

# Interfaith Religious Education: Preparing Our Own Theological Grounding

Dr. Jenice L. View and Julica Hermann de la Fuente

January 16 – 20, 2018

240-274-9771 [jenice@aol.com](mailto:jenice@aol.com)

517-525-4402 [julica.hermann@gmail.com](mailto:julica.hermann@gmail.com)

## Course Overview

Our world urgently needs people of faith and spirituality to conquer the politics of divide and conquer which separates us all from peace and justice. People who practice this way might be defined as having a religion of “critical thinking and justice,” rather than one of orthodoxy.

We neither want to rush thoughtlessly nor delay unnecessarily the process of developing interfaith social justice action. This course seeks to develop a shared consciousness, exploring practices that prepare us to act as bridge people/ambassadors, in a way that does not feel contrived.

In order to enter interfaith relationships successfully we need to do our own internal work first. Through a personal exploration of our social identities and locations, as well as our theological frameworks, this course will help us move from a mono-cultural and mono-faith perspective to a place where we are slowly challenged to change our worldview and make room for others.

We are looking at the course readings as a window into a variety of faith understandings and our own responses to those faiths. In some cases fiction offers a greater truth than non-fiction, and can serve as a “safe” way to discuss difficult topics.

After visiting various houses of worship over the fall, you are expected to write in a journal about your immediate, gut response to the worship experience; you will not be expected to share these journal entries in their entirety, though an excerpt will be shared in Populi. In addition, the course readings and the prompts for the narrative responses are intended to draw on the emotions and insights from your journal entries.

**Important warning:** This course is front end loaded (i.e. it should be thought of as taking place during the fall term). The majority of the assignments must be completed before you arrive in Chicago for the M/L Winter Intensive. Furthermore, all assignments must be submitted on or before their due dates. Time management will be necessary to pass this course.

## Objectives

- Develop skill in discerning and describing your ethical and moral stance and how it shapes your personal theology/spirituality.
- Practice the skill of shaping a community/collective theology among Unitarian Universalists that preserves your personal theological integrity.
- Increase awareness of personal barriers to and opportunities for effective interfaith work.
- Clarify your own stance as to how you wish to respond as the issues of race and xenophobia impact your congregation and public ministry.
- Understand the historic and theological experiences of people of color in the United States and Latin America through a reading of fiction.

## Requirements

1. Class attendance and active participation in the interactive coursework. Be prepared to be flexible in learning format, and be willing to share openly and to listen deeply.
2. Submit a 1-2 page bio and description of your goals for the class by September 8. Please include a description of your own faith tradition growing up, and your experiences in interfaith engagement.
3. Visit 4 houses of worship (or group spiritual practice opportunities) during the fall (a Christian denomination that is unfamiliar to you, a synagogue, a mosque, and one of your choosing - Buddhist temple, Sufi gathering, Wiccan celebration, etc.) Keep a journal of your experiences, especially noting your feelings prior, during and after the visit. You will not be required to share these journal reflections, but you will be expected to share an excerpt in Populi three days after your visit. Prior to your visit, please read the appropriate chapter in *Do I Kneel or Do I Bow?*
4. Submit your 3 reflections on and responses to the fiction books from the course bibliography. Please respond to each of the prompts and submit on or before the due dates.
5. Submit a final paper based on *God is Not One*, your journal entries, and your experiences during the course intensive by Feb 2, 2018. Further instructions for final paper will be provided in Populi.
6. Check-in at the Populi course site regularly. We will occasionally post announcements and additional short readings.

## Course Bibliography

*Do I Kneel or Do I Bow? What You Need to Know When Attending Religious Occasions*, Akasha Lonsdale, New York, Random House, 2012

*God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World -- and Why Their Differences Matter*, Stephen Prothero, New York, Harper Collins, 2010

*The House of the Spirits*, Isabel Allende, New York, Atria Press, 1982

*The Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler, New York, Seven Stories Press, 1993

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee, New York, HarperCollins, 1960

Note: The novels in this bibliography contain graphic examples of racial, sexual and political violence. We encourage you to engage these texts with attention to your self-care.

## Due Dates

Visit 4 houses of worship (or group spiritual practice opportunities) during the fall semester, at times of your own choosing. Please include a Christian denomination that is unfamiliar to you, a synagogue, a mosque, and one of your choosing - Buddhist temple, Sufi gathering, Wiccan celebration, etc. Keep a journal of your experiences, especially noting your feelings prior, during and after the visit. You will not be required to share these journal reflections, but you will be expected to share an excerpt in Populi three days after your visit. Prior to your visit, please read the appropriate chapter in *Do I Kneel or Do I Bow?*

September 8: 1-2 page double-spaced biography and description of your goals for the class. Please include a description of your own faith tradition growing up, and your experiences in interfaith engagement.

For the reflections to the 3 novels, please respond to all of the prompts in a paper of no more than 3 double-spaced pages in length.

October 13: Reflection on *To Kill A Mockingbird*

Prompts:

- How do morality and ethics manifest in Maycomb, AL? What is the role of religion in the Finch household?

- What does Scout learn about Calpurnia, religion, and white privilege at the First Purchase Church?
- If you lived in Maycomb, AL at that time, what would your faith have compelled you to do?

#### November 10: Reflection on *The House of the Spirits*

##### Prompts:

- How does this novel challenge a more traditional capitalist, patriarchal and colonialist perspective? How does it reinforce it?
- How does each character's relationship to spirituality, magic, nature and religion shape the novel?
- Compare and contrast your own ethics and definition of "good" to the ones presented in this book. Where do you agree and disagree?

#### December 8: Reflection on *The Parable of the Sower*

##### Prompts:

- How would you describe Earthseed to a 10 year-old without over-simplifying or trivializing it?
- To what extent does Earthseed challenge or align with your own philosophy/theology?
- What is your strongest disagreement with Earthseed?

February 2: Submit a final paper, no more than 10-pages double-spaced, based on *God is Not One*, your journal entries, and your experiences during the course intensive by Feb 2, 2018. Further instructions for the final paper will be provided in Populi.

**Important Note:** This course will be graded Pass/Fail. If more than 2 of the 9 assignments are submitted late, you will fail. Furthermore, after February 2, we will register an incomplete. Failure to submit any outstanding materials during the subsequent year will lead to the recording of a permanent incomplete.

### Statement Regarding Accommodations

Meadville Lombard is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. If a student has a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and requires accommodations, they should contact the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, Ken McHugh (kmchugh@meadville.edu) (312) 735 2919. Please note that classroom accommodations cannot be provided without an approved Accommodations Form.

## **Copyright and Fair Use**

Meadville Lombard works to ensure that the members of our academic community (students, staff, adjunct, affiliate, and full-time faculty) participate as informed citizens in the scholarly community and comply with applicable copyright law. In the US, copyright law was created to ensure protections for creators of original work as well as encourage an environment where ideas can be freely exchanged, adapted, and commented on in the spirit of scholarly inquiry and creativity. As a general rule, the material instructors make available for classroom use falls under different compliance rules than that used in other public settings (congregations, presentations, GA, etc.). Please refrain from sharing classroom material (texts, articles, music, video, excerpts) outside the educational setting and take care to cite your sources appropriately. Please ask your instructor or the Director of the Library and IT for guidance if needed. Together, we can ensure that Meadville operates in conscientious compliance with applicable law while remaining flexible to ensure a vibrant exchange of ideas in the community.