

Pastoral Care in Grief and Bereavement CL 688

Fall Semester

United Theological Seminary

New Brighton, MN

Tuesday: 6:00 – 9:15

Classroom B

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on the universal experience of attachment, loss and grief and the recovering process for those who grieve. In this class we will explore the dynamics of grief that occur during the dying process and in the face of loss. Attention will be given to the biblical, theological, emotional, social and personal dynamics of the grief experience. Grief will be considered as a unique experience for people with its various manifestations that are culturally and socially expressed. Particular attention will be given to the care giving role for those grieving including the utilization of rites and rituals appropriate to the social and religious context. We will address the realities of our own perspectives about grief as we attempt to develop a care providing methodology that is appropriate to utilize with those who are experiencing loss and consequent grief.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- A. To consider and reflect upon our own personal experiences of loss and grief to determine the impact that such events have in shaping our understanding of the theology and praxis of care giving for those who grieve.
- B. To consider varying definitions of grief and their implications for those grieving as well as the care provider.
- C. TO investigate the biblical/theological understandings related to the grief experience that stem from varying faith traditions.
- D. To determine the role of the care giver in the grieving process.
- E. To understand the role of the faith community in relationship to the grieving process.
- F. To take note of the unique grief experiences as associated with a variety of circumstances surrounding dying and death.

COURSE TEXTS

- A. Bregman, Lucy. *Beyond Silence and Denial*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.
- B. Boss, Pauline. *Ambiguous Loss*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- C. Hedtike, Lorraine and John Winslade. *Re-membering Lives: Conversations with the Dying and the Bereaved*. Amityville, N.Y.: Baywood Publishing Co., 2004.

- D. Lukas, Christopher and Henry Seiden, *Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Publishers.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY (separate handout)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- A. Attendance at class and participation in small group discussions. *More than two unexcused absences will constitute failure for the course.*
- B. Reading of assigned material in the syllabus for each class session.
- C. “My Personal Grief Experience: 3-5 pages double spaced.
Due: September 22
- D. Participation in Small Group Work during the Semester
- E. Book Review: **Lukas, “Silent Grief: Living in the Wake of Suicide”**
Due: October 13
- F. Book Review of your Choice **OR** Reflection Paper on the Worship Service
November 1st
Due: November 3
- G. Participation in field trip to a funeral home (**Oral Reflection week following**)
Field Trip - December 1!
- H. Final Paper/Project for the Course (options)
1. Write a grief curriculum for use in your faith community
 - a. indicate the manner in which you would advertise the course.
 - b. determine the targeted age category of your audience
(children, teens, adults, older adults)
 - c. construct **at least FOUR sessions** that include the following:
 - 1) topics for each of the sessions
 - 2) basic content to be taught/discussed
 - 3) resources utilized
 - 4) method to be used for each presentation
 - 5) theological/care giving issues
 - d. indicate the manner in which you would evaluate the course.
 2. Create an “art project” that depicts through one or a variety of art forms past and/or current understandings of ‘death’ within the context of your particular culture. The art may be “original” in nature created by you or it can feature the work of others. The art forms should be accompanied by an explanatory text that indicates your interpretation of what is being presented and the significance of the presentation from a

theological and care giving perspective.

3. Do a RESEARCH PAPER on some aspect of grief or a particular grief experience (suicide, AIDS, SIDS, prolonged illness etc.)
 - a. the paper should be 8-10 pages in length (**double spaced**)
 - b. document the paper as appropriate with footnote/endnotes and bibliography etc.
 - c. be certain to include: *theological dimensions, care giving implications and processes.*

Due: Final Project - December 15

*** It is strongly recommended that you attend “The Day of the Dead” as presented by Dr. Christine Smith. This could be “substituted” for the book of your choice if you choose to write about the worship service, its meaning for you, and its possible use within the context of your tradition.**

COURSE SCHEDULE

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| September 15 | Introduction to the course, discussion of the syllabus, course requirements, expectations and logistics. Preliminary consideration of the dynamics of grief, definitions of grief and the experience of attachments, loss and grief as it relates to crises in the lives of people. |
| September 22 | The “Many Faces of Grief”. Presentation on the multiple categories of the loss experience will be discussed as well as consideration of the levels of interrelatedness of those loss experiences in our own lives and the lives of others. |
| | Required Reading: Bregman, Introduction, pp. 1-14. |
| September 29 | A discussion of the reality of mortality as it is experienced by the care giver in relationship to those who are grieving. The attitude with which the care giver approaches those dying as well as those grieving is determined by her/his own theology and personal experience. What are the operative questions and concerns in carrying out ministry? |

DUE: Required Personal Grief Paper

A “personal case study,” revealing one of your own experiences Of grief that you are COMFORTABLE sharing with your small group. The paper should include salient features of the experience including the nature of the loss, your relationship to the person, place or thing that was lost. The way your own faith spoke or not speak to that personal experience and where

you currently are in the process now.

