

SPFM 7190 Spiritual Formation Through Embodied Storytelling
North Park Theological Seminary
School of Restorative Arts
January 17 – March 7, 2023
1 credit hour

Instructor: Rev. Alicia Reese, MDiv

Course Description:

Spiritual Formation Through Embodied Storytelling is a spiritual formation course at NPTS and the School of Restorative Arts (SRA). Participants will be given tools to embody their own stories and encouraged to use those tools to examine how their story uniquely fits within the redemptive arc of God's story. This course will examine through praxis how embodied storytelling not only helps us better understand our story and God's, but how the very act of storytelling shapes and forms us. The practice of spiritual formation listening groups will be used to allow participants time to reflect on the process of formation through storytelling.

Course Objective:

1. Gain a fuller understanding of God's story through understanding one's own story and the stories of others, recognizing God's movement and presence in each story.
2. Use tools of improvisation, acting, and storytelling as a means to process trauma and be formed through the embodiment of story.
3. Collaborate and listen with fellow participants to hear each story's connectedness to God's story and re-story one's own narrative.
4. This course contributes toward the MACF learning outcomes of demonstrating a theologically grounded ministerial identity committed to caring for the spiritual formation of the self, individuals, and communities.

Required Readings:

Wells, Samuel. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004).

Millis, Diane M., *Re-Creating A Life* (Bellevue, WA: SDI Press, 2019)

Selected readings from Instructor throughout the course that relates to specific course content, including selections from:

Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), pp.24-38

The Long Term, eds. Alice Kim, et al. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018)

“Long Division” by Tara Betts, p. 85

“Affirmation” by Eve L. Ewing, p. 316

Selected unpublished works

*****Photocopies of Reading Selections will be provided by Instructor. The above list is not exhaustive.***

Class Dates and Assignments

PRIOR TO FIRST CLASS: Please begin reading Diane M. Millis, *Re-Creating A Life* (Bellevue, WA: SDI Press, 2019), make sure to have read pp. 9-38, 123-133, 170-172 prior to the first class.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17th - LESSON 1: Introduction to Improv, Story, and Spiritual Formation

In class: We will read “What Do You See?” by Howard Keller (unpublished) and selections from *The Long Term*, eds. Alice Kim, et al. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), “Long Division” by Tara Betts, p. 85

Practicum 1:

Icebreaker: Tell us your favorite story and why

Warm-Up: The Animal Game / The Name Game; Yes, And

Introduction to the 4-4-4 format and how we are adapting it for the large group

- I noticed...
- I heard....
- I appreciated...
- I wondered...

Spiritual Group Assignments

Spiritual Formation Group Reflection: What do you hope to gain in this class? What are you unsure about or anxious about with this class?

Objectives

1. Identify what story is and its importance for spiritual formation
2. Explore story through a theological lens
3. Engage in telling our story as a spiritual formation practice
4. Reflect on story's importance in one's own life

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24th - LESSON 2: Telling Our Stories

We will ask what it looks like to view story through the lens of formation. What is our story and why does it matter how we tell it? What does it mean to re-story our story? What does improv and embodied storytelling have to do with spiritual formation?

Read (before class)

Millis, Diane M., *Re-Creating A Life* (Bellevue, WA: SDI Press, 2019)

Wells, Samuel. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), chs. 2-3.

Assignment DUE: In one page, what is the fairy-tale version of your story? (Please read the Millis text prior to completing this assignment)

In Class Exercise: Share Fairytale Stories

Practicum 2:

Warm-Up: The Animal Game / The Name Game

Intro to Improv Games

Spiritual Formation Group Reflection: What did it feel like to share your story? What did you discover in telling it as a fairy-tale? How did you connect with God through this exercise?

Objectives

1. Identify what story is and its importance for spiritual formation
2. Explore story through a theological lens
3. Engage in telling our story as a spiritual formation practice
4. Reflect on story's importance in one's own life

TUESDAY, JANUARY 31st - LESSON 3: Finding Possibilities In Our Stories

Read (before class)

Millis, Diane M., *Re-Creating A Life* (Bellevue, WA: SDI Press, 2019)

Wells, Samuel. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004)

Practicum 3: Continue with improv games focusing on discovering new possibilities in a story and letting go of contamination sequences.

Spiritual Formation Group Reflection: What is one new possibility you discovered today?

Objectives

1. Explore improvisation through a spiritual formation and theological lens
2. Engage in improvisation as a spiritual formation practice
3. Reflect on embodiment of play as a spiritual practice

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7th - LESSON 4: Improvising Our Stories

We will explore how improvising our own stories helps us to discover things about it we hadn't seen before. These new discoveries can help us as we re-story our narratives.

Read (before class)

Wells, Samuel. *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004)

Assignment DUE: Bring a piece of your story to improv using "Yes, And." This can be any story from any point in your life. You will create a set of given circumstances for a brief improv in class with a partner. Be ready to name the following about your story: **Who** are the characters? **Where** are they? **When** does the scene take place? **What** are they doing? **What** do they want? **How** do they get it?

Practicum 4:

Warm Up: Word-At-A-Time; It's Tuesday

Exercise: Improvising our stories using "Yes, And." With a partner you will take turns using the "Yes, And" planned improv exercise with your own story that you brought to class

Spiritual Formation Group Reflection: What did you discover about your story during the "Yes, And" exercise? How do you see God saying "Yes, And" to you? Write and share at least one "Yes, And" statement about your story.

Objectives

1. Explore improvisation through a spiritual formation and theological lens
2. Engage in improvisation as a spiritual formation practice
3. Reflect on embodiment of play as a spiritual practice

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14th - LESSON 5: Story and Trauma: Whose Story Is Not Being Told?

