



Graduate
Theological
Union

Instructor:

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PR- 2250 Syllabus
Interreligious Rituals
in Chaplaincy:
Faith, Ethics and Politics

9/7/21 – 12/15/21

Tuesdays on ZOOM

9:30 – 11:00 am

ZOOM LINK:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85302352488>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

As interreligious chaplains, we are called to provide a spiritual presence for attending to major life events such as birth, illness, death and grief, in addition to supporting clients in prayer, religious observances, life milestones and a variety of sacred practices across a vast spectrum of views and perspectives.

This interactive, experiential class explores the ways in which we can engage in not only rituals practiced by established religions, but also variations of those rituals that push the boundaries of classical roles and traditions. We will also examine social, ethical and theological questions related to day-to-day interreligious chaplaincy work, such as:

- . How can rituals and ceremonies help with counseling and psychotherapy?
- . How can we create innovative new rituals that are inclusive for all?
- . Can community ceremonies be performed virtually?
- . Can a non-Christian chaplain offer the Eucharist or the Sacrament of the Sick?
- . How do we respect the boundaries of our own beliefs while facilitating rituals from other traditions?
- . Does borrowing rituals from other cultures show respect, or is it “cultural appropriation?”
- . How can we create innovative personal rituals for milestones that are not traditionally recognized?

Creative ceremonies and rituals offer a breath of fresh air (sometimes literally, as many ceremonies are performed outdoors and include breathwork), that revitalizes stale old practices which have lost their meaning. Incorporating fresh new rituals into one’s spiritual life provides actions one can take to cope with a specific problem, while also shifting one’s perception of the problem, creating a new narrative, and providing inspiration for a new vision of the future.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

O'Donohue, J. (2008). *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* (First Edition). Doubleday. Click [HERE](#) for the Amazon link.

Farmer, S. D. (2002). *Sacred Ceremony*. Hay House. Click [HERE](#) for the Amazon link.

A note about these books:

Both books can be read online (but not downloaded) via the GTU library. However, I recommend that you purchase them, because they would make excellent additions to your professional library. Here's how to access them online:

- 1). Go to <https://www.gtu.edu/library/resources>
- 2) Scroll down and click on the alphabetically listed link: [Ebsco e-book collection](#)
- 3) Login with your *last name* + your *GTU ID* number or your library card *barcode* number.
- 4) Enter the title.

Due to licensing restrictions, only three people at a time can read these books online via the library.

OTHER COURSE MATERIALS

All other materials (articles, websites, videos) will be in the Moodle FILES folder for each assignment.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Course Access: Moodle Learning Management System.

- To access Moodle, visit: moodle.gtu.edu and log in using your school email address and password.
- In Moodle, the course will appear in your *Dashboard* under *Courses*. All course content including lectures, readings, activities, assignments, and discussions will be posted on our Moodle course page.
- Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox are recommended to access Moodle. Safari is not recommended.
- Students can also use their smartphone to access Moodle. When accessing Moodle from a mobile device, students should use a browser instead of the mobile app.

Technology Requirements:

- A computer, laptop or tablet with an updated operating system (Windows, Mac, Linux) and an internet browser (Chrome or Firefox),
- High speed internet bandwidth (preferably 10 mbps or greater, but at least 3 mbps)
- A webcam and microphone

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

Credit Hours:

The GTU policy is that each course unit should constitute 3 hours of work per week for the student. Since this is a three-unit course, expect to spend about nine hours per week on the assignments.

Zoom meetings - 25% of your grade

All Zoom meetings will be recorded. If you are not able to attend a meeting, you'll be expected to watch the recording and submit a report on what was discussed – with a theological reflection – which will be due prior to the next scheduled class.

GRADING FOR ZOOM ATTENDANCE:

Presence on Zoom with active participation in discussion – 100%

Presence on Zoom with no participation in discussion = 75%

No presence on Zoom – 50% (unless recording report is submitted)

Moodle assignments - 50% of your grade

Includes posting an original comment and responding to at least one other student's comment.

GRADING FOR MOODLE ASSIGNMENTS:

An original post with at least one response to another student = 100%

An original post without a response to another student = 75%

No post at all – 50%

Final Project - 25% of your grade - Due Nov. 30th

Create and conduct an interreligious ceremony for your friends, family or congregation to address a specific need or milestone. For example, a grief ritual for the loss of a family or community member, a celebration or holiday ceremony, a rite of passage (birth, marriage, adulthood, midlife), or a healing ritual for a group that's experienced a tragedy. Describe the ceremony in a 10-page paper, following these guidelines:

- . Type of ceremony – Transition, initiation, celebration, devotion, etc.
- . What need does this ceremony address for the participants?
- . What is the hoped-for outcome? Centering, releasing pain, relaxation, community bonding? Other?
- . Theological Reflection – What theological or cosmological concepts are incorporated in this ceremony, and how might they work in someone's life?

