

Nurturing Spirituality, Vocation and Mission in Adults

## Course Project

Contemplative Book Group:

On Dear Church by Lenny Duncan

Project Proposed By: Lynnette Rose & Dane Breslin

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**Missional Question: How Are We Participating in Expanding Circles of Concern in our Communities?**

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## **Contemplative Book Group Weekly Ritual**

### ***-Opening: Music / Chanting-***

- **Welcome:** Invitation to Settle In, Light a Candle, Get Comfortable
- **Breathe Prayer:** from Mary Hess's Class
- **First Scripture Reading:** relates to 'Dear Church' selection

- **Centering Prayer:**

- send instructions beforehand (See Appendix B)

Spoken: "*May Our Hearts & Ears Be Opened to Greater Understanding*"

- **Second Sacred Reading:** from "Dear Church"

- **Lectio Share:**

- no fixing/helping, send out Parker Palmer's touchstones beforehand  
(see Appendix A)

- **Book Time**

- What Caught Your Attention In The Readings?
- What Questions Do you Still Have?

- **WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

- How does what we've shared connect with our contexts
- What does our tradition demand/ask of us?
- What is the Holy Spirit calling you/us to?

- **Final Prayer** – Designated Person
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## OUR HOPES

Lynnette:

Over the past few years, I have been thinking a lot about the ELCA being the whitest church in America. I am reminded of this statistic on Sunday mornings when I see my congregation's sanctuary filled (pre-Covid) with people I have come to love deeply over 20 years and who are white, like me. We are gathered as church in a community that is 1/3 Latinx. I drive an hour each way to get to church, much of it across reservation land, from my community where I teach in a school that is equal parts Native, Latinx, and White. I have wondered, and still wonder, if I am attracted to something beyond theology and liturgy in this space that I find so prayerful and healing. Am I drawn unconsciously to this place because it reflects so much of my likeness back at me as the Body of Christ, a White Christ? I would like to think not, but I doubt that I am all that unique in this ELCA body of white bodies. So, I wrestle...a lot.

When Dane proposed the idea of working together on a contemplative book study of Dear Church, I was immediately smitten for reasons different than, but not opposed to Dane's. Lake Chelan Lutheran Church has a long history of holding space for silence, contemplative prayer, deep reflection, and rich liturgy. The format seemed likely to be a good fit for widening our circles of concern by rooting ourselves in prayer as we open ourselves to the difficult conversations surrounding our complicity of othering, neglecting, and hurting our siblings of color and within the LGBTQIA+ community. As we struggle to keep our orientation faithfully toward the gospel in the midst of the pandemics of racism, Covid-19, and national division and all that they have exposed, I believe deep prayer and vulnerable conversation are sacred acts of resistance to the winds that howl around us. My hope is that this offering of a contemplative book study will allow people to connect familiar and well-loved scriptures with the words of Lenny Duncan in a way that opens our hearts and invites us to imagine ourselves, the church, and our communities in deep relationship with one another. May it be so.

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Dane:

Before starting internship and moving back West, I participated in a prayer/meditation group called Prayer of the Heart where each Wednesday we practiced twenty minutes of centering prayer or silent seated meditation, then shared our experience in prayer/meditation, then twenty minutes of sharing into the center using Parker Palmer's Touchstones, and then wrapped up with another twenty minutes of prayer/meditation. Directly after the Prayer of the Heart group met, there was a book group in the same space where a number of us stayed and explored the brilliant works of episcopalian theologian and mystic Cynthia Bourgault.

Initially, these two experiences were distinct, but over time we as a group began to notice that our discussions around the books we read had a different quality given our time in prayer and meditation. In reflection together, we noticed that we were collectively guided towards sharing more vulnerable and intersectional aspects of our lives, and we felt drawn into action together. In fact, the book group itself began to reflect the teachings that Bourgault was sharing- the books 'came alive' and took on energy and gravity in our lives in a way none of us had experienced before. We effectively shifted from thinking about the books (orthodoxy) into living and practicing the reality described in the books which then created something new and delicious (orthopraxy)!

While this experience emerged somewhat organically, I turned to wonder if it could be emulated in some way. Could contemplation be wed with reading in community? Would reading together in this way change how we assimilate the information? Would it help difficult and challenging truths work their way into our hardened hearts? Perhaps! This project is an attempt to test, to experiment and to see if this model is possible. Lynnette perfectly summarized my own motivations behind choosing to test this contemplative reading model with Lenny Duncan's book Dear Church. I also echo Lynnette's sentiments about hoping to co-create a book group format that is grounded in contemplation and works to widen our circles of concern to include all of God's people. May we be rooted in prayer and accompanied by the Spirit in these difficult conversations! May we have the humility to let this model change, transform, or even die if it doesn't work towards justice and righteousness for all people, especially the marginalized and oppressed!

