

Faith-Rooted Organizing for Social Change

3 Units

Starr King School for the Ministry / Graduate Theological Union

Fall 2016

Instructor: Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward, MASC

bjruetersward@sksm.edu

347-850-2579

Skype & Google Hangout username: bruetersward

Availability: My office hours vary, as I aim to accommodate students' diverse schedules. Please don't hesitate to reach out to request a meeting, and indicate available days/times including time zone.

Course Description

This foundational course – applicable to all vocational paths, from community organizing to parish ministry to non-profit leadership to theological scholarship – explores tools, best practices, and multi-religious theologies for faith-rooted organizing for change. Paying close attention to the intersections of social issues, identities, and religious traditions, participants will draw lessons from a diversity of historical and contemporary movements, ranging from Black Lives Matter to climate justice. Merging the pastoral with the practical, students will learn to articulate their unique faith-rooted organizing style and strategize on how to take concrete, spiritually grounded action in their own congregations and communities.

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

- Invite students to bring their full, authentic selves to the learning community.
- Draw knowledge from both academic sources and lived personal experience.
- Embody an ongoing practice combining inquiry, study, action and reflection.
- Permeate the walls of the academy and build a global learning community.
- Center the unique learning goals and needs of each student.
- Further Starr King's commitment to countering oppressions, creating just and sustainable communities, and fostering multi-religious life and learning.

Learning Objectives

During this course, students will:

- Identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities re: faith-rooted organizing
- Draw on diverse perspectives and case studies for insight and inspiration
- Reflect on emotional and spiritual aspects of working for social change
- Provide and receive peer/collegial support for mutual leadership development

Learning Outcomes

In completing of this course, students will:

- Understand core concepts of community organizing and movement building
- Gain practical strategies and tools to address common organizing challenges
- Articulate their personal theology for and approach to faith-rooted organizing
- Research, create, and present learning resources on topics of personal interest
- Engage in ongoing, immersion learning via a self-designed praxis (action/reflection) project

Course Policies

This course relies on the thoughtful and consistent engagement of each participant. All are expected to participate actively and promptly in discussions, activities, reading and written assignments. Students are leaders and co-creators of this graduate-level learning experience, generating conversation and learning materials for each other, and proactively building a culture of peer support. In the case of missing or late assignments or inconsistent participation, students must notify the instructors as soon as possible, and work out a plan for completion.

Course Assignments

Each week,

- Review any written or recorded announcements and instructions for the week.
- Complete reading, viewing, interactive activities, and other posted assignments.
- Post (written, or via video) in an online discussion.
- Comment on at least two postings by peers.
- Engage in praxis (action/reflection component).

During the first weeks,

- Begin praxis experience.
- Begin planning student-led presentation.
- Draft a preliminary personal statement paper on faith-rooted organizing.

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 weeks,

- Summarize key lessons from your praxis experience.
- Lead presentation, and complete self-evaluation of your planning and delivery.
- Engage classmates' presentations through discussion and/or other activities

- Submit a revised personal statement paper on faith-rooted organizing.
- Complete self-evaluation of your participation, and an evaluation of the course.

Once during the course,

- Consultation with instructor re: personal learning goals and interests.

Detailed instructions will be available in supplementary documents for the following:

Praxis Project

Students will develop a tailored praxis (action/reflection) opportunity, engaging directly in faith-rooted organizing, and drawing insights from their experiences.

Presentation

Students are responsible for a multimedia presentation that brings course topics of interest to them to life for their peers/colleagues.

Paper

Students will develop a personal philosophy/theology and action plan for their own long-term spiritual leadership.

Grading and Evaluation

Regular, active class participation constitutes most of the grading rubric. Also required are three additional items of equal weight: the praxis project, presentation, and personal statement paper. Components are designed to enrich the online experience, and equip students with hands-on experiences, theological reflection, and collaborative ethos to build and sustain social change.