NOTES ABOUT THE FINAL PROJECT:

- . Be sure to use [Turabian format](#) for academic writing, and to include at least eight scholarly references.
- . Please see the grading rubric for papers at the end of this syllabus.
- . Due November 30. Please submit to the "final paper" drop box on Moodle.

COURSE FORMAT

We will meet on ZOOM each week from roughly 9:30 am – 11:00 am Pacific Time. Because most of the course work will be done via discussions on Moodle and writing/project assignments, Zoom meetings will focus on sharing ideas and discussing assignments, so some meetings may be only be 30 minutes long. When a guest teacher or interactive process is part of the meeting, expect the meeting to last longer.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

Moodle assignments are due on the day of class. For example, if the class (Zoom) meeting date is October 12, your Moodle posts for that week are due ON October 12. So you'll be doing the assigned reading and posting your comments *prior* to that meeting.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

These are the dates for our Zoom meetings:

Sept. 7	Oct. 5	Nov. 2	Dec. 7
Sept. 14	Oct. 12	Nov. 9	Dec. 14
Sept. 21	Oct. 19	Nov. 16	
Sept. 28	Oct. 26	Nov. 23	
		Nov. 30	

All reading materials that are not found online via a link will be found in the FILES folder for each week.

It is recommended that you print this syllabus and keep it handy for reference.

WEEK 1 - Sept. 7: Ceremony and Ritual Basics

Read: Farmer 21 – 36: Family Altar/Three Types of Ceremony/ Stages of Ceremony/ Principles of Ceremony

Read: Daniel, [Creative Personal Ritual as a Therapeutic Tool for Loss, Trauma and Transition](#)

Read: Theology Without Walls – Introduction, (p. 1-4).

Read: [How Hearts Align in a Muslim Ritual](#)

Post on Moodle:

Answer these two questions (please answer both questions in ONE post, numbered 1 and 2):

1. Based on *Theology Without Walls* article, write a brief reflection on how you have experienced – or hope to experience – theology without walls. Are there social, political or ethical issues, or religious systems that make this challenging for you? In addition to your post, please reply to at least one other student's comments.
2. Based on *Creative Personal Ritual as a Therapeutic Tool for Loss, Trauma and Transition*, in your spiritual tradition, would the rituals described here be controversial because of their lack of "god language?"

Discuss on Zoom: For our first meeting, we'll introduce ourselves and talk about the reading assignments.

WEEK 2 - Sept. 14 – Suffering and Healing

Read: Farmer, p. 63 – 91, Healing Ceremonies

Read: O'Donohue - Introduction (p. xiii – xvi), plus one blessing of your choice from the "States of the Heart" section (p. 101-129).

Project

As a foundation for the work we'll do in class going forward, please create a personal altar in your home. If you already have one, add something new to it, perhaps something to address a current issue in your life or your community (a personal milestone or transition? Covid 19? A loss you're grieving?). Altars – and the rituals that surround them – are mutable, living things, so they can change over time. These links will help you get started with your altar if you need some guidance:

[How to Build a Personal Altar](#)
[Brian's altar](#)

Post on Moodle: Answer these two questions in the Moodle FORUM this week (please put both answers *into the same post*, numbered Question 1 and Question 2):

1. Write a brief reflection about the blessing you chose from O'Donohue. Why did you choose this, and how would you propose using it in your personal or professional practice?
2. What do you think about the way Farmer's rituals blend spirituality and psychology? How is this blend useful in chaplaincy?

Remember to reply to at least one other student's post.

Discuss on Zoom:

Those who wish to can share photos or videos of their altars.

WEEK 3 – Sept. 21 – Death and Dying

Read: Excerpt from Hidalgo's *Children's Spiritual Coping*

Read: Native American funeral

Read: [Greek Orthodox funeral](#)

Watch: [Irish Wake video](#)

Watch: [Death is Our Business](#)

OPTIONAL VIEWING AND READING:

[Experts discussing grief rituals](#)

[Death Rituals Around the World](#)

Post in Moodle: Choose ONE of the following questions to answer (remember to also respond to another student's post):

1. Based on Hidalgo's article *Children's Spiritual Coping*), in your personal or professional life, describe a situation in which you participated in a pre-and-post liminal ritual. Based on what we've been studying so far, what would you have done or added in order to make that ritual either:
 - . More personally meaningful/relevant
 - . More spiritually inclusive
 - . More practical/useful as a healing tool
 - . More relatable/easier to understand
 - . Other?
2. Comment on either the Native American funeral or the Irish Wake. What elements did you resonate with? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable?
3. What do you think about the Greek Orthodox belief that church funerals are strictly forbidden for suicides and for people who have been (or will be) cremated? How would the denial of this ritual contribute to complicated grief in the person's loved ones?

