

## **CE3530: Christian Education in relation to Creation**

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Class meets on February 21, 6 – 8 pm, February 22, 9:30 am to 3:30 pm, BH116; March 21-23 at Shalom Hill Farm; and May 2, 6-8 pm, May 3, 9:30 to 3:30 pm, BH116, and May 3, morning worship place TBD.

### **Course rationale:**

This course is an experiment. It grows out of my conviction that as seniors you already have a lot of experience, both in theological analysis and reflection, and in supporting and designing learning experiences. I'd like to help you draw upon that experience to engage a set of pressing educational issues that arise within the Christian community. In this particular Education II, we'll focus on questions of environmental education and their relation to Christian education. This means that in the next three months we will consider questions and resources from within environmental education, and questions and resources from within Christian education. In doing so I think that we can stretch both domains and in the process also build your own ability to respond to pressing learning issues in the communities you will be called to serve.

### **Course goals:**

Provide an intellectual and experiential space in which encounters with God are welcomed, respected and critically engaged.

Provide conceptual and experiential connections between the literatures of environmental education and religious education, and between care for the earth and creation theology.

Explore pedagogical strategies for nurturing religious formation and environmental awareness within congregational contexts.

Provide connections to a variety of churches and other institutions who are making care for the earth a centerpiece of their educational leadership and mission efforts.

### **Course requirements:**

**Attendance** at all course meetings. Life often poses many challenges to participating fully in class. This course has been structured to meet only one weekend a month, so as to make it possible for commuting students to attend more easily. But this format also makes it difficult, if you miss a session, to engage the whole of the learning envisioned by the syllabus. I hope that you will make every effort possible to be with us.

**Personal learning goals** developed for the course and e-mailed to me before our second meeting (you may use the form in Appendix One if you like).

**Integrative** work with the course ideas, feelings and actions. This task can be accomplished in several ways. I will be looking for some evidence that you have attempted to engage the central ideas of the course yourself, and that you have done so with an eye towards understanding how to help other people engage them as well. That will be the minimum requirement for passing this course.

What might constitute such evidence? There are myriad opportunities:

A first possibility is to take on some practice of “earth care” that is new to you at the beginning of this course, and keep careful track of how you engage in it during the course of the term. “Keeping track” would likely involve some kind of journaling, but that might be the kind of chart you keep on your refrigerator. You could try, for instance, changing your commuting habits. Maybe you use a bus or a bicycle for every other errand trip you make. Or you could engage your nutrition practices: maybe you eat food grown locally that is lower on the food chain. Perhaps you want to work on your household’s energy consumption: you might do an official energy audit and try to implement its findings. The point of this exercise is to pick some manageable piece of your everyday practices and see what is involved in trying to integrate environmental awareness into that practice. I am assuming that you will not be able to do so perfectly! The goal here is not to “achieve perfection” – but to become more aware of your earth care habits, and to experience the difficulty – and I hope, joy -- of that growing awareness. Any insights you arrive at could be shared with me either in a personal interview at the end of the class, or in some form of writing.

A second possibility is to keep a personal learning journal throughout the class that would be more free form than a reflection paper. This kind of assignment requires that you reflect on the readings in a process of integration – you could clip articles, jot notes from other classes, sketch drawings, write poetry, include music, and so on. As with the other integrative assignments, this one requires critical engagement, not simply summarizing the readings. It allows, however, the use of media beyond that of prose writing. Again, reflecting on the ideas that you are struggling with, the feelings that arise in the process, and any action you’re engaged in with relation to the issues under consideration should be the focus of this process. This journal is due on May 9th.

A third possibility is to write a short paper (2-3 pages) on each of the four main text books (excepting the *Sojourners* resource). In this kind of paper you lift up two or three themes from the reading and reflect upon them from within the context of your own professional practice, considering in particular their educational implications for environmental awareness. A reflection paper needs to be centered upon the readings, and it needs to engage them at more than a summary level. Yet it is also a space in which you can write in the first person, and bring your experiences to the task of reflection. The key here is really to think about how the resource you’re considering has affected your ideas, your feelings, and any actions you have engaged in with relation to the issues under

consideration. These papers would be due by May 9th, although it would be best if you handed in at least two of them sometime before Easter.

If none of these processes work well for you, then please contact me and we can talk about other ways to meet this requirement.

