

EL3539

Christian Education and Dismantling Racism

(draft as of October 8, 2017)

Mary Hess

Luther Seminary

Vivian Jenkins Nelsen

Augsburg College, Senior Fellow and founder of the InterRace Institute

Appointments can be scheduled via email and take place via zoom, google hangout or facetime if necessary.

Pre-class assignments available at MyLutherNet as of December 1st and due by January 4th. In-person gathering January 5, January 6, and January 7 from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm; final class assignments due February 1st.

Course Description:

This course analyzes institutionalized racism and engages students in a series of frameworks from within Christian Education for critiquing and dismantling racism, and for supporting transformative forms of congregational learning. Students are required to participate in an intensive three day workshop on dismantling racism as part of the course.

Connection to theological rationale, program outcomes, and student vocation:

A few of the relevant sentences from the curricular documents which guide our convictions in this class:

“Communities are a central component of learning, and students and their formation are the central focus of Luther Seminary’s learning community. Students come to seminary having been affected by constructive and destructive forces of human community. Therefore, Luther Seminary walks with our students in the multi-dimensional realities of their lives, as they prepare to lead and live in communities of faith and love.”

“Neighbors engage us in God’s continually creative and good activity. God is continually active in the world and comes to us and encounters us in surprising ways. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we meet neighbors and they meet us in differing ways. In these meetings, we recognize that both suffering and sin exist in the world, in our neighbors, and in ourselves as neighbors. Neighbors offer their disruptive and generative presence to us and bring us to self-reflection as persons in relationship, who live in both brokenness and grace. Through the Holy Spirit we ourselves also become neighbors meeting others who need love, care, healing, justice, and peace. Pedagogically and theologically the curriculum is committed to communal inquiry about God’s promises for the world that come with, for, and from the neighbor.”

We believe this course is most directly pointed at the following program outcomes. Although you will not fully achieve all of these in just this one class, you should be able to make significant progress in each of them:

(MDIV/MA) Graduates will form and lead within Christian community gathered around Word and Sacrament for bold participation in God's mission.

(MDIV/MA) Graduates, within a diversity of contexts, will confess the character, identity, and work of the Triune God in the world God loves.

Within the framework of the curricular promise and the program outcomes, we will work on the following specific learning outcomes for this class:

By the end of this course students will be able to

- understand the impact of racism in particular institutions and begin to explore dismantling racism strategies
- access the literature and scholarship associated with dismantling racism, connecting it to challenges within religious community
- develop and nurture respect for the diverse ways in which adults learn
- reflect critically upon educational leadership, and their own role in facilitating such
- reflect upon their own teaching and learning practices
- begin to develop the theological and interpersonal skills necessary to help faith communities reflect on and respond to pressing learning challenges in ministry

Textbook & Materials

Required

The following should be read prior to the weekend workshop if all possible:

Stone, Patton, et. al. *Difficult Conversations*. Penguin, 2000.

Cone, James. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Orbis, 2011.

Le Tran, Mai-Anh. *Rest the Heart: Unlearning Violence, Relearning Hope*. Abingdon Press, 2017.

Deanna Thompson, "Calling a thing what it is: A Lutheran approach to whiteness," (available at the MyLutherNet)

Mary Hess, "White religious educators resisting white fragility: Lessons from mystics" (available at MyLutherNet)

After the workshop, students will need to choose one additional book to read from the list that will be available in class.

Course Schedule:

This class unfolds in three segments

The first segment is work that you do ahead of our in-person gathering, through MyLutherNet (this is largely individualized and independent, and the assignments will be active there as of December 1st)

The second segment is a weekend workshop which will take place on **January, 5th, 6th, and 7th, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm**. At the moment these sessions are scheduled to take place at Luther Seminary, although we will meet for worship on Sunday morning at a local church TBA. You must be present for the entire workshop to receive course credit.

The third segment involves a final project which can be done either independently, or as a collaborative project with classmates or local colleagues.