WEEK 4 – Sept. 28 – Bereavement

Read: *Designing Personal Grief Rituals: An analysis of symbolic objects and actions*

Read: *Christian Grief Rituals*

Watch: Choose any three of these videos about grief rituals from various cultural and religious perspectives

[A JOIK \(grief song tribute\) from the Sami people of Northern Europe](#)

[A DESPACHO from the Quero people in Peru](#)

[KEENING chants in the Celtic tradition](#)

[Is there such thing as “Christian” grief?](#)

[Grieving as soul-cleansing in the Dagara tradition \(Ghana\)](#)

[Maori Haka Dance](#)

[Hindu Death Ritual](#)

[Viking Funeral](#)

Post on Moodle: Please answer the following questions about each of the three articles you read this week. Remember to put all your answers in one post (numbered, 1, 2), and to respond to at least one other student’s post:

1. *Christian Grief Rituals* – In the case history about Pam, *baptism* is described as “a ritual that means an individual becomes a member of the body of Christ as represented by a specific congregation.” Would you be comfortable with other definitions of baptism that might not require church affiliation?
2. *Designing Personal Grief Rituals* - In your personal or professional experience, have you observed the need for more innovative, personalized rituals that formal/traditional religious rituals fail to address?

Discuss on Zoom: Which of the videos resonated with you (or didn’t resonate) and why?

WEEK 5 – Oct. 5 – Personal Milestones and Rites of Passage

Read: Farmer, page 147 – 160 (Marriage and Divorce)

Read: O’Donohue’s marriage blessing (p. 136) and blessing for the breakup of a relationship (p. 165).

Post on Moodle: Create/design a ceremony for a personal milestone in your own life or in the life of someone close to you. It can be the start of a new job, the blessing of a new home, the start (or end) of an intimate relationship or a personal transition of any kind. Think outside the box. Use your imagination.

Discuss on Zoom: What was it like for you to create this ceremony? How did it challenge – or enhance – what you know about rituals in your religious tradition?

WEEK 6 – Oct. 12 – Trauma

Watch: [THIS VIDEO](#) for a Story String demonstration

Read: Growing from Trauma with Lived Theology

Read: Farmer, 73-80 (Release and Renewal)

Optional Reading: Loss, Trauma and Resilience

Project: For this week's project, you will do your own story string to process something in your own life, perhaps a trauma you'd like to release, a forgiveness you'd like to express, or a blessing you'd like to send. You might want to place the string on your altar for a period of time (a few hours or a few days) before hanging it in a tree, burning it in a fire or putting it into a body of water.

Post in Moodle:

Write a reflection about your experience with the story string. Was it helpful? Can you think of a situation in your personal or professional life where you might teach somebody else to use this process? Looking back on your life, can you recall a situation where a ritual like this might have been a useful tool for you?

WEEK 7 – Oct. 19 – Religious Devotion and Spiritual Practice

Read: Theology Without Walls Chapter 17 (Mercadante: *Is Theology for SBNRs Possible?*)

Read: Theology Without Walls Chapter 14 (Hedges: *Shared Religious Landscape*)

Read: Embedded vs. Deliberative theology

Post in Moodle: Answer each of these questions (put your answers all in one post, numbered 1,2,3). Remember to reply to one other student:

1. What do you think of Hedges' idea that we can "do religion differently?"
2. After reading Mercadante's article, do you think it's possible to be "spiritual" without having a particular theology?
3. How have you grappled with embedded vs. deliberative theology in your own life?

Discuss on Zoom:

This week we'll discuss the idea of "neutralizing" spiritual practices (meditation, altars, prayer, ritual) to make them more inclusive, and how ritual can help us "do religion differently."

WEEK 8 – Oct. 26 – READING WEEK

No assignments or Zoom meetings this week. Use this time to work on your final project, due on Nov. 30.

WEEK 9 – Nov. 2 - Birth, Initiation and Lifespan

Read:

- . Farmer, page 100 (Births and Babies) through page 115 (Childhood and Adolescent Transitions).
- . Farmer, page 117 – 128 (initiations for males and females).

