

Writing for the Church

Fall, 2011

Christian Education (3 hours, general elective)

Teacher: J. Bradley Wigger (bwigger@lpts.edu)

1:30-4:20 Wednesdays

General Description

This seminar concentrates upon the art and craft of writing for the Church (broadly understood). Students will be introduced to and will practice various kinds of writing, for example, curriculum materials, Bible studies, devotional materials, poetry, pastoral letters, essays, church newsletters, fiction, and writing for denominational magazines or newspapers. Students will explore the role and place of written words in congregational life and educational ministry. Course readings will include reflections upon the challenges and discipline of the writing process as well as students' own work shared with the class. Local authors and those involved in denominational publications will also be invited to discuss their experiences with the class.

Hopes

Through the course, students should be able to reflect theologically on writing and words, identify differences and similarities between processes for *writing* and those for *learning*, become sensitive to various genres and contexts for writing, find guidance for working through various obstacles to writing (such as fear, writer's block, or over-editing oneself), imagine the educational possibilities for writing (such as writing a congregation's Sunday School curriculum, Lenten devotions for home-use, or magazine articles), write for children and adults alike, and discover a deeper appreciation for the joys, hardships, disciplines, and power involved in writing. In addition students should discover their own strengths in writing.

Teaching and Learning Methods

This course will heavily utilize class discussions and writing exercises. Guest speakers, reading materials, and students' own writing will focus the discussions. Accordingly, class participation and preparation are crucial to the course. Guidance for assignments and the final project will be given in class. Additional assignments not listed in the syllabus may be required but will be given adequate time and will be part of the "Reading and Notebook" grade.

Assignments and Grading

The following criteria will be used for the course grade:

Reading and Notebook Assignments (50%)

The Notebook will include a reading log, as well as daily writing exercises in and out of class in light of speakers, readings, class discussions, and interests. The emphasis for the notebook writings will be upon engagement with the assignments, not whether the writing is publishable or not.

Book Review and Final Project (50%)

Students will submit a final writing project in an area of writing the student would like to develop more fully. Examples: a full length article for a denominational magazine;

the beginnings of a graphic novel; a short story or chapter of book or novel; a Bible study or devotional that congregations or households could use; a set of poems, prayers or songs; or other possibilities a student proposes. (Roughly 10 pages, 5 pages presented in class).

Students will write a 5 page book review of one of the following (or another if negotiated with the professor):

- Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989. Or,
Miller, E. Ethelbert. *Fathering Words: The Making of an African American Writer*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
Barry, Lynda. *What It Is*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly Press, 2008.

Master of Theology/Doctor of Ministry Students

For those taking this course for D.Min. level credit, required is an additional 500 pages of reading, or an additional 300 pages plus an additional project to be negotiated with the instructor. This project could be extra writing for each session, a classroom presentation, or an additional dimension to the final project. The instructor will have some suggestions for extra reading.

Primary Bibliography

- Barry, Lynda. *What It Is*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly Press, 2008.
Clark, Roy Peter. *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2008.
Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
Elbow, Peter. *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
Lamott, Anne, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
Miller, E. Ethelbert. *Fathering Words: The Making of an African American Writer*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
Paterson, Katherine. *The Invisible Child: On Reading and Writing Books for Children*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2001.
Perry, Susan K. *Writing in Flow: Keys to Enhanced Creativity*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest, 1999.
Walker, Frank X. *Affrilachia*. Lexington, KY: Old Cove Press, 2000.

Seminary-wide Policies

Inclusive Language:

Good writing has aesthetic appeal and ethical sensitivity. Good writing for the Church in the 21st century employs inclusive language for humanity and expansive metaphors for God, and seeks to do so with grace.

In accordance with seminary policy, students are to use inclusive language in class discussions and in written and oral communication by using language representative of the whole human community in respect to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and physical and intellectual capacities. Direct quotations from theological texts and translations of the Bible

do not have to be altered to conform to this policy. In your own writing, however, when referring to God, you are encouraged to use a variety of images and metaphors, reflecting the richness of the Bible's images for God. See for further assistance, http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp.

Academic Honesty:

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Use of another's language or ideas from online resources is included in this policy, and must be attributed to author and source of the work being cited. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism, and may result in failure of the course. Multiple occurrences of plagiarism may result in dismissal from the Seminary. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center. For the Seminary policy, see The Code of Student Conduct, 6.11; the Student Handbook, p. 19.

Citation Policy:

Citations in your papers should follow the Seminary standard, which is based on these guides:
Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Copies of these guides are available at the library and in the Academic Support Center.

