

# **FAMILIES & SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

**SPRS-8412**

**3 units**

**Starr King School for the Ministry**

**Graduate Theological Union**

**SPRING 2021**

## **Instructor Information:**

**Name:** Rev. Christine Fry, Assistant Professor of Spiritual Practice & Care at Starr King School for the Ministry where she has taught for 16 years.

**Personal pronouns:** she/her

**Email:** cfry@sksm.edu

**Availability:** The instructor is available to meet with students via zoom, facetime, or phone by advance appointment. She is also available through email at cfry@sksm.edu

## **Meeting Format:**

This class is asynchronous meaning students do class work on whatever days or hours best meet their overall needs (e.g., given family, jobs, religious and/or community activities).

If they wish, students are welcome to meet with one another via zoom, facetime, phone and/or in person (masked and at a social distance) to discuss texts and spiritual practice exercises.

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**“And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently.” ~Kitty O’Meara**

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*If we were to be given a pill to be convinced, “Don’t worry. It’s going to be okay,” would that elicit from us our greatest creativity and courage? No. It’s that knife edge of uncertainty where we come alive to our truest power. ~ Joanna Macy*

### **Course Description:**

This spring we will explore ways of strengthening and supporting families at home, in congregations, and in the community through spiritual practice. Families will be understood and contextualized in diverse, marvelous, and painful ways. The class will be experiential, counter-oppressive, and multi-religious. It will draw from a variety of sacred traditions as well as psychology, family memoirs, poetry, and art.

The Starr King Thresholds covered by this class include: *Spiritual Practice and Care of the Soul (#5)* and *Embodied Wisdom and Beauty (#8)*.

The class also addresses the following Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Fellowship Competencies: *Encourages spiritual development for self and others (#3)* and *Provides Pastoral Care and Presence (#2)*.

There are no prerequisites for the class. Class limit is 20 Starr King students and 4 other GTU students.

## **Learning Objectives:**

During this course, students will:

- Examine the challenges families face during a time of through reading, film watching, discussions, and sharing their own stories.
- Engage in a variety of spiritual practices with their own families and communities. These weekly spiritual practices include: mindfulness; sabbath-keeping; cooking, baking and eating together; hospitality; meditation; kindness; rituals; play; walking in wonder; prayer; caring for the earth: community and connecting; and joy.
- Explore, develop, and strengthen their capacity for reflection and self-compassion.
- Deeply listen to their classmates, encourage and support them, and contribute to a vibrant community of learning.
- Undertake a class project to deepen their understanding of some aspect related to families and spiritual practice.

## **Course Requirements:**

- \* Students are expected to participate in class on a weekly basis.
- \* As a 3-unit class, students will invest approximately 135 hours of work in the class over the course of the semester..
- Weekly class work will involve reading/watching class texts, doing a spiritual practice exercise, and posting responses.
- Students will submit a minimum of 4 posts per week: a reflection on a class text; a reflection on a spiritual practice exercise; plus, two posts in response to classmates' posts.
- As an alternative, students may arrange to discuss class texts with classmates via zoom, facetime, chat group, phone and/or in person

(when wearing masks and practicing social distance). A short log of their conversation(s) and/or spiritual practice(s) will be completed by a designated person and posted on Moodle.

- **Class Project:** It is also expected that students will spend approximately 10-15 hours on a class project to explore and deepen their understanding of some aspect of families and spiritual practice.

Examples of projects that might be done include: creating a family photo album, video, and/or journal of the spiritual practice(s) they did during the semester; interviewing parents and /or religious leaders about family spirituality and practice; hosting a family spiritual practice film series; creating a family altar or sacred space; unplugging electronic devices and/or keeping a weekly sabbath; doing a family service project; writing a research paper on a specific topic such as welcoming and working with interfaith families, children with special needs, or transgender youth; preaching or teaching in a congregation about families & spiritual practice; creating a ceremony or ritual for a family; developing an annotated list of children's or young adult's books related to spirituality and spiritual practice, etc.

Students will announce their intended projects by February 28, the *fourth* week, of class. Projects will be due on May 16.

### **Course Texts:**

- There are no required books to read for this class. Instead, each week there will be a selection of texts (articles, readings, video clips, poems, etc.) for students to read/watch and discuss with classmates.
- In addition, students will be asked to read two books, watch four films, or read four children's books - or some combination thereof - and post reflections for each by the end of the semester. These reflections may take a variety of forms including *lectio divina*, poetry, art, stories and/or short essays on how students might address issues raised in the books or films if they were a chaplain, activist, healer, and/or spiritual leader.

