



Hartford International
UNIVERSITY FOR RELIGION & PEACE

Eco-Care: Chaplaincy in a More-than-Human World (ET-550) Fall Semester 2025

HIU Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land where we learn, teach, dialogue, and pray, and where some of us are blessed to live, is sacred. We pay respect to the traditional custodians of the land where the city of Hartford is situated. We honor their memory and hope for their future. We aspire to uphold our responsibilities on this land and to work for peace in this world, in accordance with their example.

Instructor:

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Class Meeting Dates and Times:

Wednesdays 5-7pm, in 77 Sherman Street Building, and via Zoom:

<https://hartfordinternational.zoom.us/j/92412106495>

Course Format:

Hybrid Synchronous

Course Description:

This course invites students into the emerging field of eco-care: the practice of chaplaincy in relation to ecology and the human relationship to place, other creatures, the more-than-human world, and the ecological threats endangering our shared future. This course will include attention to ecological literacy, climate change, climate- and eco-grief, eco-psychology, Nature Deficit Disorder, place-based forms of soul work and healing practices; wilderness rites of passage and other forms of ritual; human environmental and climate justice; and interspecies relationships. Student projects will center in one's own place and its creatures and needs and/or in some aspect of human need in relation to these daunting challenges.

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

- 1) attend to their relationship with God/the sacred/mystery and with Earth's creatures and wildness and in their capacity both to experience these relations and to articulate their experience (#1-3);

- 2) grow in awareness of emerging forms of spiritual care to, with, or in relation to ecological questions, non-human creatures, and ecosystems (#3, 4);
- 3) become familiar with key concepts in climate science and policy, relevant ecological science and policy for their home bioregion, eco-psychology, and strategies of place-based community development and resilience as these inform the crises, tipping points, and needs we face today (#3,4);
- 4) grow in skills of spiritual care in light of the needs noted above, including practices of contemplative listening to the holy, to the world and one's own experience, and to others both human and not, and developing forms of ritual or practice adapted to and emergent from these relationships (#1, 3, 4);
- 5) deepen knowledge of a particular form of need today and design a strategy of response to that need (#4).

Course Learning Outcomes (referring to 2017 BCCI Common Qualifications):

IIP 2: Incorporate a working knowledge of psychological and sociological disciplines and religious beliefs and practices in the provision of spiritual care.

IIP 3: Incorporate the spiritual and emotional dimensions of human development into one's practice of care.

IIP 6: Articulate how primary research and research literature inform the profession of chaplaincy and one's spiritual care practice.

PIC 3: Attend to one's own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

PIC 6: Advocate for the persons in one's care.

PPS 1: Establish, deepen and conclude professional spiritual care relationships with sensitivity, openness, and respect

Plus one or more of the following, depending on the focus of one's research project:

PPS 5: Provide spiritual care to persons experiencing loss and grief.

PPS 6: Provide religious/spiritual resources appropriate to the care recipients, families, and staff.

PPS 7: Develop, coordinate, and facilitate public worship/spiritual practices appropriate to diverse settings and needs.

PPS 8: Facilitate theological/spiritual reflection for those in one's care practice.

From the Doctor of Ministry learning outcomes, this course fulfills the following (material in square brackets added):

- Demonstrate knowledge of the larger social, cultural, **[and ecological]** dynamics affecting religious life and organizations in the 21st century and their implications for ministry settings.
- [Prepare for] a substantive and relevant ministry project that analyzes the religious, social, **[and ecological]** dimensions of real-world contexts and proposes new approaches to religious leadership that makes a substantive contribution to their area of ministry, chaplaincy, or other vocational concentration.

Required Texts: *Both are available via the DTL (Digital Theological Library)*

Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* (Gabriola Island, BC: New World Publishers, 2014). Abbreviated **MB** in calendar.

Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology, ed. Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim (New York: Routledge, 2016). Abbreviated **RH** in calendar.

