

School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University
901 12th Avenue, PO Box 222000
Seattle, WA 98122

Quarter: Spring 2012/2013

Course Information: STMM 569

The Human Person and the Discovery of Meaning
3 credit hours
Building/room Hunthausen 110
Monday evenings 5:45pm-8:35pm

Instructor

Rick Jackson
Office hours Mondays 4:00-5:30 pm
C: 206-713-9752
Email: jacksori@seattleu.edu

Course Description

Students will explore the journey toward meaning and wholeness in life and leadership. We will especially examine the human yearning for our “souls to inform our roles” through lifelong efforts to connect who we are with what we do in the world. Through reading of texts and poetry, reflective dialogues, presentation a personal statements and an integrative term paper, students will gain clarity to articulate how they and others discover and sustain meaning.

Goals of the Course

- **Clarify purpose and integrity through personal and collective “inner work.”** Meaning making and effective leadership hinges on the ability to know one’s own values and to remain present with others. The course will provide a hospitable yet demanding space for disciplined reflection around core values and vocational and leadership aspirations.
- **Applying deep listening and honest, open questions.** All people yearn to be heard and we all benefit from practicing a disciplined approach to listening. Open and honest questions help surface human resourcefulness and foster a sense of community in service of worthy goals. This course will emphasize the importance of speaking from each person’s unique vantage point and the enduring power of listening.
- **Holding tensions in the face of complexity and uncertainty.** For all of us, daily life is accelerated, fragmented and filled with unsettling tensions. Living with integrity requires learning to constructively manage these tensions by embracing paradox—the both/and nature of most profound challenges. In this course, we will explore how paradoxical tensions can be resources for the discovery of meaning and we will seek to discover ways we can find creative potential hidden within daunting realities.

- **Building trustworthy relationships in communities and organizations.** Students in the course will participate in an experiential learning community that fosters honest conversations and develops trustworthy relationships.
- **Appreciating the value of “otherness.”** Every person brings unique gifts, perspectives and life experiences. This diversity can be a source of strength, richness and wisdom for our communities and organizations. The capacity to welcome and make space for different voices and perspectives will be integral to learning, trust building and meaning making in this course.
- **Growth through season/cycles of personal and professional change.** This course is built on the understanding that life and leadership are very human journeys, with natural seasons and cycles of discovery, challenge and new growth.

Texts (required reading for all students):

Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 2004 Jossey-Bass

Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 2000 Jossey-Bass

Joan D. Chittister, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*, 2003 Eerdmans

Margaret J. Wheatley, *So Far From Home*, 2012 Berrett-Koehler

Supplemental reading will be distributed during class sessions. Students will also be encouraged to read widely in their own favorite literature, in sources suggested by the instructor, and in other readings discovered during the course of study.

Methods of Teaching

Weekly course sessions will involve a mix of methodologies, including assigned readings, lectures, questions for reflective journaling, facilitated dialogues, student presentations, and a term paper. A particularly challenging and rewarding discernment practice included in this course will be the “Clearness Committee Process.” (April 29).

Course Requirements

Personal Journal

You will keep a journal throughout the course, although it will not be collected. You will be writing in it both in class and on your own personal time. This journal will function as a “learning log”—a place for you to write during class, respond to and ask questions about the readings, work through individual issues you have posed for yourself, write reactions to the class assignments and activities, and compile writing you will use in your final “Reflective Essay.” This journal is a place for you to make meaning of the course. Your journal acts as a place for “conversations with your Self.” I suggest that you write every time you read, after each class, and in class as invited. Reflect on what you have heard in class or read: ask questions, make connections, describe confusions, note the quotes and ideas that stick for you. You will not be turning in your journal, but instead will be selecting entries that reflect your learning through the course to include in your essay.

“Listening to your life” reflective writing (Due April 8)

2-3 pages of “listening to and reflecting on your life experiences” through the concept of vocation as Parker Palmer invites in Ch 1 & 2 of *Let Your Life Speak*. Tell a story about when you discovered meaning and/or aliveness from a struggle (“blizzard”) and what you learned about sustaining your identity/wholeness (“rope to the barn”).

“Discovery of Meaning Presentation” (June 3 class session)

Drawing from your reading, class participation and reflection over the past two months, provide a brief spoken presentation about your process for discovering meaning.

This is an opportunity for creative expression in whatever way is meaningful to you. Include what will feel most comfortable and fitting for you: written statement; story or poem; spontaneous remarks; music. You decide. This is meant to be a respectful, informal and affirming process, not a performance.

Some questions that may be useful to ponder as you prepare:

- Over the past two months, what have I learned about who I am, my gifts and limits, my sense of “true self,” my identity, my wholeness?
- Over the past two months, what have I learned about how I discover meaning in life and/or work?
- What critical incident or struggle in my life and/or work required me to live with courage and authenticity, and through it, to discover meaning?
- What new questions are emerging for me to live into?

At our June 3 class session, this process will work as follows: You will have 6-7 minutes to offer your presentation, followed by about 2 minutes for the rest of us to write statements of affirmation on index cards for you. We will then take a minute for one or two persons to read what they wrote on their cards after which all cards will be given to you. Then we’ll move on to the next presenter.

Allowing yourself to show up and to speak from your heart is all that’s needed. It takes courage to speak authentically about how we learn about who we are and how we discover meaning. This is a sincere invitation to do just that: to share in a community that is trustworthy and affirming with colleagues who have taken a significant journey together. Let’s embrace this as a time of honoring each member of our class.

