

PREACHING AS IF YOU MEAN IT

Meadville/Lombard Theological School

July 6-10, 2009

Instructor: William F. Schulz

About the Course:

A great Harvard professor of homiletics once said that all ministers must face the hard question, "How far would you go to hear yourself preach?" If the answer is to be "A long way," then the sermons we preach will need to be both worthy in their content and felicitous in their style. This intensive course will address both elements of preaching. It will help students clarify what fundamental message they want to preach and how to do so most effectively.

Requirements:

- (1) Completion of readings and participation in class.
- (2) Interview with a preacher [see below].
- (3) A 24-hour journal [see below].
- (4) A five-page paper on your source of hope [see below].
- (5) Two sermons [10-12 minutes long] for presentation in class [see below].

Texts:

Arnason, Wayne, and Rolenz, Kathleen, *Worship that Works: Theory and Practice for Unitarian Universalists* (Boston: Skinner house, 2008) [available from the UUA Bookstore];

Parker, Theodore, "Reflections on Preaching and Ministry," [reader];

Rzepka, Jane, and Sawyer, Ken, *Thematic Preaching: An Introduction* (St. Louis, MO Chalice Press, 2001) [available from the UUA Bookstore];

Schulz, William F., ed., *Transforming Words: Six Essays on Preaching* (Boston: Skinner House, 1996) [reader];

Interview with a Preacher:

Before you come to M/L for the course, please interview a preacher of your choice to obtain from her or him a sense of her/his understanding and technique of preaching. You may feel free to ask whatever questions you feel would be most helpful but among the

questions you might want to consider are, “Do you have a ‘philosophy’ of preaching?”; “How do you decide what topics to preach about?”; “What resources do you find most helpful in constructing your sermons?”; “Do you have favorite types of sermons?”; “How does a sermon relate to the other elements of the worship service?”; “How does the congregation/audience and its experience inform your presentation?”; “What are the worst mistakes you have made in preaching?”

You will not be required to submit anything written related to this interview. Instead, I will simply ask you to tell me who you interviewed and to participate in a class discussion about the learnings you gleaned from the conversation.

A 24-Hour Journal:

Among the most important resources for our sermons are our own experiences and encounters. For any quotidian 24-hour period, please record in a journal whatever you discover that may be of use in some future sermon. This can be random incidents, chance encounters, dreams, insightful observations, humorous stories...or simply the dull everydayness of existence which in and of itself may provide insight into the plight of humanity. Pick any day you wish but do not combine days. Do not, in other words, take the best incidents from the past six months. Just decide at the beginning of any 24-hour period that you will during that time be especially attentive to your daily life as a resource for your preaching.

Again, you will not be required to submit anything in writing but I will ask each student to share what she/he observed or experienced in a standard 24-hour period that was useful. The answer may be “Nothing” and that too is acceptable!

Paper on Your Source of Hope

There are many different kinds of sermons, as the Rzepka/Sawyer book points out and illustrates, but every preacher must be able at least occasionally to provide some insight and inspiration related to those “dark nights of the soul.” What is the fundamental theological/philosophical/psychological source of hope from which you draw in your preaching to speak to people in despair of one sort or another. Imagine your congregation on a Sunday morning includes a person whose spouse/partner has just walked out on them; another person who has just lost the “best job I ever had;” a third who has recently experienced a blatantly racist or homophobic remark from someone they had considered a good friend; a fourth who is deeply distressed emotionally about the genocide in Darfur; and a couple whose twelve-year child has just been diagnosed with a serious and possibly fatal illness. In this five-page paper I don’t want you to give me the sermon you would preach that morning (though it may be one of the two you deliver to the class [see below]); I want you to tell me the source of hope you would call upon, point to or invoke out of which that sermon would be preached. How do you answer the question, “In the face of pain and suffering that feels overwhelming, why ought we choose to live another day?”

Two Sermons for Presentation in Class

During the course of our week together, each student will have the opportunity to preach two sermons to the class and instructor, at least one of which will be videotaped so that you can see yourself preach. These sermons must be prepared ahead of time and may be on any topic you wish but be no more than 10-12 minutes in length. They should also represent two different types of sermons as delineated in the Rzepka/Sawyer typology of sermons [see text].

Grades

Grades will be based upon (1) your participation in class discussion; (2) your five-page paper on the source of hope; (3) your two sermons. Because the course turns on your having completed all these assignments before the first day of class, there will be no incompletes.

About the Instructor

Dr. William F. Schulz was ordained to the Unitarian Universalist ministry in 1975 and served a church in Bedford, MA, before going to work at the UUA and eventually becoming President (1985-93). He served for twelve years (1994-2006) as Executive Director of Amnesty International USA and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington, DC. Dr. Schulz has preached in many of the great pulpits in America, including Memorial Church at Harvard; Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago; Riverside Church in New York City and to more than 300 Unitarian Universalist congregations. He is the contributing editor of *Transforming Words: Six Essays on Preaching*, now out of print, and has authored or edited six other books and written more than one hundred published essays and articles. He is a graduate of Oberlin College (A. B., 1971); the University of Chicago (M. A. in philosophy, 1974); and Meadville/Lombard (M. A. in Theology, 1973; D. Mn., 1975) and has been awarded seven honorary degrees. Bill lives with his wife, the Rev. Beth Graham, Associate Vice President for Stewardship and Development at the UUA, in Gloucester, MA. He can be reached at “williamfschulz@yahoo.com.”