We will examine how dominant narratives (i.e. white supremacy, patriarchy, and more) have influenced how we tell our own stories, especially stories about trauma. How can we reclaim the "subversive memory" of our stories by re-telling them? We will use improvisation to explore the connection between status and violence/trauma and how that informs our storytelling.

Read (before class)

Pamela Cooper-White's *The Cry of Tamar* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), pp.24-38

Assignment DUE: Come prepared to improv/share one part of your story (could be the same story from the "Yes, And" exercise but doesn't have to be) that feels unheard or is only told from one perspective. How could it be told differently from the dominant narrative (if it is a story that has never been told, then the dominant narrative is the one you have been telling yourself about the event)?

PLEASE NOTE: Because this week's class deals with trauma, no one will be forced to share their story publicly, only those who wish to.

Practicum 5:

Warm-Up: "Yes, And" Alien Edition

Exercise: Bowl of Worms [Practicing resilience]

Using improv, we will explore how traumatic parts of our stories might be told differently if we accepted a high status, instead of the low status imposed on us by those in power/dominant narratives. We will also build resilience by using improv to practice bravery.

Spiritual Formation Group Reflection: How has being heard/not being heard impacted you? What was it like to hear Tamar's story re-told? Where do you notice God in this process?

Objectives

1. Identify trauma and how storytelling helps process it
2. Engage in spiritual practice of listening and being heard
3. Reflect on the impact of being heard/not being heard in one's story

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21st / TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28th / TUESDAY, MARCH 7th -
LESSON 4: Re-Storying Our Stories**

In-Class: We will share our Final Projects of re-storied stories through embodied art and discuss what it means to re-tell our stories in light of a larger redemptive arc.

Read In Class:

Selection from *The Long Term*, eds. Alice Kim, et al. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018),
“Affirmation” by Eve L. Ewing, p. 316
“Re-Do” by Brandon Lewis (unpublished)
“The Wilderness is a Place of New Life” by Sarah Are

Assignment DUE: Using the discoveries you have made about your story the past three weeks, bring for our final class, your re-storied story to share. This can be a dramatic scene, a poem, a spoken word, song, or other piece of embodied performance art. [See Addendum at the end of the syllabus on p. 6 for further explanation]

Practicum 5:

Warm-Up: Class choice!
Exercise: Sharing our embodied stories.

Class Listening Group Exercise: Reflection For those listening, what did you notice, hear, appreciate, or wonder? For those presenting, what was life-giving about sharing your story today?

Spiritual Formation Group Reflection: If you shared your story today, what was that experience like for you? If you did not share today, what was it like to hold other’s stories?

In-Class Reflection: Instructor will provide a final reflection question(s) to be completed in class on the final day of class (March 7, 2023).

Objectives

1. Understand what it means theologically, spiritually, artistically to share one’s own story
2. Understand what it means theologically, spiritually, artistically to hold someone else’s story
3. Engage sharing one’s story through embodied storytelling for/with others as a spiritual formation practice
4. Reflect on the experience of sharing/holding a story

GRADING RUBRIC

This class is Pass/Fail but **all** assignments completed in order to earn a Pass. Only **one** class may be missed, if more than one class is missed, student will receive a Fail, unless there are extenuating circumstances and prior approval is given by the instructor.

The assignments are broken down as follows:

Class attendance

Spiritual Formation Group participation

Fairytale Exercise

“Yes, And” Exercise

Untold Story Exercise

Final Project: Embodied Story Presentation

Additional Course Guidelines

Confidentiality: a signed “NPTS Confidentiality Statement” must be on file. This form will be provided. Discussion in class and group is protected under this statement.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

In keeping with our Christian heritage and commitment, North Park University is committed to the highest possible ethical and moral standards. Just as we will constantly strive to live up to these high standards, we expect our students to do the same. To that end, cheating of any sort will not be tolerated. Students who are discovered cheating will receive a failing grade on the assignment and are subject to discipline up to and including failure of a course and expulsion. Our definition of cheating includes but is not limited to:

1. Plagiarism – the use of another’s work as one’s own without giving credit to the individual. This includes using materials from other written material/internet/television.
2. Copying another’s answers on an examination.
3. Deliberately allowing another to copy one’s answers or work.

ADDENDUM: Final Project for SPFM 7190

Instructor: Rev. Alicia Reese

In 5-7 minutes (you will be timed), using the discoveries you have made about your story the past three weeks, bring for our final class, your re-storied story to share. This can be a dramatic scene, a poem, a spoken word, song, or other piece of embodied performance art.

Your story could answer **one** of the following questions:

- What is one of the days in your story of re-creation? (see Millis pp. 123-126)
- What is the story of your best possible future self? (see Millis pp. 127-133)
- What is a story that has not been heard that needs telling or needs telling from a new perspective? (reference the re-telling of Tamar's story in *The Cry of Tamar* by Pamela Cooper-White)
- How does your story fit within God's larger redemptive arc? How have you seen your redemption or transformation narrative through God's narrative?
- If you could give a particular story in your life a different ending that it had, what would it be? How does re-imagining that part of your story change your narrative going forward? (reference "Re-Do" by Brandon Lewis)

You are not limited to these questions, but the purpose of the final assignment is to work towards telling your most life-giving story that tells a more hopeful or transformative narrative.

You may build on the stories that we have worked on in class which include your fairytale, your "Yes, And" story, or your unheard story, but you can also pick a different part of your story that you have not explored yet if you wish.

We will take time as a class after each story to share with the presenter using one of the following statements:

- I noticed...
- I heard....
- I appreciated...
- I wondered...

Thank you all for your bravery and vulnerability in sharing your stories. I look forward to seeing your final projects!