

Spirituality in a Digital Age

July 6-10, 2015 / 6 to 9 pm

Mary Hess / mhess@luthersem.edu / meh.religioused.org

Appointments available every day, request via email

651-236-7592

This is a course which takes seriously the power of story and ritual, and asks two important questions:

How do we discern the Holy Spirit in the stories and rituals that breathe life into and through us?

How are our stories and rituals being shaped by and through a digital age?

We will focus together on finding constructive ways to engage digital stories -- both the commercialized ones presented by media culture, and those shared within faith community. Using communicative theology as a base, we will explore how the Holy Spirit breathes through our lives in the midst of a digital age, and the practices and perspectives which can engage spirituality generatively.

Course Information:

This course is relatively short, and as such I want to offer some advice about preparing for our time together. First, please take seriously my request that you do the reading in advance. The three required readings are highly accessible, and should be enjoyable and provocative. My list of recommended readings should also prove highly useful to you, but I understand that a short course such as this cannot require such reading.

I am making no assumptions in advance of our gathering about your ability to use digital tools, or even your familiarity with digital cultures. I imagine that for some of the students in this class it will be the first time you enter these realms, and for others you may be far more proficient than I in this work. I have structured our time so that we should be able to engage each other well no matter where we reside on the spectrum of experience (“digital native,” “digital immigrant,” “digital luddite”).

I do assume, however, that you will have some access to digital devices during the week. That may mean that you have a smartphone, tablet or laptop to bring to class. But it could mean that you find and know how to access a computer lab on campus or in your workspace. If the latter is the case, please make sure that you save some time to experiment in the lab.

Finally, because I will be on campus the entire week, I am happy to meet with students at other times if you would like some one-on-one technical help.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course a student should be able to...

Articulate the connections between story and ritual, and their primacy for exploring spirituality in a digital age

Articulate the ways that an understanding of the social Trinity grounds engagement within digital cultures and invites an articulation of the work of the Holy Spirit

Understand the basic elements of communicative theology (especially the “create, share, believe” circle)

Know how to lead at least two different forms of “liberating structures” for participatory engagement in theological reflection

Know how to use at least two digital tools for sharing stories

Texts:

Required reading:

Aageson, J. et. al. *One Hope: Re-Membering the Body of Christ* (Augsburg Fortress and the Order of St. Benedict, 2015)

Chapters 1-3 of Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (Jossey-Bass, 2011).

Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make us Better and How They Can Change the World* (Penguin, 2011)

Recommended reading:

Keith Anderson and Elizabeth Drescher, *Click2Save: The Digital Ministry Bible* (Morehouse Publishing, 2012)

Alex Soojung-Pang Kim, *The Distraction Addiction* (Little, Brown and Co., 2013)

Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, *Connected Toward Communion: The Church and Social Communication in the Digital Age* (Liturgical Press, 2014)

Excellent background reading:

Lynn Schofield Clark, *The Parent App: Understanding Families in the Digital Age* (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark Burrows, Ed. *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005)

Elizabeth Kandel Englander, *Bullying and Cyberbullying: What Every Educator Needs to Know* (Harvard Education Press, 2013)

Meredith Gould, *Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways* (Liturgical Press, 2013)

Stewart Hoover and Monica Emerich, *Media, Spiritualities and Social Change* (Continuum, 2011)

Knut Lundby, Ed. *Religion Across Media: From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity* (Peter Lang, 2013)

Julie Lytle, *Faith Formation 4.0: Introducing an Ecology of Faith in a Digital Age* (Morehouse 2013)

Jeffrey Mahan, *Media, Religion and Culture* (Routledge, 2014)

John Pungente, SJ and Monty Williams, SJ, *Finding God in the Dark: Taking the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius to the Movies* (Novalis, 2004)

Howard Rheingold, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online* (MIT Press, 2012)

Frank Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti* (Pilgrim Press, 2011)

Matthias Scharer, Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative Theology* (Crossroads Publishing, 2008)

Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (Penguin Press, 2008)

Antonio Spadaro, *Cybertheology: Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet* (Fordham University Press, 2014)

Douglas Thomas, and John Seely Brown, *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change* (CreateSpace, 2011)

Course Schedule:

July 6

Introductions to each other and the challenges of “storying faith” in digital cultures; ritual and narrative in the midst of digital cacophony

Practical challenge: Make a tackk which shares a biblical verse or spiritual insight you live with and through

