

**SPFM 7190 Embodied Formation**

North Park Theological Seminary

Summer 2024 | May 20 – July 12, 2024

Hybrid Class

**In-Person Meeting Times: Thursday 6/13 6-9pm; Friday 6/14 6-9pm; Saturday 6/15 9am-5pm**

1 credit hour

**INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION**

Rev. Alicia Reese, Adjunct Professor

Email: akreese@northpark.edu

Phone: 734-637-5979 (cell)

Office hours: By appointment via Zoom

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

*Embodied Formation* is a spiritual formation elective at North Park Theological Seminary. Participants will be given tools to embody their own stories and encouraged to use those tools to examine how their stories influence their own spiritual formation. 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 OBJECTIVES**

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 and storytelling as a means to 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/M.Div learning outcomes of demonstrating a theologically grounded ministerial identity committed to caring for the spiritual formation of the self, individuals, and communities.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

McKibben Dana, MaryAnn. *God, Improv, and the Art of Living*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.

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

McAdams, Dan P. *The Stories We Live By*. New York: Guildford Press, 1993, pp. 17-37.

Selected unpublished works

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



## **SUGGESTED TEXTS**

Carpenter, Les. *The Gospel According to Improv*. New York: Morehouse, 2022.

## **ASSESSMENTS AND GRADING SCALE**

This class is Pass/Fail but all assignments/classes must be completed in order to earn a Pass.

The assignments are broken down as follows:

Class attendance to all three intensive classes (unless there are extenuating circumstances and prior approval is given by the instructor)

Spiritual Formation Group participation

Fairytale Exercise

Final Project: Embodied Story Presentation

Responses to Classmates' Final Projects

## **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.

Please also see the inclusive language policy in the [Student Writing Handbook](#).

## **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 the internet.
2. Copying another's answers on an examination.
3. Deliberately allowing another to copy one's answers or work.
4. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.
5. Use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software to impersonate individual assignments.

For additional information, see the [Seminary Academic Catalog](#), pp. 25–26.

## **ACCOMMODATIONS**

Your experience in this class is important to me. North Park is committed to creating inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have already established your accommodations, please share your accommodation letter with me so we can discuss how your accommodations will be implemented in this course. If you have not yet established services and have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations, please email the Disability Access Specialist or contact by phone (773-244-5737). Student Engagement facilitates the interactive process that establishes reasonable accommodations.



## TITLE IX

Students who believe they may have experienced sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking should contact the Title IX Coordinator (773) 244-5664 or [TitleIX@northpark.edu](mailto:TitleIX@northpark.edu) to learn more about reporting options, resources, and support services.

As members of the North Park faculty, we are concerned about the well-being and development of our students and are available to discuss any concerns. Faculty members are private resources meaning we are legally obligated to share information about the behavior reported above with the University's Title IX coordinator. If you are unsure whether you want your concerns disclosed to the Title IX Coordinator, we encourage you to contact Counseling Support Services at (773) 244-4897 or [counseling@northpark.edu](mailto:counseling@northpark.edu).

Please refer to North Park's [Safe Community](#) site for reporting, contact information, and further details.

## INCOMPLETE GRADES

If, due to extenuating circumstances (specifically, pregnancy, illness, personal and family issues, military assignment, etc.), a student anticipates they will be unable to complete course work within the allotted time, that student may request a grade of incomplete from the course instructor before the last week of class clearly stating the reason(s) for this request. Overscheduling and/or lack of self-discipline are not considered extenuating circumstances. If the request is timely and meets the criteria, student and instructor will submit the incomplete grade form and the grade for that class will be listed as "I" until the last day of the following semester. If coursework is not submitted by the last day of the following semester the listing of "I" will automatically be changed to "F." For the full policy, see page 15 of the [Seminary Academic Catalog](#).

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### PRIOR TO FIRST CLASS:

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.**

Begin reading MaryAnn McKibben Dana, *God, Improv, and the Art of Living* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 2018).

Please have read the selection from McAdams, Dan P. *The Stories We Live By*. New York: Guildford Press, 1993, pp. 17-37 (this will be provided ahead of time by the instructor via Canvas).

### CLASS 1 – THURSDAY, JUNE 13<sup>TH</sup> (6 – 9PM): Introduction to Improv, Story, and Spiritual Formation

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?

**Key concepts:** Becoming the Mythmaker, Living Yes-ly, Listening and Letting Go, Living in the Moment

**In class:** We will read “What Do You See?” by Howard Keller (unpublished) and other selections by the instructor.

**Practicum 1:**

Icebreaker: Tell us your favorite story and why  
Warm-Up: The Animal Game / The Name Game; Yes, And  
Bowl of Worms Exercise

**Spiritual Formation Group Assignments**

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 Formation Group:** We will spend the last 45 minutes of class in assigned spiritual formation groups reflecting on the following questions: *What do you hope discover about your own spiritual journey? What role has embodiment played in your own spiritual formation?*

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

**CLASS 2 – FRIDAY, JUNE 14<sup>TH</sup> (6 – 9PM):** Finding Possibilities In Our Stories

We will explore contamination sequences and what it means to practice hope through improv and storytelling. 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 connect improvisation to traumatic and difficult parts of our story (NOTE: no one will be asked to share their trauma).

**Key concepts:** Practicing Failure, Cultivating Resiliency, Group Mind and Beloved Community, Contamination Sequences and Redemption Stories, Magical If vs. Eschatological Is

**Read** (before class)

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

MaryAnn McKibben Dana, *God, Improv, and the Art of Living* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans’ 2018)

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

**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:** We will spend the last 45 minutes of class in assigned spiritual formation groups reflecting on the following questions: *What did it feel like to share your story? What did you discover in telling it as a fairy-tale? What is one new possibility you discovered today?*

#### Objectives

1. Identify what keeps us from telling our most life-giving story
2. Identify trauma and how storytelling helps process it
3. Cultivate tools for re-storying our narratives
4. Engage in spiritual practice of listening and being heard

#### **CLASS 3 – SATURDAY, JUNE 15<sup>TH</sup> (9AM – 5PM): 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. Today's class will be focused on practicing the key concepts we have discussed in classes 1 and 2 through improv.

**Read** (before class): Finish any assigned reading that has not been completed.

#### **Practicum 4:**

The instructor will lead the class through a series of improv exercises for each of the spiritual formation categories that we explored in class: Living Yes-ly, Listening and Letting Go, Living in the Moment, Practicing Failure, Group Mind and Beloved Community, and Redemption Stories. At different points in the day, we will break into our formation groups to process, or stay in large group to process together. The day will end with one final reflective piece.

**Spiritual Formation Written Reflection:** 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

#### **FINAL PROJECT: Re-Storying Our Stories (Due MONDAY, JULY 1<sup>ST</sup>)**

#### **CLASS 4 – (3 HRS; DATE and TIME TBD) MEETING VIA ZOOM**

In 5-7 minutes, using the discoveries you have made about your story the past three classes, tell your most life-giving story. This can be a dramatic scene, a poem, a spoken word, song, or other piece of embodied performance art. Your projects will be presented to the class during our Zoom class meeting at a TBD date in early July. Everyone in the class will have an opportunity to view your story, and respond with the statements we have been using in our formation groups (I noticed, heard, appreciated, wondered).

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 (for example: your fairytale), but you can also pick a different part of your story that you have not explored yet if you wish.

Thank you all for your bravery and vulnerability in sharing your stories. I look forward to seeing your final projects! I am available to meet via Zoom to discuss your projects and address any questions.

### 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