

# Summer Term 2025

## Strong Roots: Contemplative Prayer & Practice

### Course Syllabus

**Course Code:** *Canterbury: A01EY1    Huron: Spiritual Formation 250*

#### Canterbury College Land Acknowledgment

We respectfully acknowledge that Canterbury College resides on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie.

**Course Dates:** June 14, 21, 28, July 5, 12

**Time:** Saturdays from 10a – 4p EST

**Delivery:** In Person (limited hybrid available)

**Instructor:** Jennifer Boyes-Garbin, BA, MDiv, DMin

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**Phone:** 226-340-3018

#### Course Description

This course examines the practice of contemplative prayer from the Early Church through to modern times, with the intent of reflecting on, strengthening and growing our relationships with God, self, and others. Grounding our study in theological and scriptural understandings of prayer, we will explore the idea that the act of contemplation leads to greater daily embodiment of the Gospel and experiences of the Divine that we encounter in private moments of prayer. Through practicum, lecture, reflection, discussion, and readings taken from a wide sampling of authors and practitioners of contemplative prayer, we will consider how this practice encourages us to be more fully engaged as anti-racist, embodied, and self-reflective Christ followers, open to continual spiritual growth and deepening relationship with the Divine.

#### Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will:

- Be familiar with the theological and scriptural foundations of prayer in general, and contemplative prayer specifically, in the Christian tradition.
- Be familiar with and have experience in the following contemplative prayer practices:
  - The Ignatian Exercises
  - The Awareness Examen (Ignatius)
  - Centering Prayer
  - *Lectio Divina*
  - Praying with Icons
  - Walking Prayer and Labyrinth Prayer
  - Nature Mysticism

- Understand how these practices of contemplative prayer create opportunity for deeper communion with God/the Divine, and a more profound understanding of the presence of God in daily life.
- Understand how the experience of the desert fathers and mothers (monastic tradition) influence and provide the groundwork for modern contemplative prayer.
- Be familiar with the varying experience, reflections and impact of global voices including but not limited to Black, Queer, South American, and Asian writers and practitioners.
- Reflect on and create a sustainable personal contemplative prayer practice which incorporates and builds on the work covered in this course.

## Required Texts / Study Documents

The principal Texts/Documents/Resources for this course will be (this list is subject to slight changes and will be made available to all students in advance of the course date):

### *The Bible*

Cheng, Patrick S., "Reclaiming Our Traditions, Rituals, and Spaces: Spirituality and the Queer Asian Pacific American Experience" (*Spiritus*)\*\*

Farley, Wendy, various videos

Haight, Roger, "Ignatian Spirituality and Racism" (*Spiritus*)\*\*

Holmes, Barbara A., *Joy Unspeakable*

Nouwen, Henri J.M., *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons*

Swan, Laura, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*

Robinson, Timothy, "He Talked to Trees! "Thinking Differently" About Nature with Howard Thurman" (*Spiritus*)\*\*

Rohr, Richard, various videos

On the Ignatian Exercises and Awareness Examen: [www.ignatianspirituality.com](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com) (various)

### Optional Readings:

Bondi, Roberta C., *To Pray and to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church*

Bourgault, Cynthia, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*

Morello, Sam Anthony, *Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer*

Wood, Funlayo E, *Cyber Spirits, Digital Ghosts: African and Diasporic Religions in the Age of Collaborative Consumptions* (CrossCurrents)\*\*

\*\*These documents will be made available in electronic (pdf) format, free of cost, for all students in the course.

## Course Outline/Plan

### Week 1

1. Introduction to theological and biblical understanding of the practice of prayer and images of God in the Christian tradition
2. The challenge to embody prayer as a way of life
3. Learning from the desert mothers and fathers
4. Practicum: Awareness Examen (daily prayer in the Ignatian tradition)
5. Practicum: Contemplation based on a reading by a desert mother

### Week 2

1. Beginning the journey of the Ignatian Exercises: Week 1 of Exercises
2. Understanding the Exercises as an act of anti-racism
3. Introduction to *Lectio Divina*
4. Introduction to Centering Prayer
5. Practicum: *Lectio Divina*
6. Practicum: Centering Prayer