July 7

Seeing through and reframing commercial culture
The social Trinity and communicative theology: Create, share, believe
Story circles and faith formation

Practical challenge: Make an animoto which takes a favorite biblical verse or spiritual insight and matches it with a “secular” song

July 8

Social communication and the social Trinity: Further implications
Using social media proactively in ministry

Practical challenge: Spend an hour in social media and bring back three “nuggets” you’ve found, and one spiritual insight

July 9

The “I”, the “We”, the “It” and the “Globe” – embodying communicative theology in participatory structures, amidst Catholic frames of authority
Prayer, worship, and other opportunities for spiritual engagement in a digital age

Practical challenge: Spend some time in quiet contemplation of your current prayer life, and the ways in which your participation (or lack thereof) in social media might invite consolation and/or desolation

July 10

Exploring the riches of digital games for spiritual practice
Concluding questions, enduring challenges

Assignments:

10% (1) Carefully read the required texts in advance of our gathering in July. I am more than happy to be in conversation with you via email as you work through these texts.

10% (2) Participate fully and thoughtfully in class discussion and exercises.

20% (3) Write a clear statement of your convictions in relation to spirituality in a digital age. This statement should be between 350 and 750 words, and draw on the ideas, themes and processes we read and engage. This statement is due as a draft on July 6th, and then in final form on July 10th.

40% (4) Create two short digital pieces (one which combines words and images; and one which combines words, images and music) sharing your faith convictions or introducing a spiritual practice in a public context. We will be exploring options for these pieces in class. You are welcome to use tools with which you are already familiar. If you have never created anything digitally, you will be introduced to *tackk.com* and *animoto.com*, both of which are free, easily used digital tools. Drafts can be shared during our time together, but final pieces are due by July 13th and must be available in a public format which can be shared with your classmates.

20% (5) Write a learning plan for your own practices of spirituality in the midst of a digital age. We will discuss this in class, but the primary goal here is to find ways to continue your use of participatory practices in the midst of digital cultures. This assignment is due on July 13th.

Assessment strategy and criteria:

I will evaluate your work using a rubric shared in class. Late assignments will necessarily lower your grade, as will missing or incomplete assignments. Please check in with me in advance if you anticipate schedule challenges – I realize how challenging a life in pastoral ministry can be!

Instructional Methods:

This class will unfold through a variety of exercises, discussions, and practical technology demonstrations during our time together. For that reason this class is in some ways a “flipped classroom,” and requires that you attend carefully to the reading in advance of our gathering.

I very much appreciate, and agree with, Stephen Brookfield’s assertion of “classroom caveats” which are as follows:

“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:

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.

That students attending will have experiences that they can reflect on and analyze in discussion.

That the course will focus on the analysis of students’ experiences and ideas as much as on the analysis of academic theories.

That the chief regular class activity will be a small group discussion of experiences and ideas.

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."*

For Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for this course, please register with either Kathy Duggan (kathleen.duggan@bc.edu) Associate Director, Academic Support Services, the Connors Family Learning Center (learning disabilities and ADHD) or Paulette Durrett (paulette.durrett@bc.edu), Assistant Dean for Students with Disabilities (all other disabilities). Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.

[The STM Writing Companions Corner \(WCC\)](#) offers students one-on-one help with writing research papers, exegeses, reflection papers, and other assignments frequently given by STM faculty. Please watch *STM News* for more information on signing up for an appointment in the WCC.

Academic Integrity Policy:

Plagiarism is the act of taking the words, ideas, data, illustrations, or statements of another person or source, and presenting them as one's own. Penalties at Boston College range from a grade penalty to dismissal from the University. To avoid plagiarism, any use of another's words or ideas must be fully cited. If in the original wording, quotation marks or blocked, indented quotations must be used. [For more information regarding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, please consult the STM website.](#)

A note added by Dr. Hess: this policy includes appropriate care with relation to music, images, and other digital materials.

Bias neutral and Inclusive Language:

Language is not fixed or static, but is constantly evolving and changing as society's attitudes and practices change. Be aware of the development of new forms of expression that endeavor to describe persons in non-discriminatory ways that are appropriate, respectful and just. In accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style and generally accepted contemporary canons of scholarship, the expectation is to use bias neutral language in academic writing. In addition to gender inclusive language, conscientious effort should be made to use appropriate language with reference to race, ethnicity, disability, age, religion, social status, etc.