**Final curriculum project.** The final assignment of the class is to develop a curriculum project. You could write a liturgy, for instance, that would accompany one Sunday's lesson plans for earth care. You could develop a lesson plan for a specific group (a confirmation class, an adult forum, a preschool session, and so on). You could develop a weekend retreat for a high school group. You could develop plans for a service project. You could develop a web page of linked resources. Use your imagination! My primary concern is that whatever you develop should be complete enough that you could give it to someone else to use. This project will be due at our final class session, on May 3rd, and at that time you should bring enough copies to provide one for each of your colleagues (I will make copying available through duplicating services). When you fill out your learning goals sheet you need to describe, at least briefly, how you think you will approach this project.

### **Required reading:**

First, a note about reading. The books I have chosen attempt to respond to the following issues: understanding environmental education, shaping religious education around these issues, interpreting/confessing a biblical imagination, shaping biospheric awareness (another way of saying this would be to speak of environmental spirituality), and engaging Lutheran theology on issues of creation.

I think these are good books, but each of you comes from a specific context with a specific background. Therefore I'm open to substitutions if you can identify books that would better fit your unique learning needs.

Second, I am assuming that you will read these books (or the substitutions we agree upon), by the end of the term. I am not specifically requiring that you read a particular book by a particular date, or even that you prove to me that you have read a specific book in a certain way. I assume that you are an adult learner and will engage these books in a respectful and appropriate manner. I have grouped particular readings on specific calendar dates, but this is only to alert you to times when we will work more directly with these texts. All of the texts are relevant to all of our work together.

The following books are available for purchase in the seminary bookstore:

Hessel, D. and Rasmussen, L. *Earth Habitat: Eco-injustice and the Church's Response*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Orr, D. *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1994.

Sittler, J. *Evocations of Grace: Writings on Ecology, Theology and Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

Thomashaw, M. *Bringing the Biosphere Home*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

“On Holy Ground: A Resource on Faith and the Environment,” from the editors of *Sojourners Magazine*.

[This last resource is also available through the Web ([https://www.sojo.net/resources/index.cfm/cfid/3455754/cftoken/42592987/mode/display\\_detail/ResourceID/139/action/catalog.html](https://www.sojo.net/resources/index.cfm/cfid/3455754/cftoken/42592987/mode/display_detail/ResourceID/139/action/catalog.html)) (or, go to “www.Sojonet” and click through their catalog). It costs \$5 plus shipping.]

### **Course topics schedule:**

#### **February 21-23**

Basic introductions to the tasks at hand.

Basic overview / refresher of foundations of religious education.

Relational epistemologies.

Dimensions of religious ed: diakonia, koinonia, didache, kerygma, leiturgia

Trio of triads / multiple intelligences / Eisner’s curricula.

Confirmation, contradiction, continuity

Basic overview / refresher of foundations of environmental education.

Orr’s “six myths and six principles” (CF. *Earth in Mind*, by David Orr)

Thomashaw’s “biospheric awareness” (CF. *Bringing the Biosphere Home*, by Mitchell Thomashaw)

Biblical foundations for Earthcare.

As an example, how do we engage the Genesis stories? (CF. pp. 53-68, in *Earth Habitat*)

Nature walk.

The Blue Planet.

Confirming / contradicting starting points:

Hymnody and religious education. (CF. pp. 173-183, in *Earth Habitat*)

Worship service analysis.

## **March 21-23**

Shalom Hill Farm weekend

CF. "On Holy Ground" resource from *Sojourners*.

CF. ELCA and other documents found linked to the course website (<http://www.luthersem.edu/mhess/ce3530/>)

CF. *Evocations of Grace*, by Joseph Sittler.

Please note: this weekend is being substantially planned and led by the retreat faculty at Shalom Hill Farm. You need to plan on being present from dinner on Friday through lunch on Sunday.

## **May 2-4**

Urban environmental justice issues.

CF. "On Holy Ground" resource from *Sojourners*.

CF. pp. 71-172, in *Earth Habitat*.

CF. Environmental justice and urban issues sites on the course website.

Issues of "compelling knowledge" and other Lutheran frameworks.

Globalization and the eco-economy.

Tour of Twin Cities sites.

Conversations with local pastoral leaders.

Sharing of specific student projects.

## Appendix One: Learning Goals

Name \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (or phone if you don't do e-mail) \_\_\_\_\_

My learning goals for this course are as follows (please provide some rationale to accompany them):

I will work on integration in the following way:

My final curriculum project will likely focus on:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_