### Week 3 (Reflection paper due)

1. Continuing the journey of the Ignatian Exercises: Week 2 of Exercises
2. Jesus' mission of healing the world
3. Praying with Icons
4. Connecting the experiences of global voices
5. Practicum: Praying with Icons
6. Practicum: Prayer through Music and Motion

### Week 4

1. Travelling the way of the cross: Week 3 of the Exercises
2. Understanding the physical embodiment of the Divine through movement
3. Connecting the experiences of global voices
4. Exploring nature mysticism
5. Practicum: Labyrinth walk
6. Practicum: Nature walk

### Week 5 (Class presentations)

1. Resurrection and new life in the Exercises: Week 4 of the Exercises
2. Understanding the concept of resurrection in contemplative practice
3. Connecting the experiences of global voices
4. Closing reflections
5. Practicum: Class presentations on draft papers (see below)

**July 26, 2025 Final Paper due.**

## Method of Evaluation and Criteria for Grading

(only for students choosing to be evaluated for full course credit)

Non-credit students are encouraged to write the course reflections as a learning and self-development tool. All of the below exercises will be completed by each student seeking evaluation for full certificate credit.

### 1. Self Evaluation - 20% (evaluated by student and instructor)

Each student will sign a learning covenant which includes self-evaluation as a significant part of the course grade. Students should feel comfortable with and committed to a form of evaluation in which the student honestly evaluates those course components that cannot be measured directly by the instructor (private prayer, reading, and journaling). The learning covenant will include commitments by the student for:

- Daily personal prayer, 45 minutes per day, 5 days per week,
- Keeping of a personal prayer journal, 5 days per week, and
- Reading required texts, watching required videos, and preparing for class discussion.

### 2. Class Engagement/Participation - 10% (evaluated by student and instructor)

Students are expected to attend all classes prepared to participate in discussion with fellow classmates and instructor. Discussion topics will range from our weekly readings to subjects raised in class.

### 3. 1<sup>st</sup> Reflection Paper - 20% (evaluated by instructor)

A short paper (3-5 pages) reflecting on your reading and experience of prayer.

### 4. Final Presentation and Paper – 50% (evaluated by instructor)

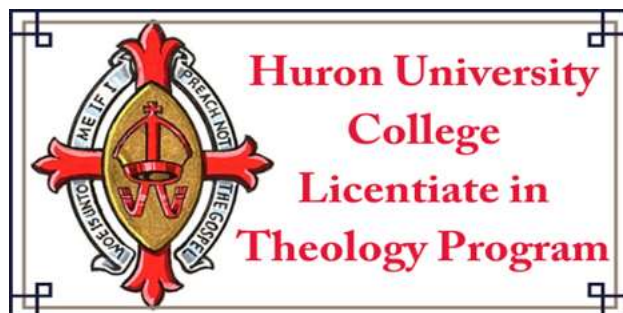
A final paper of 6-10 pages in length developing one (or more) of the contemplative prayer practices covered in the course specifically for the student's own personal prayer life. The opportunity is to explore how to "plant a new seed" in one's own practice. A short presentation on this paper is to be given at the last class for conversation, support, and discussion. Students should have ready their general outline and at least one new source to present. (Grade is divided: 10% for class presentation, 40% for final paper) (further details will be shared in class)

Essays are to double-spaced, 12 font size or equivalent. Please use Turabian style (for help with Turabian style writing please visit the "Citations Guide" section of your university library website, or for a quick guide visit: [http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian\\_citationguide.html](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html)).

## Grade Descriptors

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

**Note of Gratitude:** This course is inspired by and owes a debt of gratitude to Rev. Canon Dr. Constance Joanna Gefvert, SSJD who is the architect of the course “Rooted in God: Personal Prayer as the Soil for Ministry.” Methodology utilized in “Strong Roots” is loosely based on Sr Joanna’s work and is used with her knowledge and permission.



THIS COURSE HAS BEEN APPROVED BY HURON’S  
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY COMMITTEE  
TO BE OFFERED IN THE WINTER/SPRING TERM OF THE LTH PROGRAM, 2025.