Watch: [Rumspringa as a rite of passage](#)

Post on Moodle:

If you had an initiation ritual as a child or adolescent (confirmation, first communion, bar/bat mitzvah... other?), describe how it contributed to your spiritual formation. If you didn't have an initiation ritual, would you have liked to have one, and if so, what kind of ritual would have been meaningful for you? Is this something you've done – or plan to do -- for your children?

Discuss on Zoom:

Can you think of any important milestones that do not have adequate rituals in our culture? For example, puberty, divorce, menopause, sexual initiation, pregnancy, miscarriage?

WEEK 10 - Nov. 9 – Daily Blessings for Daily Life

For this week's assignment, you'll create a daily ritual/ceremony for yourself and practice it every day for the week leading up to this class. Your ritual can focus on something specific, such as healing, grief or forgiveness, or it can just be a simple blessing or centering process (you might want to choose something from the O'Donohue book). If you already have a daily blessing ritual, add something new to it, such as a new ceremonial object (stones, flowers, animal totems, religious symbols, photos, etc.), or a new process (breathwork, movement, singing, chanting, etc.)

For example, I walk my dog every morning before sunrise. While we're out, the world changes from dark to light. It is a very powerful time to be outdoors. There is a river very close to my house, so for the one-week ritual exercise, I will commit to walking to the river every day and sitting quietly while watching the sun rise (instead of rushing home to get back to work).

Post on Moodle: Write a reflection about how your new ritual – or the new aspect of your existing ritual -- shifted your outlook or your sense of well-being. Feel free to add photos or video.

Discuss on Zoom: How can we incorporate these rituals into our daily life at work or school?

WEEK 11- Nov. 16 - Property/Prosperity/The Material World

Read: Two articles about ceremonies for blessing a house:

- . Farmer p. 93-96 - Home Clearing and Blessing
- . Original Christianity/Original Yoga: [House Blessing](#)

Read: Two articles about material abundance:

- . [The Prosperity Gospel](#)
- . [Manifesting Money](#)

Post on Moodle: (put all answers in one post, numbered 1, 2, 3)

1. Compare and contrast the two approaches to house blessings. How are they different and/or similar?
2. Have you ever prayed to get a job you wanted, or for a bigger house or a better car? Can this kind of prayer influence events in the material world?
3. How is the Christian prosperity gospel different from or similar to the New Age law of attraction?

WEEK 12 – Nov. 23 Thanksgiving Week –

This week you will create and facilitate an *interfaith* gratitude ceremony, altar or special prayer specifically for your Thanksgiving gathering that reflects some of the ideas in this week's reading. If you have no Thanksgiving plans and will be alone for the holiday, create a solo ceremony. Write a 1-2-page essay about your ceremony that you will post in *next week's* Forum (Week 13)

Read: [18 Unique Thanksgiving Traditions](#)

Read: *We Gather Together: Consumption Rituals of Thanksgiving Day*

Read: [Six Things Every Non-Native Should Do on Thanksgiving](#)

Post on Moodle: Did this week's reading give you any ideas or inspirations for your Thanksgiving ritual? Post a brief reflection, and remember to reply to at least one other student.

Discuss on Zoom: Share ideas for creative Thanksgiving rituals and ceremonies.

WEEK 13- Nov. 30 - Religious Holidays and Family Traditions

FINAL PROJECT DUE TODAY!

Submit your paper in the "FINAL PAPER" drop box on Moodle

Read: Moyaert, pages 171- 176 of *The Role of Ritual in Mixed-Faith Families*

Post on Moodle: Your essay about the Thanksgiving ceremony you created last week (with photos or video if you wish).

Discuss on Zoom: Share personal stories about your experiences with rituals, ceremonies and celebrations in mixed-faith families.

WEEK 14 – Dec. 7 – Seasonal Celebrations

Read: Farmer, p. 199 – 221 (Seasonal Ceremonies)

Post on Moodle: Discuss how you have traditionally celebrated the winter holidays, and consider new rituals and ceremonies you might want to incorporate into those traditions. For example, if you celebrate Hanukkah, how could you make the "festival of lights" connect to the Winter Solstice? If you traditionally have a Christmas tree and gifts, what processes could you add to your festivities to link the tree to Solstice?

Discuss on Zoom: We will spend our Zoom time planning a closing ceremony for our class next week. Think about what elements our ceremony should honor, such as our time together, our academic journeys, our future goals, etc.

WEEK 15 – Dec. 14 - Course Wrap-Up and Community Ceremony

On Zoom today we will perform our group ceremony.