Final Reflective Essay (Due June 10)

Write a reflective paper that describes your learning journey in this class, using at least one “big idea” from the course and its readings. That is, what have you learned, explored, affirmed or had challenged about yourself and the discovery of meaning through our conversations, readings, poetry, questions, dialogues, etc.?

Speak from your own truth *and* discuss examples from the readings that connect with your individual truth.

- You should draw significantly from and cite yourself from your journal and analyze your own meaning-making practices and processes; *and*
- Your reflections should involve the use of at least one “big idea” from the course readings, including its definition and intended meaning for the author, and explication of why the idea contributes to your meaning-making process. [Include author and relevant citations.]

The Final Reflective Essay should be 10 pages.

Regarding style

- Papers should be typed, double-spaced.
- Use 1-inch margins all around. Use 12 pt. type.
- Follow the Chicago Manual of Style. Use footnotes, not endnotes. Use *Handbook for Writers*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007 for writing guidelines.
- Staple the paper in the top left-hand corner. Do not use plastic covers or binders.
- In addition to the one you submit, keep a copy for yourself.

Return of Written Materials:

Papers you wish to have returned with comments after the course ends must be accompanied with a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope (SASE) at the time they are turned in.

Grading Weight and Scale

- 20% Attendance/participation
- 20% Discovery of Meaning Presentation
- 60% Final Reflective Essay

Class participation, the term paper and the professor’s sense of the student’s mastery of the material overall will all be taken into consideration in grading.

Policies

- Attendance, participation, deadlines
- Disabilities and learning styles
- Academic Honesty

Schedule of Course Activities

April 1 **SESSION I** **The Human Person and the Discovery of Meaning**

(or, *Leadership and Meaning*)

Guiding question: *Why is discovering "who I am" –my identity and integrity–key to the discovery of meaning?"*

Part I Discovering meaning in "Our restless and crazy time"

together Touchstones: guidelines for being

Introductions: aliveness/alignment

Part II "The Blizzard of the World"

It Is " AHW "Prelude" + Stafford's "The Way

Course overview; syllabus, methods, assignments

"For the Traveler" by John O'Donohue

Read over spring term: Chittister, *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* (2-3 chapters/week)

Read for next week: *LYLS* Ch I, II; *AHW* Ch I, II

Writing assignment for next week (due Apr 8):

2-3 pages "listening to" and reflecting on your life experiences through the concept of vocation as PJP invites in Ch 1& 2 of *LYLS*. Tell a story about when you discovered meaning and/or aliveness from your struggles ("blizzards") and what you learned about sustaining your identity/alignment/wholeness ("rope to the barn").

April 8 **SESSION II** **Images of Integrity**

Guiding question: *Why is living an "undivided life" so difficult and yet so important?*

Part I Meaning and Integrity

Merton "The Way to the Real "World" Thomas
Palmer video "The Primacy of the Soul" Parker
Stories of Self/Us/Now
"Start Close In" by David White

Part II The Journey Toward an Undivided Life
life" writing. Sharing stories from "listening to

"To Marry the Soul" Mark Nepo

Read for next week: *LYLS* Ch III, IV;

AHW CH III, IV

April 15 SESSION III

Personal Destinies

here?

Guiding question: *What am I doing*

Part I
Vocation

Meaning and Work: Visions of

David L. Norton

Excerpts from *Personal Destinies*,

dialogues on vocation

LYLS excerpts, questions and

"Ask Me" by William Stafford

Part II

Joining Soul and Role

Nepo

"Life on the Mobius Strip"

"This Poem Should Be a Circle" Mark

Read for next week: *LYLS* Ch V

April 22 SESSION IV

Leading from Within

do my best work?

Guiding question: *What is required to*

Part I
Encounters"

Meaning through "Live

"Courage" Amelia Earhart

"The Woodcarver" by Chuang Tzu

Part II

The work before the work

"The Shadows of Leadership
and the Gifts of the Inner Journey"

"Fluent" by John O'Donohue

Read for next week: *AHW* Ch VI, VII

"The Clearness Committee" [handout]

April 29 SESSION V

Listening

listening?

Guiding question: *How can I serve by*

Part I & II

Clearness Committees

SFFH Part I, II

Read for next week: *AHW* CH VIII, IX,

**May 6
Relationships**

SESSION VI

Building Trustworthy

Guiding question: *How do love,
power and trust connect?*

Part I

De-briefing Clearness Committee
process

"Power and Love" Rev. Dr. Martin
Luther King Jr.

Part II

Meaning and Leadership: Communities
of trust

"Wandering Around an Albuquerque
Airport Terminal" Naomi Shihab Nye
Foundations of Trustworthy
Leadership

Read for next week: *AHW* Ch X, *SFFH*

Part III

**May 13
Ways**

SESSION VII

Holding Tensions in Life-Giving

Guiding question: *What is a
"tragic gap" and why does it
require courage?*

Part I

Standing in the "Tragic Gap"
Skype conversation with Parker J.
Palmer

"The languages of Power and Love"
Adam Kahane

Part II

Meaning and Paradox
"Paradox" by Gunilla Norris
"Contract: A Word from the Lead" by
William Ayot

Reading for next week: *SFFH* Part IV

May 20

SESSION VIII

The "Long Haul" of Leadership

