

Writing as a Spiritual Practice
SPFM-7190 – Equip and Ignite, Fall 2024
North Park Theological Seminary
(1 credit hours, *syllabus subject to minor changes)

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**preferred method: barring any unforeseen circumstances, I will respond to any emails within 48 hours.*

Course Description:

Writing As a Spiritual Practice explores the ways several different creative writing genres—journaling, psalms, collects, poetry, blessings—can help nurture Christian faith. Through a combination of readings and writing exercises, students will learn *about* the creative act of writing as a path of spiritual discovery as they also engage in these writing practices to better understand their own relationship with God, themselves, and their neighbors.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the role of creativity and creative writing in Christian spirituality;
2. Engage in several different genres of spiritual writing—journaling, memoir, poetry, blessings—to discover the unique ways each can function and open us up to the presence of God;
3. Develop their own sustainable writing practices for ongoing spiritual renewal and growth.

Required Texts

1. Helen Cepero, *Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God through Attentive Writing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).
2. Other weekly readings as assigned on Canvas.

Assessments

1. Complete all assigned readings for each week (a reading log will be completed at the end of the semester).
2. Following the prompts below in the course schedule, write and post the weekly exercise by the end of the week (by Friday 11:59 p.m. of the week).
3. Respond to two other group members' posts (by Sunday 11:59 p.m.) using the following guidelines:
 - a. What did you resonate with in their writing and why?

- b. What are you curious to hear more about?
4. Participate in two sessions with a spiritual director.
 - a. Spiritual Direction is an important part of each of our spiritual formation classes. It is a spiritual practice meant to help each student engage more deeply with the topic at hand as well as increase their awareness of the work of God more broadly.
 - b. Each student will participate in two sessions of spiritual direction. Sue Braun (suebraun4@gmail.com) will assign a spiritual director to each student. The list of directors will be posted in Canvas.
 - c. Spiritual Direction is commonly a monthly meeting. Students are responsible to contact their spiritual director and arrange the two sessions. Students are to schedule their SD session dates to by **Sept. 20** (which will be confirmed through a Canvas assignment). These sessions must be completed by **Nov. 22**.
 - d. The student is responsible to inform the instructor when this assignment has been completed for full credit.
5. Complete a final reflection paper of 750 words that reflects on what you have discovered about your faith through the practice of writing in the class and how you would like to integrate writing into your life moving forward. **Due: Dec. 12, 11:59 p.m.**

Grading

The grading in this course is pass/fail.

Accommodations

North Park Theological Seminary provides services for students with documented disabilities to ensure equal access to programs, services, facilities, and activities. Students with a disability who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Seminary Academic Services at 773-244-5619 as soon as possible. If desired and necessary, discussion pertaining to documentation and accommodation can take place at another suitable location or by telephone. Further information about the American Disabilities Act Service is found in the Student Academic Handbook by visiting the following website: <http://www.northpark.edu/ada>.

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 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.

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

Academic Honesty

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 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. Using one's own work from previous assignments or other class assignments.
5. Signing an attendance roster for another who is not present.
6. Use of ChatGPT or other AI composition software to impersonate individual assignments.

In the special instance of group work, the instructor will make clear his/her expectations with respect to individual vs. collaborative work. A violation of these expectations may be considered cheating as well.

For further information on this subject you may refer to the Academic Dishonesty section of the University's online catalog.

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

(Reading Key: **bolded** – main readings; **blue** – art resource [read/watch/listen], **orange**: assignments due)

Week 1 (Aug. 26) – Creativity, Discovery, and Writing

Read:

- Pat Schneider, “There Is a Spirit”
- Denise Levertov, “Work That Enfaiths”
- Watch: Eugene Peterson video (1 min.)**

Due: In all three of our sources today, the authors describe creativity generally, and writing specifically, as a means of discovery in faith. In a short essay (500 words or so), describe how creativity and/or writing has helped form your faith, or how you would like to engage the practice of writing this semester as a means of discovery? What might you be looking for?

Week 2 (Sept. 2) – Attention and Intention

Read:

- Cepero, Ch. 3 “Looking Intently”
- Mary Oliver, “Upstream”
- Watch: Scene from *Lady Bird* (Canvas)**

Due: Go outside your house or apartment and write down 20 things you have never noticed before with as much detail and imagination as possible. (1-2 sentences for each)

Week 3 (Sept. 9) – Delight

Read:

- Excerpts from Ross Gay, *The Book of Delights* (Introduction, #10, #14, #47, #59, #83)
- Listen: *On Being* interview with Ross Gay, “Tending Joy and Practicing Delight” 4:00-16:40, 25:00-30:25, 31:54-37:06, 45:35-49:00**

Due: Using Ross Gay’s essays as a model, write a one-page (about 500 words) essay about one thing—a place, a song, a food, a tree, a concept, a word, anything!—that delights you and why.