Assignments and Means of Assessment:

- 1) Attendance and Participation in class throughout the semester. Presence in class and substantive engagement with readings, discussions, in-class exercises, and one another. **20% of grade.**
- 2) Narrative: Experience of Childhood Immersion in Nature: In no more than 5 minutes *spoken* text, narrate a story from your childhood that centers or crystallizes some aspect of your relationship with the natural world: an experience of natural beauty, a relationship or encounter with a wild animal, a beloved creek or tree, a garden or other place that made a deep impression on you as a child for its natural beauty or the haven it provided you. Try to choose a story that gives us a glimpse of *who you are in relation to the natural world*. Include a quote from each of the readings (Berry, Mourning Dove, and Griffiths), with page numbers. **10% of grade. *Students who have had Environmental Ethics will receive an alternative assignment.***
- 3) Blogs: Please complete five of the eight possible blog posts of 600-800 words, due Tuesdays at 11:59pm Eastern in the weeks assigned (see calendar) – plus a kindly written 100-200 word response to a classmate’s blog, including a new quotation from the readings to advance the conversation. Doctoral students: 1000 words for the original blog and 300 for the response to a classmate. Please respond to someone who does not yet have a response posted to their work – so that everyone will both post and receive a response each week. *All students should complete Blog 1, along with four others you choose.* Reflect on what stirs in you from the readings, including at least one quote from each (with the relevant page number), in conversation with the week’s practice. **Please do these readings, practices, and/or writing in physical proximity to a particular plant/tree, waterway, or sit-spot of your immediate environs, to which/whom you will apprentice yourself in the process. *DMin students see below!* 8% each = 40% of grade.**
- 4) Research and Class Presentation (30% of grade):
 - a. **Topic**: Listen for an ecological *context* and *need* you experience calling you into care: for humans in relation to Earth, for other creatures, for a place, for an ecosystem. Please schedule a conversation with the professor to take place by Week 6 of the semester 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 about your topic and to guide your articulation of form/s of spiritual care you find effective, healing, transforming (or other appropriate adjective). This might include rituals, programs, practices, interventions you learn about that others have already created, or those you design yourself. Create a bibliography of eight or more high-quality sources, at least four of them scholarly (doctoral students: 12 or more sources, at least eight of them scholarly), **due in Week 9 of the semester: 1/3 of project grade or 10% of course grade.**
 - c. **Class Presentation**: Create a 20-minute presentation to be given in class in the last three weeks of the semester. This presentation will show us what you learned in your research and its significance for your present or possible ministry focus. Give us a taste of your subject – help us experience how it works or why it matters. 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.**

Doctor of Ministry Students will complete *four blogs, rather than five*. **In place of the fifth blog**, you will be working with Suzanna Barrett, an HIU student preparing a Graduate Certificate in Eco-Spirituality (GCES) capstone thesis on inter-species communication. As part of this work, you will do additional **readings** on plant communication, the imaginal realm, and interspecies verbatim work (from an Australian CPE program); write your own **verbatim** of an interspecies encounter that feels relational and transforming in some way to you; and **present** on your experience of this process with Suzanna in Week 9 of the course (November 5, 2025).

