Draft Syllabus

CEST 4558

In Your Hands: The Spirituality, Language and Ethics of Touch
Adam Dyer
Thursday 6:00pm-8:30pm – Fireside Room

This unique course offers a safe environment for seminarians to discover their personal language of touch and applications for understanding touch in the context of spiritual practice and expression, communication and caregiving. Blending elements of manual therapy, biology, theology and sociology, we will explore why we touch, how we touch and where touch fits in our consciousness as religious leaders. Reading will range from texts on ethics and anatomy to religious scripture and poetry. Exercises will incorporate healthy consensual touch drawing on established exercises from acting, dance and Somatics.

Learning Outcomes

- Establish a context for understanding touch as a spiritual expression or in the spiritual setting.
- Understand the physical elements of touch.
- To experience touch as a unique personal language.
- Identify a language for boundaries about touch.
- Gain a historical context for understanding touch as an ethical question.
- Identify and confront personal and cultural biases surrounding touch.

Students will be evaluated on their willingness to engage and explore their own process of touch (20%), on their understanding of the readings (20%) and on their participation in the hands on exercises (20%). A final paper describing how they will use their knowledge about touch in the context of religious leadership or spiritual practice will represent 40% of the course grade.

Weekly Sections

1. Introduction - Why does touch matter in the spiritual setting.
2. Anatomy of Touch - Exploring the biological, neurological process involved in touch.
3. History of Touch - How is touch used (or not used) in different cultural settings.
4. Boundaries and Barriers - How do we establish a system of permissions surrounding touch.
5. Hand to Hand - What does holding hands mean culturally, socially, and in the context of religious practice.
7. Self Touch - How do we experience ourselves through touch.
8. (Reading Week)
9. Spiritual Traditions and Touch (Tribal/ Indigenous)
10. Spiritual Traditions and Touch (Eastern)
11. Spiritual Traditions and Touch (Western) (Thanksgiving)
12. **Empathic touch** - What does touch say as a tool of empathy. How can it work in the pastoral care setting.

13. **Touch as a weapon** - Exploration of unwelcome touch.

14. **Sensual vs. Sexual** - Establishing the most important boundary.

15. **Beyond Touch** - Legalities of touch. Touch beyond the physical nervous system. (Final project due)

**Course Reading List (partial list of texts being considered either in full, excerpted, or for bibliography)**

*Non-technical texts are being considered for their specific relevance to touch seen through the lens of theology, spirituality and/or ethics.*


- Scripture from: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Vodou
- Various Articles from Massage Magazine
- Pub Med - Medical Journal articles on compassionate touch, touch therapy and manual therapies
- Poetry Selections (Transcendentalists)