- A list of suggested books, films, and children's books will be sent to students - and posted on the Moodle class page - two weeks before the start of class.
- Students may substitute other books or films with the instructor's prior approval.

### **Course Assignments:**

- Class materials for the week ahead will be posted by the instructor on Fridays.
- Class assignments are due ten days later on Sundays.
- After reviewing class materials, students will do a minimum of four posts each week. Posts will be 1-5 paragraphs long. To make the volume of posts more manageable, students will be divided into two groups at the start of the semester.
- A Class Checklist is posted on the class Moodle page to assist students in keeping track of assignments completed.

### **Grading:**

- In general, Starr King students will take the class on a pass/fail basis. If needed, they may request a letter grade from the semester at the start of the semester.
- Other GTU students will typically take the class for a letter grade. However, at the start of the semester they may ask their registrar to arrange for them to take the class for a pass/fail instead.
- Grading - pass/fail or letter grades - is done by the instructor at the end of the semester. Students will be graded on the rubric Starr King has devised in evaluating students' work, including:

- Deep engagement with class materials and in class discussions;
  - Clear, coherent, creative and contextualized writing;
  - Use of an intersectional, counter-oppressive, and multi-religious lens;
  - Sensitivity to and responsible handling of ethical problems if they occur;
  - Understanding of Starr King's ECO (educating to counter oppression) philosophy and practice of it in terms of class participation and conduct.
- The instructor will provide students' with feedback on their work throughout the semester on a regular basis. It will necessarily be limited given the large size of the class and the instructor's part-time status (15 hours per week for teaching, advising, and related work). In general, students can expect to receive feedback from the instructor on individual posts about 6-10 times per semester. This makes students' weekly responses to at least two classmates' posts all the more important so no one feels they are not being seen, heard, and appreciated.

### **Course Policies:**

#### **Attendance:**

- Students are asked to notify the instructor when they will be absent or shortly thereafter.
- Students may miss up to two weeks of class without having to make up the weekly assignments.
- All other missed classes will require students to make up their work within 3 weeks.
- A student may be asked to drop the course if they are not showing up to class regularly and doing the work in a timely fashion.

## **Accommodations:**

- Students with disabilities will work with the instructor to develop a plan for doing class work at a pace and in a manner that promotes their health, well-being and success in the class.
- Students who encounter difficult and unexpected circumstances (e.g., an illness or death in the family, wildfires or floods, loss of employment or a relationship) will work with the instructor to develop a plan that allows them to do their class work in a manner that promotes their health, well-being and success in the class.
- Students with disabilities or other difficult circumstances who are unable to do satisfactory class work - even with accommodations and conversations with the instructor - will be asked to withdraw from the class.

## **Other Policies:**

Students are expected to review and adhere to the following policies required by the Graduate Theological Union, the Association of Theological Seminaries (ATS), and the Department of Education. These policies will be posted on the Moodle class page:

- Academic Conduct
- Notice to Students About Your Privacy (FERPA)
- Disability Policy

## **Learning Outcomes:**

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- (1) Discuss some of the challenges facing American families today from an intersectional, counter-oppressive, and multi-religious perspective.

- (2) Articulate how spiritual practices can strengthen and support families – however they are defined - in contemporary society.
- (3) Share some of the joys, struggles and insights they experienced by engaging in weekly family spiritual practice exercises.
- (4) Point to the ways they listened deeply to their classmates, encouraged and supported them, and contributed to a vibrant learning community.
- (5) Demonstrate through their class project an in-depth understanding of some aspect related to families and spiritual practice.

### **Course Calendar:**

February 1 - 7: Families in a Time of Pandemic

February 8 - 14: Everyday Mindfulness

February 15 - 21: Sabbath Time

February 22 - 28: Cooking, Baking & Eating Together

March 1 - 7: Hospitality

March 8-14: Meditation & Our Emotions

March 15 - 21: Family Traditions & Rituals

March 22 - 28: Reading Week

March 29 - April 4: Kindness

April 5 - 11: Apology & Forgiveness

April 12 - 18: Play



April 19 -25: Walking in Wonder

April 26 - May 2: Prayer

May 3 - 9: Community & Connecting

May 10 - 16: Joy

May 17 - 21: Celebrating What We Have Learned

*The instructor reserves the right to modify the schedule and assignments in order to meet course objectives. If this happens, both students and the Dean of Faculty will be notified.*