Your final grade +/- or evaluation will be determined by the following components:

Class Participation - 40%

Praxis Project - 20%

Presentation - 20%

Paper - 20%

Required Texts

“Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World”

by Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, Peter Heltzel

ISBN-10: 0 0830836616, ISBN-13: 978-0830836611, current cost on Amazon: \$14.20

With so many injustices, small and great, across the world and right at our doorstep, what are people of faith to do? Since the 1930s, organizing movements for social justice in the U.S. have largely been built on assumptions that are secular origin—such as reliance on self-interest and having a common enemy as a motivator for change. Alexia Salvatierra has developed a model of social action that is rooted in the values and convictions born of faith. Together with theologian Peter Heltzel, this model of "faith-rooted organizing" offers a path to meaningful social change that takes seriously the command to love God and to love our neighbor as ourself.

“The Impossible Will Take a Little While: Perseverance and Hope in Troubled Times”

edited by Paul Loeb

ISBN-10: 0465031730, ISBN-13: 978-0465031733, current cost (new) on Amazon: \$13.27

What keeps us going when times get tough? How have the leaders and unsung heroes of world-changing political movements persevered in the face of cynicism, fear, and seemingly overwhelming odds? In *The Impossible Will Take a Little While*, they answer these questions in their own words, creating a conversation among some of the most visionary and eloquent voices of our times. Ten years after his original edition, Paul Rogat Loeb has comprehensively updated this classic work on what it's like to go up against Goliath--whether South African apartheid, Mississippi segregation, Middle East dictatorships, or the corporations driving global climate change. Without sugarcoating the obstacles, these stories inspire the hope to keep moving forward.

“Prophetic Activism: Progressive Religious Justice Movements in Contemporary America”

by Helene Slessarev-Jamir

ISBN-10: 0814783856, ISBN-13: 978-0814783856, current cost (new) on Amazon: \$23.51

While the links between conservative Christians and politics have been drawn strongly in recent years, coming to embody what many think of as religious activism, the profoundly religious nature of community organizing and other more left-leaning justice work has been largely overlooked. *Prophetic Activism* is the first broad comparative examination of progressive religious activism in the United States. Set up as a counter-narrative to religious conservatism, the book offers readers a deeper understanding of the richness and diversity of contemporary religious activism.

In addition to these texts, the course will incorporate other materials (readings, videos, online resources, etc.) including those generated or suggested by students.

Course Schedule

Weeks One to Three:

- Welcome and Introduction
- Getting Oriented to the Course, and Each Other
- Exploring Key Course Concepts

Weeks Four to Ten:

- Engaging Course Textbooks
- Personal Journeys in Faith-Rooted Organizing

Weeks Eleven to Fourteen:

- Student Presentations
- Closing & Celebration

About the Instructor

Betty Jeanne Rütters-Ward serves as the Visiting Assistant Professor for Transformative Leadership at Starr King School for the Ministry, where she has taught and mentored Graduate Theological Union students and other spiritual leaders around the world since 2007. Her courses examine leadership, community organizing, education, organizational management, social change theory, multigenerational ministry, and more. Betty Jeanne's approach is distinguished by:

- Linking theory, reflection and action – within and beyond the classroom
- Curricula that respond to students' unique passions, interests and goals
- Multi-faceted, interactive online courses that bring virtual learning to life
- Holistic academic advising, vocational counseling, and personal coaching

Betty Jeanne is a social change practitioner whose work has included ministry, community organizing, writing, public speaking, teaching and training, coaching, organizational and campaign management. She speaks widely on these and other topics, most recently reflecting on her faith-rooted organizing at the United Nations. Currently, she serves as Program Director at All Souls Unitarian Church in Manhattan, as an organizer with Showing Up for Racial Justice, as well as a freelance coach, consultant and community organizer. She holds a Master of Arts in Social Change – one of the first awarded by Starr King after the MASC program's inception – 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 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. Betty Jeanne has supported thousands of leaders in achieving success, maintaining balance and developing emotional resiliency amid the often fast-paced, high-stakes, stressful environments in which social change efforts happen. On a larger scale, Betty Jeanne has built powerful religious-secular coalitions for civil and human rights, universal healthcare, marriage equality, youth empowerment, and racial justice.

More about Betty Jeanne can be found at www.linkedin.com/in/bruetersward or www.sksm.edu/2015/04/17/i-am-starr-king-interview-with-betty-jeanne-rueters-ward.