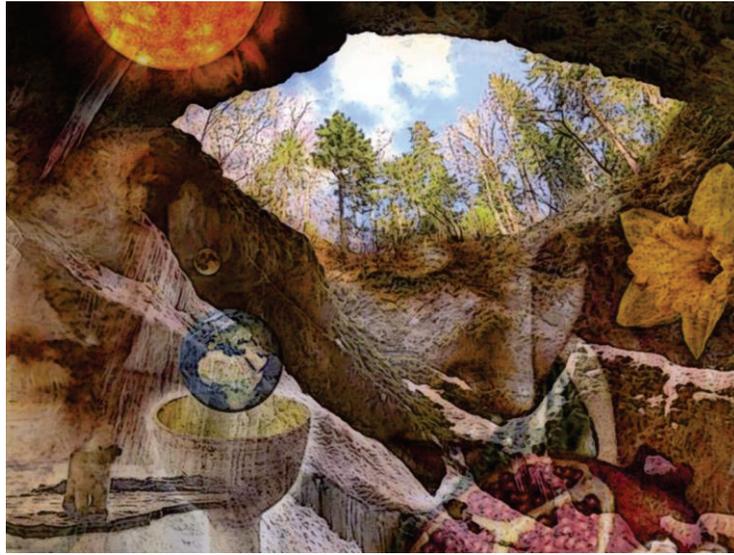


Image: Doug Van Houten

CALENDAR

WEEK	TOPIC	READINGS OR DUE DATES at the <i>beginning</i> of class each week
Week 1: September 3, 2025	Introduction to Course, Topic, and One Another	<i>No reading due in advance of class, but please complete the Introduction exercise in Canvas (Welcome Module)!</i>
Week 2: September 10, 2025	Ecological and Religious Contexts: Our Larger Home <i>Practice for the Coming Week: Eco-Autobiography</i>	Blog 1 due Monday midnight, 9/8 (response to classmate due Tuesday midnight, 9/9) <u>Readings for Week 2:</u> MB chapters 1-2 One chapter from <i>Routledge Handbook (RL)</i> , Parts 2 or 3: Choose whichever essay best corresponds to your religious tradition or spiritual approach to the world Brown, “ Contemplating an Ecological Chaplaincy: A Soft Manifesto for Dark Times ” <i>Optional: A second chapter from RL on a tradition you want to learn more about</i>

<p>Week 3: September 17, 2025</p>	<p>Children and the Sacred Wild</p> <p><i>Practice for the Coming Week:</i> Terra Divina (Loorz)</p>	<p>Childhood Experience of Nature Paper due</p> <p><u>Readings for Week 3:</u> Thomas Berry, “Loneliness and Presence,” in <i>A Communion of Subjects</i> Mourning Dove, “Recognition of Spiritual Energies in Nature” Jay Griffiths, “Kith,” in <i>A Country Called Childhood</i> Barbara Kingsolver, “Knowing Our Place”</p>
<p>Week 4: September 24, 2025</p>	<p>Kin: Place and Its Creatures</p> <p><i>Practice for the Coming Week:</i> Breathing Through (MB 276-78)</p>	<p>Blog 2 due</p> <p><u>Readings for Week 4:</u> Bowen, chapters 1-4 Alexis Pauline Gumbs, <i>Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals</i>, 1-14 Stuckey, “Being Known by a Birch Tree,” 182-91 Loorz, “Terra Divina” (practice)</p> <p><u>Optional:</u> Remainder of Stuckey (pp. 192-203) Cunningham, “Animal Spirituality”</p>
<p>October 1, 2025</p>	<p>NO CLASS: Yom Kippur</p>	
<p>Week 5: October 8, 2025</p>	<p>The Science: Climate, Water, Extinctions, Tipping Points</p> <p><i>Practice for the Coming Week:</i> Contemplative Drawing/ Photography in Nature</p>	<p>Blog 3 due</p> <p>RESEARCH TOPIC conversations due!</p> <p><u>Readings for Week 5:</u> MB chapters 3-4 “On the Brink of Five Tipping Points,” <i>The Guardian</i> <i>Routledge Handbook</i>, <u>one</u> chapter from Part VI (“Planetary Challenges”) Susanne Moser, “Getting Real About It: Meeting the Psychological and Social Demands of a World in Distress”</p>
<p>Week 6: October 15, 2025</p>	<p>Climate- and Eco-Grief</p> <p><i>Practice for the Coming Week:</i> Awe/Compassion/ Grief Walk</p>	<p>Blog 4 due</p> <p><u>Readings for Week 6:</u> MB chapters 7 and 11 Rebecca Salzhauer, “Why Climate Anxiety Is Familiar to Some Jews” Joyce Mercer, “Children and Climate Anxiety” Chapters from <i>The World as We Knew It: Dispatches from a Changing Climate</i>, Introduction and your choice of two additional chapters</p>

