

**The Licentiate in Theology Program**

**Fall Term 2023**

**Spiritual Formation 230**

**Basic Life Issues in our Changing World:**

**An Exploration of Worth, Belonging and Purpose**

**Course Syllabus**

**Huron University College Land Acknowledgment**

Huron is situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron, and Lenape peoples, whose sharing and stewardship of the land has been governed by the Dish with One Spoon treaty since time immemorial. We are guided by this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect. Huron University College acknowledges its past role in perpetuating colonial and exclusionary relations. Because religious and ecclesial institutions were instrumental in such relations, we consider it our particular responsibility as a Faculty of Theology to work towards justice and reconciliation.

**Course Dates:** September 7- October 26, 2023

**Time:** Thursday from 7 – 9 P.M. (CT), 8 – 10 P.M. (ET)

**Delivery:** Hosted via Zoom

**Instructor:** Dr. Norman King

**Contact:** nking@uwindsor.ca **Phone:** 519-980-9853

**Course Description**

BASIC LIFE ISSUES IN OUR CHANGING WORLD

An exploration of fundamental questions that arise in the search for meaning in our current world; for a sense of worth, belonging, and purpose. Areas of study include: pandemic effects; gender and racial equality; challenges of aging; climate collapse; social divisiveness, among others. Implications for personal growth and social involvement. Resources are drawn from the study of religion, spirituality, and the arts.

**Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes**

The chief focus of this course will be an exploration of some central issues that arise in the contemporary world, from the perspective of religion and spirituality. Its objectives are: to raise awareness of these issues, and to offer a theological understanding in response to them. In order to enrich and make concrete this knowledge, each theme will be illustrated from story, music, and other arts, and pastoral implications will be drawn from them.

In this course we shall explore key issues that confront us in our quest for meaning today. Our search for meaning includes our longing for a sense of identity and worth, for a sense of belonging or home, and for a sense of purpose, for a deeper theological meaning to which we can orient our lives. More colloquially, it is the quest for who we are, where we belong, and what we are for.

In the light of Christianity and other world religions, each human being is created in the image of God and therefore has a sacred worth, which is to be recognized and honoured in oneself and others and is to be reflected in and fostered by the structures and institutions of society. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights also speaks of the dignity of the human person as the basis of fundamental rights and responsibilities.

In this light, we may reflect on many dimensions of the concrete context in which we find ourselves today; and how that context may affect, whether assisting or hindering, our search for meaning in our life. A theological approach considers that we are essentially relational, communal, and social beings. It sees that our growth and fulfillment embrace personal depth and integrity and outgoing compassion and justice. As an example, we may explore the impact of Covid-19 on outlook and behaviour in a greatly altered social landscape, and the contribution religion and spirituality may make to a meaningful response.

In another instance, the religious tradition asserts that both men and women are created in the image of God, which implies a fundamental equality that cuts across all ethnic, cultural and economic conditions. We may examine what this equality means in light of gender and racial issues that arise today in terms of attitudes, relationships, and roles.

This course is also an invitation to explore our own quest for meaning today, within the current context within which we find ourselves and our ministry. It is an invitation as well to reflect on and try to name our own experience, both in its crucial times and its everyday moments, to consider and assess the images, concepts and values that shape our lives, and draw out their personal, relational, and social implications.

**Required Texts:**

All course readings will be made available to students through a shared virtual folder

(they be in pdf format), allowing students to access them through a computer or for printing.

**Course Outline/Plan**

Topics and Readings

Week 1.

A) General Introduction: where are we situated in our lives and ministry context today?

B) Pandemic issues: isolation, stress, loss, yet time for reflection and resetting priorities.

Readings:  Gross and Lukin. “Tips for Post-Pandemic Life: Beginning the transition toward normalcy.” How have our lives changed as a result of the pandemic?

Week 2.

Search for meaning, for a sense of worth and purpose

Readings: Excerpts from Viktor Frankl. *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

Weeks 3 and 4.

Loneliness, Solitude, Friendship. Social Outreach

Readings: Excerpts and summaries from Moustakas, Vanier, Nouwen, Fromm

Week 5.

Issues in Gender

Readings: Excerpts and Summaries from Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God Tal*k

Week 6.

Climate and spirituality

Readings: Summaries from Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, and Thomas Berry, “Evening Thoughts.”

Week 7.

Search for Transcendence

Readings: Notes on Karl Rahner, and excerpts from Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* and *Contemplative Prayer*

Week 8. Summary and Overview

*Throughout the course, we will also draw on the realm of story: including biblical literature, but also Western folk tales, Greek mythology, modern short stories and novels. We will also draw on the art of such figures as Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Monet, Vermeer. And we will use certain musical selections.*

**Method of Evaluation and Criteria for Grading**

**Two Document Studies: 20% each.**

      1) Select one of the class readings, and summarize its content in about 250 words.

      2) State in one or two sentences the central point in the article.

      3) State in a few sentences whether and why you do or do not agree with this reading.

4) State in a few sentences how this reading might affect your own personal or pastoral life.

**Final Essay: 40%**

In light of class presentation and discussion and the required readings:

1) present an understanding of the basic issues discussed, and a possible underlying theme in the various topics;

2) spell out its implications for your own life, relationships, work/ministry, and social involvements. This paper is intended as a thoughtful recapitulation and application of the course material.

There are two parts to this essay:

In the first part, attempt to gather together and synthesize the material covered in this course, through the various sources studied.

This section should be approximately 2-3 pages (500-750 words)

In the second part of the essay, spell out briefly the impact or challenge that the study of this material does have or might have on your self-understanding, your connections with others, and your place and role in society. How might it relate to your experience of Church or your ministry?

*The purpose of each assignment is to assimilate and reflect on the course material, so as to enrich our own understanding and its possible application to our own lives and pastoral outreach.*

**DUE DATES:**

*The due dates for the document studies will be one week after class three and one week after class six. The final essay will be due two weeks after the last class (8)*

**Huron Grade Descriptors**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  A+    |  90-100     |  One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level  |
|  A  |  80-89    |  Superior work which is clearly above average  |
|  B  |  70-79  |  Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory  |
|  C  |  60-69  |  Competent work, meeting requirements  |
|  D    |  50-59  |  Fair work, minimally acceptable  |
|  F  |  below 50  |  Fail  |

**Student Code of Conduct**

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work, and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at: [https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf](http://about:blank/).

**Statement on the Recording of Class Activities**

Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student’s own private use.

Online courses within the Licentiate in Theology Program are recorded for student engagement purposes. These recording are only used by the registered students of the class and made available through a restricted video hosting site to respect both privacy and intellectual property. Should a student be uncomfortable with this practice, they can contact the course instructor or the LTh Program Director, Dr. Grayhame Bowcott at grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca

**Support Services**

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should contact the LTh Program Director, Dr. Grayhame Bowcott at grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca.



THIS COURSE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY HURON’S FACULTY OF THEOLOGY COMMITTEE

FOR THE FALL TERM OF THE LTH PROGRAM, 2023.