

Sustainability and Resilient Spiritual Leadership
Starr King School for the Ministry / Graduate Theological Union
RSFT-8160
3 Units
Fall 2020

Instructor: Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward, MASC
Visiting Assistant Professor of Transformative Leadership
bjruetersward@sksm.edu
347-850-2579

Availability: I meet with students via video and phone. My office hours vary, as I try to be as flexible as possible to students' diverse schedules. Most of my meetings with students occur on weekdays between 8am and 11am Pacific (11am and 2pm Eastern). To request a meeting, send an email indicating available days/times including time zone.

Course Description

How do those called to bless the world – to engage with the suffering and healing of others, and of the planet – ground and sustain themselves? Students will link theory, practice, and personal experience to develop their personal theologies for sustainable, resilient leadership – and learn practical tools to more effectively serve their vocations for the long haul. Together, we will explore concepts including compassion/empathy fatigue, assessing emotional and spiritual health, vocational burnout, trauma stewardship, boundary setting, and care for self and community. Participants will also examine how to positively influence organizational culture and build healthy, sustainable congregations and other organizations. This interactive, multi-faceted course combines multimedia, readings, class discussion, a praxis (action/reflection) component, and more, and is open to all interested in spiritual leadership for social change.

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 build a global learning community.
- 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.

Learning Objectives

During this course, students will:

- Explore the theological foundations for their vocational call.
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities re: sustainability and resiliency.
- Draw on diverse spiritual traditions and social movements for insight and inspiration.
- Reflect on emotional and psychological aspects of spiritual leadership.
- Provide and receive peer/collegial support for leadership development.

Learning Outcomes

In completing of this course, students will:

- Articulate their personal theology of sustainable, resilient spiritual leadership.
- Develop concrete strategies for supporting and sustaining their long-term leadership.
- Research, create, and present diverse learning resources on topics of personal interest.
- Engage in ongoing learning via a self-designed praxis (action/reflection) project.

Course Expectations

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 co-creators of this graduate-level learning experience, generating learning materials for each other, facilitating discussions, and proactively building a culture of peer leadership and support.

- **Attendance and Timeliness:** For the most part, this course happens asynchronously – students participate each week on their own time, when their schedules allow, but with specific deadlines by which to complete assignments and activities. In the case of late assignments or participation, it is your responsibility notify the instructor as right away (for example, sending a quick email notifying of the onset of an illness), and work out a plan for completing the missed or late coursework as soon as possible. You are encouraged to reach out to fellow students for support in catching up.
- **Technology:** Do not attempt to complete this course using a tablet or smartphone. Students are required to use a computer and consistent internet connection throughout the course. In addition to Moodle, this course incorporates web-based applications such as Zoom, YouTube, Google Drive and VoiceThread.
- **Counter-Oppressive Course Community:** In addition to providing a foundation in for graduate students preparing for spiritual leadership, this course seeks to advance the values expressed in the statement on Educating to Counter Oppressions (ECO) that is central to Starr King School for the Ministry's educational design. Students should familiarize themselves with these priorities and reflect on them as they critically engage course content and the learning community.

Course Assignments

Each week,

- Review announcements and instructions for the week.
- Complete any activities or assignments for the week.
- Post (in writing or via video) in the online discussion.
- Comment on at least three postings by peers in the online discussion.
- Connect with discussion partner/s, preferably via phone or video.
- Engage in praxis (action/reflection component).

During the first month,

- Submit a brief description of your proposed presentation topic and praxis project.
- Meet with instructor to reflect on your unique learning interests and goals.

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,

- Summarize key lessons from your praxis experience.
- Lead presentation, and evaluate your planning and delivery.
- Engage classmates' presentations through discussion and/or other activities.
- Submit your personal statement paper on theology of spiritual leadership.
- Complete a self-evaluation of your participation, and an evaluation of the course itself.

Once or twice during the course,

- Facilitate an engaging discussion forum.
- Participate in a live, instructor-facilitated gathering of the class community.

Supplementary documents detail the following course components:

Reading: Engaging the textbooks and other learning resources.

Discussion: Connect and reflect online, via phone and/or video with your classmates.

Praxis Project: Develop and execute a customized praxis (action/reflection) project, engaging directly in individual and/or collective spiritual practices or other activities, drawing insights from the experiences and integrating them with lessons from other course components.

Presentation: Create a multimedia presentation about course sub-topics of interest.

Paper: Write a personal statement describing your philosophy/theology about, and action plan for sustaining, their unique call to 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

“Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice”

By Naomi Ortiz

ASIN: B07D99R9RV, current cost (print, new) on Amazon: \$14.54

In times of dangerous uncertainty, as Brenè Brown says, “vulnerability is our most accurate measure of courage.” We face messy, contradictory intersections where we must regain our footing and somehow take care of ourselves in the midst of struggling for a better world. We must speak out, take action, make a difference—yet can we remain passionate about a cause without being consumed by it? What habits can we cultivate to feel compassion for ourselves as well as others? Why does constructive willingness to self-nurture evoke such discomfort?

Now the distinctive voice of social change activist Naomi Ortiz offers powerful, thoughtful, transformative insight into self-care. She weaves together personal experiences in class, race and disability advocacy into informative advice on dealing with the risks of burnout. She brings wisdom drawn from her deep connection to the Sonoran Desert to guide us to live more wholehearted lives. The power of belonging is a catalyst that resonates throughout her stories. She offers her techniques with candor, helpful tips tested through big and small struggles, as tactics for those who would affect the world.

“Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives”

by Wayne Muller

ISBN-10: 0553380117, current cost on Amazon: \$11.55

In today’s world, with its relentless emphasis on success and productivity, we have lost the necessary rhythm of life, the balance between work and rest. Constantly striving, we feel exhausted and deprived in the midst of great abundance. We long for time with friends and family, we long for a moment to ourselves. With wonderful stories, poems, and suggestions for practice, this book teaches us how we can use sacred Sabbath practice to refresh our bodies and minds, restore our creativity, and regain our birthright into inner happiness.

Optional Texts

“Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others”

by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky

ISBN-10: 157675944X, current cost (print, new) on Amazon: \$16.03

This book is written for those doing work with an intention to make the world more sustainable and hopeful— a better place—and who, through this work, are exposed to the hardship, pain, crisis, trauma, or suffering of other living beings or the planet itself. It is for those who notice 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.

In addition to these texts, the course will incorporate a variety of other materials (readings, videos, podcasts, and more) including resources generated or suggested by students themselves.

About the Instructor

Betty Jeanne Rütters-Ward serves as Assistant Professor for Transformative Leadership at Starr King School for the Ministry, where she has taught and mentored Graduate Theological Union students and spiritual leaders around the world since 2007. Her courses examine leadership, community organizing, education, social change theory and practice, ministry, and more. Betty Jeanne's teaching 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
- Incorporating vocational counseling and personal coaching into work with students

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 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 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 religious-secular coalitions for civil and human rights, universal healthcare, youth empowerment, and racial justice.

Betty Jeanne's reflections on "Rethinking Work Culture and Self Care in the Nonprofit Sector" were featured by Idealist.org and the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network. Her graduate research centered on "Personal Sustainability and Social Movements" and "Constructive Theologies for Mental and Spiritual Health", exploring the successes and struggles of social change leaders, and strategies for long-term success. More about her background can be found at www.linkedin.com/in/bettyjeanne or <https://www.sksm.edu/2015/04/17/i-am-starr-king-interview-with-betty-jeanne-rueters-ward/>.