Week 7: October 22, 2025	Climate- and Eco-Justice <i>Practice for the Coming Week:</i> The Seventh Generation (MB 184-87)	Blog 5 due <u>Readings for Week 7:</u> MB chapter 12 Aph Ko, <i>Racism as Zoological Witchcraft</i> , 19-38 Rhonda Magee, “ The End of Othering ” Ann Marie Davis, “ Reimagining Harvesting the Gifts of the Ancestors ”
Week 8: October 29, 2025	Eco-Psychology <i>Practice for the Coming Week:</i> Wild Yoga Child Pose (p. 72, adapted as needed)	Blog 6 due BIBLIOGRAPHY due! <u>Readings for Week 8:</u> Lakshmi Sundaram, “Let’s Take It Outside: Nature as a Dynamic Partner in the Therapeutic Relationship” Francis Weller and Alnoor Ladha, “ On Initiation, Trauma, and Ritual ” Ferris Jabr, “ The Social Life of Forests ”
Week 9: November 5, 2025	Becoming Animal: Ritual and Ceremony <i>Practice for the Week Ahead:</i> Four Directions Prayer	Blog 7 due <u>Readings for Week 9:</u> Macy/Brown, chapters 5, 8, and 9 Lisa Dahill, “This Creek Is the Baptismal River” Rebecca Wildbear, <i>Wild Yoga</i> , 64-71, 132-35 Prechtel, <i>The Smell of Rain on Dust</i> , 9-19
Week 10: November 12, 2025	Becoming Human: Ritual and Ceremony	
Week 11: November 19, 2025	Spiritual Care for Future Generations: Advocacy, Action, Love, and Outrage <i>Practice for the Weeks Ahead:</i> Gratitude	Blog 8 due <u>Reading for Week 11:</u> Macy/Brown, chapters 1 and 10 Additional reading/s TBD <i>Optional:</i> Wildbear, <i>Wild Yoga</i> , 139-50
	THANKSGIVING WEEK	
Week 12: December 3, 2025	Presentations 1	

Week 13: December 10, 2025	Presentations 2	
Week 14: December 17, 2025	Presentations 3	



COURSE POLICIES

On Communication:

I prefer e-mail communication over campus phone/voice mail, which I do not check regularly. I generally return e-mails within two business days, usually quicker; I may or may not be on-line on weekends, however. ***Please do not use email to discuss grades.***

On Attendance:

Your presence truly matters *every class session* to me and your classmates. This is a class that includes substantial experiential material. You can't easily make up a missed session, which is why class participation is a key part of the course assessment.

Details: One class may be missed for any reason (no excuse needed). Beginning with the second, the attendance/participation portion of your final grade will drop for each absence. I generally include Participation together with attendance. That is, everyone who shows up in person or with your camera on via Zoom will usually get full participation credit. Camera off in Zoom means I can't track your presence visually and will grade you for participation based on your actual engagement in the session. As is standard at HIU, "3 or more absences without a serious reason may result in automatic failure 'without explanation or permission'."

On Timely Completion of Assignments:

The blog assignment is geared around timely completion. The blog grade drops a full letter grade for late submission – however, I am generally happy to give you an extension *without penalty* if you request it in advance of the weekly deadline. The grades for the in-class presentations at the end of the semester are similarly tied to actually presenting on the date you agree to – but if something arises, we can almost always find ways to be flexible with no drop in grade.

Other assignments will drop 1/3 of a grade for every two days they are late (as per the HIU Student Handbook).