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## CHAPTER SCHEDULE

### **Intro- Ch.1: Lynnette**

Start Date: Last week of January / evening time / zoom

Scripture: Luke 22:15b-21

I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them , saying, " This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table."

Quote from Book for Lectio:

It is our duty and our joy that in this time and this place we join the angels and archangels, the witnesses of the resurrection in their never-ending hymn of justice. The banquet that is about to be laid out by the sovereign God is a feast of equity. But make no mistake: it will be like the night this same God was arrested. God will take this church, lift it up and give thanks, and then break it. He will turn and face us, saying to those we have oppressed, "This is my body, broken for you." This same God, who carried his own lynching tree up Calvary on his back, will lift a cup full of the blood of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile. Jesus will lift up the cup and say, "This is the new covenant made in the blood of the innocent, spilt by our hands." (pg 13-14)

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## Ch. 2-3: Dane

Date: 2nd Week

Scripture: John 20: 24-27

**24** Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." **26** A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" **27** Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Quote from Book for Lectio:

Church, the cross was raised high by slaveholders and lifted up in fields full of white-hooded men. It has hung with a pale white hippie man nailed to it over our sanctuaries for years. Not only are we complicit, but we are perpetrators. Our seminaries still teach theology as if the only important thinkers have been European scholars. We still have only a few hundred black leaders out of tens of thousands. Kids like Dylann Roof grow up in our sanctuaries, and we have no idea. That isn't one pastor's or one community's fault; it is all of our burden to bear. We can no longer ignore this wound. We must be like Thomas and put our hands in the wounds of the body of Christ, hold them, and kiss them. We are being invited to wash the weary and downtrodden feet of black America with our hair. We must repair the breach that we caused. Us. We're all complicit in the communal sin of white supremacy. The first step toward reparations is to dismantle white supremacy. This is the church's mission in the twenty-first century. We have to keep the fires burning, so that others can use us as a guidepost, a true north. We are called to be shepherds, Church. Let us no longer be wolves in sheep's clothing. You want to know why young people are pouring out of our churches and finding sustenance elsewhere? It's because we claim to be a community that is founded on the incredible vision of the heavenly banquet,

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yet we don't even have enough chairs for everyone to sit at the table. We love the hymn "All Are Welcome," but it should come with an asterisk, and we know it: All Are Welcome\*

\*if you don't challenge us \*if you don't question the way we do things \*if you sing, act, pray, and worship just like us \*if you don't make me feel anything that isn't positive for this hour and a half \*if you don't make me question anything I have built my life around White supremacy looks like punitive assimilation. We have forced people of color in this church to leave their identities behind, causing lasting damage for which we need to repent. The truth is that our entire liturgy and worship are dripping with the affirmation of whiteness. We simply haven't answered the call to love our neighbor, because if we do, we will have to put too much of our own power and privilege at risk. We won't feel this more poignantly than in the moment between the confession of our sin and the proclamation of absolution. So let's sit in that moment a bit longer, Church, and allow the discomfort to fuel our work toward reparation. (p.44-45)

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## Ch.4-5: Lynnette

Date: 3rd week

Scripture: Excerpts from 1 Corinthians 12

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body so it is with Christ...(v. 12)

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body...(v. 19-20)

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary...(v. 21-22a)

God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored all rejoice together. (v. 24b-26)

Quote from Book for Lectio:

And Dylann Roof and I are both Lutheran. We both were baptized at and have sat in the pews of ELCA churches. We both have heard the gospel preached from the lectionary cycle. Both of us have tasted the nearness of God from the table after the words of institution were spoken over the elements. We both have witnessed the utterly ordinary things like bread and wine become utterly extraordinary with only words and community as the recipe. We both have seen the deep blues of Advent and the crimson of Pentecost. We both have acclaimed that Christ is risen.

We came from similar circumstances, and I believe God's grace falls on this world evenly. So how did I end up leading Bible studies in one black church and Dylann committed an act of terrorism in another? (Pg 57)

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## Ch. 6-7: Dane

Date: 4th Week

Scripture: Proverbs 9:1-6:

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."