Assignments

The autobiographical statement and the history exercise need to be completed prior to the in-person workshop. It is best if you can complete the other two exercises, and the readings, prior to the gathering as well.

- Autobiographical statement concerning race

Using the template (see below, and at MLN), respond to the questions found there and then upload your responses as a single, attached file to the autobiographies forum in the full class discussion space. If you're the first person to do so, you get to start the conversation. If you're not, participate in the conversation with at least one thoughtful response to someone else's statement. Feel free to respond to more than one statement, but for at least one you need to do more than "toss a verbal bouquet" – you need to respond substantially.

- History exercise

Give yourself at least two hours to explore the timeline at this history site -- <http://www.understandingrace.org/history/index.html> -- which was developed by the American Anthropological Association. Make sure that you take the time necessary to read in each era depicted on the timeline. Find at least one event that you are unfamiliar with, and post it to the history forum in the full class discussion along with your reflection on why you think this event was unfamiliar to you. (That is, what about your own context, experience, family history, prior education, etc. might not have introduced you to, or emphasized, that history.)

If you cannot find such an unfamiliar event on this timeline, then contribute to the history forum a brief description (including relevant dates) of an event or person that you believe is relevant to our learning, and explain why you think it should be included in this timeline.

Do NOT repeat events that are already noted in the forum -- so, again, the sooner you complete this exercise, the more choices you will have!

- Book sentence exercise

Pick out one sentence (or so) from at least THREE of the readings that you were deeply engaged by (this could mean that you disagreed with these sentences, you found them profoundly true, or you were puzzled by one or more of them). Contribute your sentences (with appropriate citation/location numbers) -- and a description of why you were engaged by them -- to the book sentences forum in the full class discussion space. If you're the first person to do so, congratulations! If not, after you upload your own sentences comment on at least one other person's posted sentences (including their rationale for posting them) in a thoughtful way.

Do NOT repeat sentences other people have already posted. Obviously, the sooner you complete this exercise, the more choice of quotation you will have.

Note that this exercise requires you to make three separate initial postings, one for the quotation you pick from each of three readings.

- Theology framing statement draft

Throughout our weekend together we will be engaging a variety of resources on dismantling racism and living into beloved community. Some of these resources are biblical, some theological, some sociological, some pedagogical, and others do not easily fit into a particular category. Towards the end of our time together we are going to ask you to develop a theological statement to frame your own understanding of what it means to dismantle racism and live into beloved community.

It would be best if you could do this prior to our in-person weekend, but we understand that we cannot require it given that this class cannot officially begin until January 2nd (but please feel free to do so, anyway!). We ask that you draft a brief statement (no more than 250 words) which expresses your current understanding of what your faith contributes to the challenge of dismantling racism and living into beloved community. Please note that this is an *initial draft*, and that we simply want you to begin to gather your thinking on the topic.

Following the workshop we ask you to complete all of the previously mentioned short exercises, as well as to complete a book review and a worship or educational aid by February 1st:

Write a short review (no more than three pages) of the book you chose from the list, in which you engage at least the following questions: (1) In what ways does this book support, and in what ways contest, the ideas and practices we engaged in the weekend workshop? (2) What would you identify as the author(s) primary theological stance? (3) How would you imagine this book serving as a resource within a religious education context?

Write a short worship contribution (a litany, an intercessory prayer, a song) or a short religious education resource (a retreat outline, a learning resource, a handout) that teaches something you've learned this weekend.

