8 due</b>  <u>Readings for Week 10:</u> TBD
Week 11: <i>November 15, 2022</i>	<b>Shadow/Discernment</b>  <i>Practice for the week between classes: Gratitude</i>	<b>Blog 9 due</b>  <u>Readings for Week 11:</u> TBD
THANKGIVING WEEK		
Week 12: <i>November 29, 2022</i>  <i>Hanukkah and First week of Advent</i>	Presentations 1	<b><i>Class Presentations due this week or next!</i></b>
Week 13: <i>December 6, 2022</i>  <i>Second week of Advent</i>	Presentations 2	
Week 14: <i>December 13, 2022</i>  <i>Third week of Advent</i>	Final Wrap-Up	Blog 10 due

*I look forward to welcoming you to this course  
and to the growth and insight we will experience together*