On ChatGPT and Other Forms of Artificial Intelligence Software:

This course probes the depths of our hearts, minds, souls, and capacity; engaging this material is meant to evoke our truest, raw-est, most authentic voice, even when we feel like we are fumbling for words. And we need to know that what we are hearing is *your* voice. Thus **please document on your honor any use of AI software** in your reading or writing this semester, via a statement at the beginning of a blog or paper or presentation noting exactly how you have used this software in generating what you are submitting. You are responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation the software may produce. **Please do not use AI to generate a response to classmates' blogs.**

HIU Plagiarism Policy:

Plagiarism, the failure to give proper credit for the words and ideas of another person, whether published or unpublished, is strictly prohibited. All written material submitted by students must be their own original work; where the words and ideas of others are used (including via AI, as above), they must be acknowledged. Additionally, if students receive editorial help with their writing they should also acknowledge it appropriately.

Credit will not be given for work containing plagiarism, and plagiarism can lead to failure of a course. Faculty will report all instances of plagiarism to the Academic Dean. The Academic Dean will collect documented details of the case and advance any recommendations for further action to the Academic Policy Committee. Through this process the situation will be reviewed and any penalties that may be warranted (up to and including expulsion from the school) will be determined.

For clarity as to what constitutes plagiarism, the following description is provided:

1. Word for word plagiarism:
 - a. the submission of another person's work as one's own;
 - b. the submission of a commercially prepared paper;
 - c. the submission of work from a source which is not acknowledged by a footnote or other specific reference in the paper itself;
 - d. the submission of any part of another person's work without proper use of quotation marks.
2. Plagiarism by paraphrase:
 - a. mere re-arrangement of another person's works and phrases does not make them your own and also constitutes plagiarism;
 - b. paraphrasing another person's words, ideas, and information without acknowledging the original source from which you took them is also plagiarism.
3. See Part II of Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (7th Edition, University of Chicago Press, 2007), for an explanation of the proper ways to acknowledge the work of others and to avoid plagiarism.
4. Reuse of your own work: Coursework submitted for credit in one course cannot be submitted for credit in another course. While technically not plagiarism, this type of infraction will be treated in the same manner as plagiarism and will be subject to the same penalties. If you are using small amounts of material from a previous submitted work, that work should be referenced appropriately. When a student is writing their final program requirement (paper, project or thesis) it may be appropriate, with their advisor's permission, to include portions of previously submitted materials if properly referenced.

HIU MA and PhD Grading Scale:

A (95-100)	Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
A- (90-94)	Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.
B+(87-89)	Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.
B (83-86)	Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.
B-(80-82)	Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
C+(77-79)	Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
C (70-76)	Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
F (below 70)	Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

HIU D.Min. Grading Scale:

High Pass:	Exceptional work
Pass:	Good to excellent work
Low Pass:	Marginal work
Fail:	Inadequate work

HIU Inclusive Language Policy: Inclusive language is encouraged when the writing is the student’s own. In general, do not use the terms “man” or “mankind” for human beings; use instead “human beings,” “humans,” “persons,” “people,” “individuals,” “humanity,” “humankind,” etc.

- Pronouns: generally, use the non-binary pronouns “they/them/their” when referring to people whose gender/gender preference is unknown or unrelated to the context, or when the preference is expressed as non-binary.
- Avoid using the third person singular masculine or feminine, unless you are certain that the person referred to is male or female or expresses as male or female exclusively. For example, revise, “A student must ask questions if he expects to learn” to something like: “Students must ask questions if they expect to learn,” or “A student must ask questions if they expect to learn.”
- When a source you quote uses exclusive language, you may quote it as it appears, or you may substitute/add bracketed words, e.g., [humanity] in place of “man.”
- Students who prefer to use male pronouns for the deity should consult with their professor/ advisor on a case-by-case basis.

For all other questions of policy, see the HIU Student Handbook

(<https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/current-students/student-resources/student-handbook>) and/or the HIU Academic Policies website (<https://www.hartfordinternational.edu/current-students/academics/academic-policies>).

Note: This syllabus is subject to change. I will make every effort to alert you to changes promptly.

*I look forward to this semester
and to the growth and insight we will experience together*