Course Workload

Throughout this course students will be expected to engage in a total of 140 Student Learning Hours, which breaks down to roughly 40 hours of guided learning (workshop and online discussion) and 100 hours of self-directed learning (reading, writing and other course work)

Guided Learning (lectures and online precepts):

24 hours in person gathering (weekend workshop)

16 hours in pre-workshop guided discussion online

Reading:

60 hours of assigned reading

Summative writing development:

40 hours of writing (book review paper and worship or learning resource)

Instructional Methods:

We appreciate and agree with Stephen Brookfield's "course caveats":

"As a student, I very much appreciate the chance to make informed decisions about the courses I take. I want to know who the educator is, what his or her assumptions are, and what he or she stands for before I make a commitment to spend my time, money, and energy attending the class. So let me tell you some things about me and how I work as an educator that will allow you to make an informed decision as to whether or not you wish to be involved in this course.

I have framed this course on the following assumptions:

1. That participating in discussion brings with it the following benefits:

- It helps students explore a diversity of perspectives.
- It increases students' awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity and complexity.
- It helps students recognize and investigate their assumptions.
- It encourages attentive, respectful listening.
- It develops new appreciation for continuing differences.
- It increases intellectual agility.
- It helps students become connected to a topic.
- It shows respect for students' voices and experiences.
- It helps students learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse.
- It affirms students as cocreators of knowledge.
- It develops the capacity for the clear communication of ideas and meaning.

- It develops habits of collaborative learning.
 - It increases breadth and makes students more empathic.
 - It helps students develop skills of synthesis and integration.
 - It leads to transformation.
2. That students attending will have experiences that they can reflect on and analyze in discussion.
 3. That the course will focus on the analysis of students' experiences and ideas as much as on the analysis of academic theories.
 4. That the chief regular class activity will be a small group discussion of experiences and ideas.
 5. That I as teacher have a dual role as a catalyst for your critical conversation and as a model of democratic talk.

So please take note of the following "product warnings"!

If you don't feel comfortable talking with others about yourself and your experiences in small groups, you should probably drop this course.

If you don't feel comfortable with small group discussion and think it's a touchy-feely waste of valuable time, you should probably drop this course.

If you are not prepared to analyze your own and other people's experiences, you should probably drop this course." (*Taken from Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms*, by Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc., 1999, pp. 60-61.)

Policies and Procedures

Any course that invites us to examine issues of human pain and perplexity has the potential to be unsettling. Our ability to learn in such a course depends on several things: our ability to tolerate ambiguity; our willingness to dialogue honestly and respectfully with each other; our willingness to consider alternative interpretations; our acceptance of truth, no matter where it is found; our ability to take responsibility for both our beliefs and our anxiety about different beliefs; our comfort with "political and religious incorrectness"; and our ongoing struggle to integrate new information with present beliefs. We expect that in this course we will all work to create a spirit of respect, curiosity, and dialogue. If you find that you are having personal difficulty in this course, please feel free to check in with us, or with Rev. Justin Lind Ayres (Seminary Pastor) or Rev. Angela Shannon (Dean of Students) regarding a referral for consultation or counseling

We believe that this course requires full engagement with one's peers and with the process. We assume that you will be with parishioners in much the same way that you are with peers in class. We will depend on your wise judgment as to the ways in which you engage various digital devices, but if we observe your use of them distracting your colleagues or detracting from your own learning we will ask that you put them away.

ADA Compliance Statement

Reasonable accommodation will be provided to any student with a disability who is registered with the Student Resource Center and requests needed accommodation.

If you are a student with a disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) and think that you might need special assistance or accommodation in this class or any other class, please contact the Director of the Student Resource Center or contact your instructor directly.

Academic Honesty

Members of the Luther Seminary community are expected to conduct themselves responsibly and honestly in academic matters. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses against this expectation and are subject to disciplinary action.

If instances of cheating or plagiarism are detected, one of the disciplinary actions shall follow: either the instructor records a failure for the assignment or examination, or the instructor records a failure for the course. In either case, the instructor shall bring the matter to the Office of the Academic Dean and the Office of the Dean of Students, and the question whether further disciplinary action should be considered will be determined in consultation with the instructor, the Office of the Academic Dean, and the Office of the Dean of Students. See the current Student Handbook for more details on this matter.