Special Accommodations:

Students requiring accommodations for a documented physical or learning disability should be in contact with the Director of the Academic Support Center (kmapes@lpts.edu) during the first two weeks of a semester and should speak with the instructor as soon as possible to arrange appropriate adjustments. Students with environmental or other sensitivities that may affect their learning are also encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Attendance Policy:

According to the Seminary catalog, students are expected to attend class meetings regularly. In case of illness or emergency, students are asked to notify the instructor of their planned absence from class, either prior to the session or within 24 hours of the class session. Missing 1/4 of the course or more may result in a low or failing grade in the course.

(Working) Calendar Writing for Church, Fall 2011

I (9/14/11)

Course introduction and trying to remember—even faintly—how writing could be fun

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Homework for next time 9/21

Find: a sketchbook or notebook to work with for the semester.

WWW: Read Intro and 5 chapters of *Writing Tools*. Read 3 **Walker** poems. Free **Write** for 10 minutes 3 to 5 times per week (40-50 total for semester). This is a steady assignment throughout the semester.

Read: Elbow, xii-25; 177-190

Write: a 3 minute fiction (under 600 words) to submit to NPR's contest by 9.25.

See: <http://www.npr.org/series/105660765/three-minute-fiction>

Submit: <http://www.npr.org/contact/threeminutefiction.html>

II (9/21)

Serious play

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Homework for 9/28

WWW

Read: Lamott, xi-43, 162-175

Write: a letter to someone (alive or dead) who has been significant for your faith.

Let them know how they have mattered to you.

III (9/28)

Some ways the written word works in the life of three outstanding pastors

Guests: Jane Larsen-Wigger, Ann Deibert, and Dee Wade (3:00)

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Homework for 10/5

WWW

Read: Lamott, 97-161

Write: TBA

Plus: Bring in something that represents your "broccoli."

IV (10/5) *Why your own experience matters and how to expand it*

Guest: President Michael Jinkins (1:30)

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Homework for 10/12

WWW

Read: Lamott, 172-237

Read: "Anne Lamott's Subversive Faith," by Eva Stimson, *Presbyterians Today*, June, 2002. Familiarize yourself with the magazine and Presbyterian News Service

Service <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/>

Write: TBA

V (10/12)

Good news—church people need to know stuff too

Guests: Jerry Van Marter, Presbyterian News Service. Eva Stimson, *Presbyterian Outlook* (1:30)

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Homework for 10/19

WWW

Write: Look over notebook and re-work something to be either for a church newsletter, a newspaper article, or a devotional.

Read: Elbow, Chapter 11;

Perry, *Writing in Flow*, chapter 1, pp. 6-14 (Reserve Shelf)

VI (10/19)

Fun with poetry even if you don't publish, wear a beret, hang out in cafes, or go to slams

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Homework for 11/2

WWW

Write: 5 poems—giving yourself different rules for each (e.g. Haiku, Rhyming, no rules, etc.) Consider sharing one in class.

Read: Elbow, 279-80; 300-338; 357-373.

Paterson, *Invisible Child*, pp. 3-24. (Reserve Shelf)

10/26 **Research and Study Week** (consider reading Dillard, Miller, or Barry)

VII (11/2)

Magic wrapped in mystery surrounded by wonder

Guest: Rebecca Barnes Davies, author of *50 Ways to Save the Earth*. (1:30)

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Homework for 11/9

WWW

Write: Something for children (e.g. devotional, prayers, story)

OR 50 ways to...(one liners)

OR (work on final if you are presenting on 11/16)

Read: Elbow, pp. 177-190.

VIII (11/9)

Writing for teaching (which is the reason I designed this course in the first place)

Guest: David Maxwell, *The Thoughtful Christian* (1:30)

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Homework for 11/16

WWW

Read (TBA)

Write: for one hour on your final project. If you don't know what it is, try free writing about it, or just take a stab at something to see whether anything generates energy for you.

IX (11/16)

First Presentations—5 pages of a writing project. (Yes, you really have to present 5 pages of your final project to the class and even though this is scary, I know the class is going to treat you and your writing with the upmost respect.

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Homework for 11/23

WWW

Write: work on final projects and book review

X (11/23)

Open for work on your final projects—if

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Homework for 11/30

WWW (finishing up whatever you have left)

Read: work from others.

XI (11/30)

Presentations

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Homework for 12/7

WWW (if)

Read: work from others

XII (12/7)

Presentations

12/16 Turn in Revised Project and Book Review

O tragedy! The class is over.