

Towards Collective Liberation: Theories and Practice for Social Change

RSFT-8420

Starr King School for the Ministry
Instructor: Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward, MASC
Online Spring 2014
3 Units, pin number required

Course Description

Open to all, and geared toward those engaged in community organizing, activist, social work, and nonprofit settings; also a foundational course for students in the MASC (MA in Social Change) program. Topics include visionary leadership, assessing organizational and community needs, social movement history, coalition building, power and identity, theological reflection, spiritual and emotional care for social change agents, and more.

This interactive online course combines web technologies with small group work, an in-person praxis (action/reflection) component, team-based student-led presentations, guest contributors, and more: all to deliver a dynamic distance learning experience for social change practitioners around the world.

Participants will engage in academic study and scholarship, professional development, and spiritual practice responding to their particular goals, gifts, and challenges. Students will build a classroom community for peer reflection and support, while articulating and advancing their unique goals for their own learning and leadership in social change.

Learning Objectives

- Articulate a personal theology/philosophy of social change
- Draw on historical and contemporary social movements for insight and inspiration
- Explore spiritual and emotional/psychological aspects of social change
- Research, critically evaluate, and share (via team teaching) diverse learning resources
- Develop strategies for supporting and sustaining one's social change efforts
- Contribute directly to a social change effort via praxis (action / reflection) project
- Provide and receive peer/collegial support for leading social change

Pedagogical Approach

Inspired by the educational philosophy of Starr King School for the Ministry, this course will:

- Invite students to bring their full, authentic selves to the learning experience.
- Draw knowledge and wisdom from both academic sources and personal experience.
- Embody an ongoing practice weaving together inquiry, study, action and reflection.
- Permeate the walls of the academy and builds learning community around the world.
- Center the unique learning goals and needs of each student.
- Further Starr King's commitment to education that counters oppressions, creates just and sustainable communities, and fosters multi-religious life and learning.

Course Commitments and Expectations

This course relies on the thoughtful engagement of each participant. All are expected to participate actively in on-line discussions and activities, in addition to reading and written assignments. Over the span of the semester, participants will generate learning materials to share with each other, and build a culture of ongoing peer support. Students will also develop a personal philosophy/theology of leadership for social change, for use in community, professional, and other contexts. Finally, they will engage directly in a social change effort.

Course Requirements

Class Participation

Each week,

Complete reading, or viewing other assignments.

Post in an online discussion and comment on at least one posting by a peer.

Participate in activities offered by instructors and peers.

Connect with your small group.

Engage in praxis.

During the first month,

Begin praxis experience.

Begin planning team-based learning project.

Draft a preliminary personal theology/philosophy of leadership for social change.

At the mid-semester point,

Submit an update on your praxis project.

Complete a self-evaluation of your participation, and an evaluation of the course itself.

During the final month,

Complete a self-evaluation of your praxis experience.

Lead a team-based presentation for your peers, and complete a group self-evaluation of your planning and delivery.

Revisit and update your theology/philosophy of leadership for social change.

Complete a self-evaluation of your participation, and an evaluation of the course itself.

Once during the course,

In-depth consultation with instructor on personal goals and vision for social change.

Praxis Project

Beyond theoretical study alone, lived practice in social change efforts is an essential part of learning – and of this course. Students will work with instructors and peers to develop a tailored praxis (action/reflection) opportunity of at least 25 hours, engaging directly in a community effort for social change. Please see the praxis hand-out for more details.

Team-Based Learning Project

Social change is a collective effort. Team-based learning is also a key component of this course. Students will be matched with a small group, which will serve as a source of ongoing peer engagement and support, and as a team to develop a student-led presentation near the end of the semester. Each team will be assigned a week related to a topic near the beginning of the semester, given a preliminary set of related readings or other learning materials to draw from, and a due date. They are responsible for creating a multimedia presentation (using resources from the Moodle 2.0 platform, as well as their own research) that responds to the topic. Please see the team-based learning hand-out for more details and requirements.

Primary Texts

This course weaves together readings, audio-visual materials, online resources, presentations, spiritual practices, and more as sources for learning. The instructor, along with guest contributors and students themselves, will identify and contribute readings throughout the semester. We will focus most closely on the following two texts:

“Towards Collective Liberation: Anti-Racist Organizing, Feminist Praxis, and Movement Building Strategies” by Chris Crass

This collection of essays is geared toward activists engaging with the dynamic questions of how to create and support effective movements for visionary systemic change. These essays and interviews present powerful lessons for transformative organizing. It offers a firsthand look at the challenges and the opportunities of antiracist work in white communities, feminist work with men, and bringing women of color feminism into the heart of social movements. Drawing on two decades of personal activist experience and case studies within these areas, Crass’s essays insightfully explore ways of transforming divisions of race, class, and gender into catalysts for powerful vision, strategy, and building movements in the United States today. This collection will inspire and empower anyone who is interested in implementing change through organizing.

“Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others”
by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky

This book is written for anyone who is doing work with an intention to make the world more sustainable and hopeful—all in all, a better place—and who, through this work, is exposed to the hardship, pain, crisis, trauma, or suffering of other living beings or the planet itself. It is for those who notice that they are not the same people they once were, or are being told by their families, friends, colleagues, or pets that something is different about them.

This book is a navigational tool for remembering that we have options at every step of our lives. We choose our own path. We can make a difference without suffering; we can do meaningful work in a way that works for us and for those we serve. We can enjoy the world and set it straight. We can leave a legacy that embodies our deepest wisdom and greatest gifts instead of one that is burdened with our struggles and despair.

About the Instructor

Betty Jeanne Rütters-Ward is a social change practitioner whose work has included ministry, community organizing, writing, public speaking, teaching and training, coaching, organizational and campaign management. She holds a Master of Arts in Social Change, combined with over ten years of leadership in the non-profit, educational, religious, philanthropic, and socially responsible business sectors. Betty Jeanne drives social change through capacity building and by developing effective, sustainable leaders of all ages, with the goal of activating people, organizations and communities in pursuit of the common good.

Betty Jeanne's lifelong passion for social change is fueled by her experiences in spiritual communities. She supports people – of any or no religious affiliations – to develop as leaders, make meaning of their lives, build community, reflect on and enact their values. On a larger scale, Betty Jeanne has built powerful religious-secular coalitions for causes including civil and human rights, universal healthcare, youth empowerment, and racial justice.

Betty Jeanne has supported thousands of leaders in achieving goals, maintaining balance and developing emotional resiliency amid the often fast-paced, high-stakes, stressful environments in which social change efforts happen. Her graduate research on “Personal Sustainability and Mental Health in Social Movements” explored professional and personal struggles of social change leaders, along with strategies for long-term success. Her reflections on “Rethinking Work Culture and Self Care in the Nonprofit Sector” have been featured nationally by Idealist and the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network.