Quote from Book for Lectio:

For the sake of my soul, I repent. I repent of times I laughed at homophobic jokes to hide my own queerness in fear. I repent of the times I raised my voice at a woman, not remembering the times we hid with my mother when my father did the same thing. I repent that I have defined womanhood simply by a vagina and erased transwomen from that spectrum of beauty. I repent of the times I have acted like my daughter was a fortress men were trying to scale and that it was my job to intimidate them, taking away her sense of agency. I repent of the times I cut other men to pieces with my words, just so I could climb an imaginary rung of power. I repent that I haven't done enough to dismantle this system of oppression in my own sphere of influence, specifically the ELCA. I repent that I haven't believed women when they have looked me in the eyes and told me their experiences in this church as leaders. I repent that I have only treated woman as objects that were in my life to please me in some way, whether it was to stroke my ego or realize how "great" I am. I repent of the times that I have halfheartedly lifted women's voices but didn't really take the time to listen. I repent of broken sexual and relationship patterns that I have repeated to great harm to women in my life. I repent of the times that I have discounted the genius of woman theologians, tearing down their constructs until I'm left sitting in a mental landscape of bitterness and ash. I repent for the times I have listened to other men say sexually violent things and have not called them out. I repent of the way I have allowed manhood to become a twisted identity that is barely alive and have told others to follow my example. I repent that it has taken me until I was forty years old to say these things.

Church, when will you repent? (p.96)

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## Ch. 8-9: Lynnette

Date: 5th week

Scripture: Philippians 1:1-9

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Phillippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.

Quote from Book for Lectio:

Dear Church, I love you. I mean a stay-up-late-at-night-and-think-about-you kind of love. I still get butterflies in my stomach when I think of you, Church...I never trusted anyone before I met you, Church--not with my spirit, and certainly not with my future, no matter how doomed it seemed. I spent my formative years living on the streets sleeping outside, and never allowing anyone close enough to hurt me...

I fell for you almost instantly. You are worthy of that love, and you are worthy of a lifetime of my service, Church. I have put it all on the line for you--a career, my family, my sweat, blood, and tears--because I see you for the radiant being you are. Dear Church, I love you. Sincerely Lenny Duncan.

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## Ch. 10-11: Dane

Date: 6th Week

Scripture: Matthew 5: 3-13

[Jesus] said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

Quote from Book for Lectio:

The twenty-first-century American church is a passion project of the creator. We are entering an incredible period of rebirth and growth. When I say growth, I don't mean seeing more butts in pews or adding to your endowment. I mean growing in nearness to our creator until our very presence can become a means of grace to a hungry world. I mean growing a popular love movement that actually creates sustainable and revolutionary change in this country. I mean growing in Holy Spirit power, growing in concern for the poor and oppressed. I mean growing in our sexual ethic and queer theology. I mean growing in prophetic witness to the world. I mean growing in solidarity and community. That is the growth we should be aiming for. That is the growth that pleases God—growing in our deep respect for Scripture and its often varied and contradicting voices, growing in deep respect and humility toward our contexts and communities and in knowledge that we are there to serve the people, even if they never worship with us. (149)

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# Circle of Trust® Touchstones

developed by Parker J. Palmer and the Center for Courage & Renewal

[www.couragerenewal.org](http://www.couragerenewal.org)

## Give and receive welcome.

People learn best in hospitable spaces.  
In this circle we support each other's learning  
by giving and receiving hospitality.

## Be present as fully as possible.

Be here with your doubts, fears and failings  
as well as your convictions, joys and successes,  
your listening as well as your speaking.

## What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.

This is not a "share or die" event!  
Do whatever your soul calls for, and know  
that you do it with our support. Your soul  
knows your needs better than we do.

## Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.

Our views of reality may differ, but speaking  
one's truth in a Circle of Trust does not mean  
interpreting, correcting or debating what  
others say. Speak from your center to the  
center of the circle, using "I" statements,  
trusting people to do their own  
sifting and winnowing.

## No fixing, saving, advising or correcting.

This is one of the hardest guidelines for  
those of us who like to "help." But it is  
vital to welcoming the soul, to making  
space for the inner teacher.

## Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions...

instead of counsel or corrections. With such questions,  
we help "hear each other into deeper speech."

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Appendix A Source: "Circle of Trust Touchstones • Center for Courage & Renewal." Center for Courage & Renewal, [www.couragerenewal.org/touchstones/](http://www.couragerenewal.org/touchstones/).

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## Summary of the Guidelines

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts (which include body sensations, feelings, images and reflections), return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Appendix B Source: "Centering Prayer." Minnesota Contemplative Outreach, [www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer.html](http://www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer.html).

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## REFERENCES

“Centering Prayer.” Minnesota Contemplative Outreach,  
[www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer.html](http://www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer.html).

“Circle of Trust Touchstones • Center for Courage & Renewal.” Center for Courage & Renewal,  
[www.couragerenewal.org/touchstones/](http://www.couragerenewal.org/touchstones/).