- October 6 A presentation on the biblical, theological and care giving understanding of the phenomenon of death, with the explicit and the implicit theological assumptions that are operative and that inform your ministry. A consideration of the ecclesiological perspective historically will be discussed to become aware of the evolution of the theology and practices that surround death.
- Required Reading:** Bregman, chapter 1, pp. 15-42
- October 13 The dynamics of the grief experience as they have been noted by leading researchers in the field of thanatology. Consideration will be given to the “unique” nature of the grief experience dependent upon the relationship to the deceased, the gender differential in grieving, particularly in the “medicalization” of death in this society.
- Required Reading:** Bregman, chapters 2-3, pp. 43-98
- October 20 Consideration of “special grief experiences” that are dealt with in ministry. What is meant by “unsanctioned death and also “unsanctioned grief?” The range of death experiences from that of: miscarriage, to SIDS, suicide, AIDS and other such traumatic forms of death will be considered.
- Required Reading:** Bregman, chapter 4, pp. 99-132
- Special artistic presentation dealing with grief!**
- Due: Book Review of “Silent Grief”**
- October 27 **NO CLASS – READING WEEK!**
- November 3 “Ambiguous Loss” is a special form of loss and grief named by Dr. Pauline Boss in her book by that title. As you read this resource, keep in mind the following questions:
1. What is the definition of “ambiguous loss?”
 2. Why are emotions “mixed” in this experience?
 3. What does she mean by the family ‘gamble?’
 4. What does Boss say about a “turning point?”
 5. What role do “ambiguity” and “doubt” play?
 6. What did you find most helpful in this book?

Be prepared to discuss your reactions in small groups!

Required Reading: Boss, “Ambiguous Loss”

November

Special Chapel Worship – Dr. Christine Smith
(See note above regarding this event!)

November 10

The practical aspects of care giving with those who are dying and their significant others. The “art of care giving” in the midst of the varying social settings, cultures and situations will be discussed. How do people deal with their impending death and how do those who love them deal with this reality?

Required Reading: Bregman, chapter 5, pp. 133-154

Due: Book Review of your choice

November 17

The rites and rituals of dying, including the funeral with all of its attendant concerns. What resources from the faith tradition are helpful in this setting? What ‘cultural’ realities need to be taken into account in conducting a funeral and burial rites?

Required Reading: Bregman, chapter 6, pp. 155-182.

November 24

“Catastrophic Loss and Grief” in the context of household dynamics and communal sensitivity. What is different or unique about this kind of loss? The story of such a loss and its aftermath as noted in *Loving Still, Loving Always*.

Required Reading: Aasen, “Loving Still, Loving Always”

As you read give consideration to the following questions:

1. How might you personally respond to this kind of experience?
2. What did you find helpful in reading the book?
3. What were your feelings as she described the “shattering experience?”
4. What were your thoughts about “rebuilding a new self?”
5. How did you respond to her comments about the faith community?
6. What thoughts did you have concerning the way this whole experience was appropriated?

Come prepared to answer these questions in your small groups as well as other salient issues brought to the fore by the book.

December 1

Field Trip to Local Funeral Home

Come prepared with questions and concerns that you have personally about funerals, cremation, rites, rituals and the relationship that you might have to a funeral director.

December 8 The role of the faith tradition in dealing with issues of mortality and the consideration of 'life beyond death.' What are the historical perspectives on these questions? What role does eschatology play in the theology of griever and care givers?

Required Reading: Bregman, Chapter 5 and Conclusion
pp. 155-188.

December 15 View of the film, "Shadowlands" and discussion of this film in the light of what has been learned in class. Final discussion and completion of the course.

Due: Final Paper

Course Grading and Evaluation

- A. Attendance in class along with the reading assignments for the evening.
More than TWO unexcused absences constitutes failure for the course.
- B. Quality of the assigned papers *submitted on time!*
- C. Participation in the field trip
- D. Participation in small group processes
- E. Quality of the final project submitted for the course.

There will be no exams in the course.

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Office Hours:

Monday: 1:30 – 4:30
Tuesday 10:30 – 12:00
Thursday 10:30 – 11:30

OTHER TIMES BY SPECIAL APPOINTMENT!