Week 4 (Sept. 16) – Letters of Thanks/Gratitude

Read:

- Margaret Shepherd, “The Art of Connecting” & “Letters of Thanks”
- Chuck Leddy, “The Power of ‘Thanks’”
- Optional: Brother David Steindl-Rast, “Surprise and Gratefulness”
- Optional: Dwight Garner, “Mourning the Letters That Will No Longer Be Written, and Remembering the Great Ones That Were”

Due: Write (and send!) a handwritten letter of thanks to a friend or mentor who has helped form your faith. Since this might be personal, you only need to send a picture of the outside of the addressed envelope with a stamp on it. (No responses this week)

Week 5 (Sept. 23) – Journaling

Read:

-Cepero, Ch. 1&2

-Weems, “The Longest Prayer”

Due: Write a journal entry (about 500 words) using one of the prompts in this week’s Cepero chapters (please indicate prompt you are using).

Week 6 (Sept. 30) – Journaling (cont.)

Read: Cepero, Ch. 4&5

Due: Write a journal entry (about 500 words) using one of the prompts in this week’s Cepero chapters.

Week 7 (Oct. 7) – Journaling (cont.)

Read: Ch. 6&7

Due: Write a journal entry (about 500 words) using one of the prompts in this week’s Cepero chapters.

Week 8 – READING WEEK

Week 9 (Oct. 21) – Journaling (cont.)

Read:

-Cepero, Ch. 8&9

Due: Write a journal entry (about 500 words) using one of the prompts in this week’s Cepero chapters.

Week 10 (Oct. 28) – Journaling (cont.)

Read:

-Cepero, Ch. 12&14

Due: Write a journal entry (about 500 words) using one of the prompts in this week’s Cepero chapters.

Week 11 (Nov. 4) – Psalm Writing

Read:

-David Taylor, "Writing a Psalm of Lament: An Exercise"

-Howard Vanderwell, "Writing Your Own Psalm"

Due: Using the forms discussed by the two authors, write either a psalm of thanksgiving/praise or a psalm of lament.

Week 12 (Nov. 11) – Writing Collects

Read:

-Terry Stokes, "A Recipe for Collect-Writing"

(optional): Instagram: @prayersfromterry

Watch: [A Letter to the Church – Terry Stokes](#)

Due: Using the collect form described by Terry Stokes, write a collect prayer for a situation (comical or not) that often is not brought into the prayer life of the church.

Week 13 (Nov. 18) – Poetry

Read:

-Donald Capps, "Introduction" to *The Poet's Gift*

Watch: [Daniel Tysdal's "Everything You Need to Know to Write a Poem"](#)

Due: Using the process described in "Everything You Need to Know" write a poem about a loss in your life (does not have to be a huge loss—can be something small—even seemingly trivial!) and (possibly) how your faith might interact with it/where you find God in the midst of it.

Week 14 (Nov. 25) – Composing a Life

Read:

-Bateson, "Emergent Visions"

Due: Choose one of the two prompts and write a 500-word essay:

1. Describe an unhealthy narrative in your life. How could you re-compose this story toward health and wholeness?
2. What parts of your self do you feel is underutilized in your current composition of your life? How would you like to see these parts of your life woven in as you continue to compose your life?

Week 15 (Dec. 2) - Blessings/Benedictions

Read:

-Excerpts from John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us*

“For Friendship,” “To Learn from Animal Being,” “To Come Home To Yourself,” “For Work”

-Excerpt from W. H. Auden’s, “Precious Five”

-Listen (Optional): *On Being* interview with John O’Donohue, “The Inner Landscape of Beauty”

Due: Using O’Donohue’s blessings as a model, write a blessing of a person, place, or idea. If you are having trouble with the prompt, perhaps write a blessing for a particular person in your life who needs to hear a word of blessing (e.g., for hope, for courage, for peace, etc.).

Week 16 (Dec. 9) - Reflections

Due May 11 (11:59 p.m.): Write a 750-word reflection on what discoveries you have made in the class through your writing and how you would like to integrate the spiritual practice of writing moving forward.