Post on Moodle:

Please write a reflection on the following questions:

- . What have you learned that can be incorporated into your personal or professional life?
- . Have any of your views changed?
- . Have any of your assumptions shifted?
- . Do any of the processes we learned in class resonate more strongly with you than others? Which, if any, do you think you might use in your professional or personal practice going forward?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this course, students will be better able to:

OUTCOME	ASSESSMENT
Explain the value of ritual and ceremony for processing change and transition	Attendance and participation in class, final project
Assess needs of clients, patients or congregants that can be addressed by the use of ritual	Experiential process and group work
Discuss a variety of multi-cultural ritual practices	Attendance and participation in class, final project
Identify scenarios in which ritual can be helpful in chaplaincy practice	Class assignments, final project
Utilize ceremonial processes as a tool for spiritual healing	Class assignments, experiential processes, final project
Discuss current research on the use of ceremony/ritual in counseling	Attendance and participation in class, final project
Demonstrate awareness of the ethics and politics involved in the use of multi-cultural, interreligious rituals	Attendance and participation in class, final project

Grading Rubric for Papers

Organization and Structure	Paper logically organized and well prepared with documented support for the conclusions presented. Paper follows structure put forth in Turabian.	Paper logically organized, but conclusions weakly supported. Paper mostly follows structure put forth in Turabian.	Paper logically organized, but conclusions not supported. Paper minimally follows structure put forth in Turabian.	Paper not organized and no documented support for the conclusion. Structure is not discernible.
	12.5	10.75	9.5	8.75
Concepts	Key concepts presented with supporting outside resources. The paper demonstrates knowledge beyond the chapter readings and discussions.	Key concepts presented with supporting outside resources.	Failed to present all of the related concepts. Outdated outside resources were used.	Failed to present concepts or misrepresented several major concepts.
	25	21.5	19	17.5
Conclusions	The impact of these issues on pastoral situations is presented. Future areas of further research are also included.	The impact of these issues on pastoral situations is briefly presented. Future areas of further research are also included.	The impact of these issues on pastoral situations is presented without supporting connections. Future areas for further research are not included.	The impact of these issues on pastoral situations is missing. Future areas for further research are not included.
	25	21.5	19	17.5
References and Citation	The appropriate number of outside references have been cited, correctly using Turabian style.	The appropriate number of outside references have been cited, but the style is questionable.	Not enough outside references have been cited, but they are correctly cited using Turabian style.	No valid outside references have been cited.
	12.5	10.75	9.5	8.75
Spelling and Grammar	Grammar, spelling and composition of paper demonstrate graduate- level work.	Grammar, spelling and composition of paper near graduate-level work.	Grammar, spelling and composition of paper below graduate-level work. Consider contacting the writing tutor for assistance.	Writing requires serious additional effort to reach graduate-level work. Student required to document consultation with writing tutor.

	12.5	10.75	9.5	8.75
Overall Quality of Insight	The paper demonstrates an understanding of concepts beyond the printed materials. These insights are effectively stated in the paper.	The paper demonstrates an understanding of concepts beyond the printed materials.	The paper demonstrates a limited understanding of the concepts beyond the printed materials.	The paper demonstrates no understanding of the concepts beyond the printed materials.
	12.5	10.75	9.5	8.75
TOTAL POINTS	100	86	76	70
	Letter Grade	Points		
	A	94-100		
	A-	90-93		
	B+	87-89		
	B	83-86		
	B-	80-82		
	C+	77-79		
	C	73-76		
	C-	70-72		
	D+	67-69		
	D	63-66		
	D-	60-62		
	F	50		

Course Policies

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the presentation of another's ideas, methods, research, or words without proper acknowledgement. It runs the gamut from failing to cite a reference (sloppy scholarship), to passing off another's work as one's own. It includes close paraphrasing as well as lifting of entire lines nearly verbatim without acknowledgement. As the effects of the plagiarism will be the same regardless of intent, intent will not be construed as essential to the act, although it may be considered in determining whether the charge of plagiarism should be pursued or what the penalty may be. For general requirements for proper acknowledgement in written work, see the most current edition of Kate Turabian, *Manual for the Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Arrangements in Cases of Documented Disability

If you will need special arrangements for meeting course requirements for reasons of documented disability, please speak to one of the instructors very early in the term so that appropriate arrangements can be made. A

description of the GTU policy regarding accommodation for differently abled students is online at:
<http://gtu.edu/admissions/life-at-gtu/students-with-disabilities>

Honor Code

Students in all courses and phases of the Doctoral Program are subject to the GTU Honor Code, described on p. 15 of the on-line Student Handbook. Please note: "Documented evidence that a student has violated the honor code may result in immediate expulsion from the program."