

SPIR 290: Contemporary Issues in Spirituality

Spring Quarter 2025

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TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

Course description: As its title suggests, this course is a sampling of spiritual topics relevant to pastors, ministers, and aspirants to ministry in the 21st-century church. The purpose for such a sampling is to inform and deepen the appreciation in ministries of all sorts the elemental nature of spirituality, not just in the religious experience, but in the human experience. Some of the topics here will appear relevant, even familiar based on a general consideration of issues of concern in the contemporary church, while others are here to broaden perspective as to what constitutes the spiritual life of individuals and communities.

This course is still 'under construction' by the instructor, but the sketch below should give prospective students both a sense of what the course offers and what will be

required. The **assigned readings** included in this tentative syllabus are a sampling what students can expect for each topic through the quarter.

Learning Outcomes:

LO 2 Pastoral Proficiency

Familiarity with ministerial practices in various manifestations of church life, expressed in concrete pastoral applications which include discernment, compassion, and ministries of accompaniment.

LO 4 Diversity Fluency

Awareness of and critical engagement with how one's own culture influences ministry, and then to engage in ministries that build the community of Christ and are sensitive to and respectful of all cultures and traditions, and individuals who vary by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and dynamics of wealth, poverty, and power.

Student Requirements include:

- Read, reflect, discuss, discover; be changed by what you encounter. Participation is the primary student requirement which only begins with regular and punctual attendance of all sessions. In that context, then, this participation comes naturally from a sense of ownership between the student and the course.
- Discussion leadership: each student will be responsible for facilitating a session discussion on one of the readings assigned.
- The writing requirement is completed in four 5-page reflection papers placed at various points through the course. These papers incorporate basic practices of theological reflection on experiences generated from the course. This is the first part of each paper; the second moves to pastoral application and how the writer (the student) can envision some integration of a course theme with that person's ministry, current or aspired to.

Apportionment of Credit:

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|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Participation: | 30% |
| Discussion Leadership | 10% |
| Reflection/Pastoral Essays | 60% (15 points each) |

Sessions and Topics

Part I: Orientations: we tend to use the word 'spirituality' as if we know what we mean, hence our beginnings--Part I of the course--are an exploration of the human (even biological) capacity for seeking God.

Session 1: Getting our bearings. Topics include: what the tradition offers: community, ritual, faith, and spiritual formation; are spirituality and interiority the same? Reflecting on one's 'graced history.' Spirituality as a subject of study; how language influences experience. Religion and spirituality; spirituality without religion.

Readings:

P. Sheldrake, 'Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly'

Session 2: Imaging God in a secular age; how we 'vision' God matters; dualism and monism; what comprises one's spirituality? True Self / False Self: a false dichotomy? The science behind the spiritual: This is your brain on spirituality: the evidence from neuroscience; spirituality as the common language for inter-faith dialogue.

Readings:

J. Finlay, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* (excerpts)

Part II: Canvassing the field

Session 3: Nature and Supernature; Spirituality and ecology; the cosmos and the challenges of human experience; the role of wonder in heart's search. Technology and spirituality

Readings:

Brian Swimme, 'The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos' (excerpts)

Session 4: The mystical and the prophetic: spirituality and social change; mindfulness and the prospects of self-awareness; Ignatian Pedagogy: Experience, Reflection, Action

Readings:

J. Mossi, SJ, 'Ministering in the Present Moment'

S. Rakoczy, *Great Mystics & Social Justice* (excerpt)

Session 5: Spirituality on the margins, Part 1: Gospel coinage; spirituality and the minority experience; women and feminist spirituality; sexual minorities: seeking God in an LGBTQ+ context

Readings:

Fiducia supplicans Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Session 6: Spirituality on the margins, Part 2: Recovery spirituality: the Twelve Steps; spirituality and incarceration

Readings:

Gerald May, *Grace and Addiction* (excerpt)

R. Weber, 'Spiritual Ministry with Men in Prison'

W. Burghardt, 'A Spirituality for Justice'

Session 7: Spirituality and the Dark Night; Suffering and Spirituality

Readings:

D. Lane, 'Death, the Self, Memory, and Hope'

L. Richard, 'What Really Matters: Suffering and Spirituality'

Session 8: Prayer and spirituality; prayer forms in the Catholic tradition and beyond; contemplation and silence in an age of noise

Readings:

G. Arbuckle, 'Letting Go in Hope: A Spirituality for a Chaotic World'

Part III: Pastoral Application

Sessions 9 & 10: Spirituality and ministry; pastoral applications in the lives of ministers

Readings:

G. Boyle, SJ, 'Barking to the Choir'