IPS/SP5/710  Liturgy, Ritual, and the Sacred, Fall 2019

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan Kaplan (ldkaplan@vst.edu)

Purpose: An introduction to the theory and practice of ritual, focused on elements shared by multiple traditions. Humans use ceremony to approach the divine, build community, mark important life events, and more. Together, we will explore theological, psychological, sociological, anthropological, and philosophical theories of ceremonial activity. We will apply those theories as we study effective ritual facilitation to increase our own skills. The course is an MDiv/PPL spirituality elective and MAIIS requirement.

Competencies: Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:

- Explain selected psychological, sociological, philosophical, and anthropological theories of the role of sacred ceremony in human communities
- Articulate a personal theory of the role of ritual in the sacred
- Describe the formational role of two key sacred ceremonies from two faith traditions
- Describe elements of effective ritual facilitation
- Plan a public ritual or ceremony with attention to context, participants, symbols, language and rites

Format: Fall term 2019, Thursday 6-9 pm/Friday 9am-5pm: Sept 19/20, Oct 17/18, Nov 14/15 PLUS Thursday Oct 17, 12:00 noon – 1:00 pm. Course activities include lecture, discussion, student presentations, observation of a Thursday noon Community Worship at VST, planning and facilitation of a closing class ritual, possibly one field trip.

Identification of the levels at which the course can be taken: Certificate, Basic (Diploma/MA/M.Div) or Advanced (Th.M).

Required texts:
Please purchase at amazon.ca or borrow from the library:


Please download from Canvas:

Behar, Ruth. “Death and Memory from Santa Maria del Monte to Miami Beach” in The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart (Boston: Beacon Press), 1996.


**Assignments:**
For all students:

- Attendance in accordance with VST policies
- Completion of assigned readings
- Thoughtful engagements with all course activities
- Participation in group planning and facilitation of a ritual
- Reflection paper (750-1000 words) analyzing a VST Community Worship service, using concepts from the course. Specific concepts to be assigned in class.
- In-class group presentation (20 minutes) and short (750 words) paper critically summarizing a chapter from Bell. Specific chapters and details to be assigned in class.

Additional assignment for basic credit (MATS, M.Div, MAPPL, MAIIS):

- Course paper (3,000 words) on a theme relevant to the course, demonstrating at least two of the course competencies, involving research with at least 10 sources beyond the course reading. Details of possible topics to be discussed in class.

Additional assignment for advanced credit (Th.M.):

- Course paper (4,000 words) on a theme relevant to the course, demonstrating at least two of the course competencies, involving research with at least 15 sources beyond the course reading. Details of possible topics to be discussed in class.

**Bibliographic Resources for Research Papers**


Behar, Ruth. “Death and Memory from Santa Maria del Monte to Miami Beach” in The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart (Boston: Beacon Press), 1996.


Schmemann, Alexander. *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*. Publisher, Publication Date.


Vento, Arnoldo C. “Rediscovering the Sacred: from the secular to a postmodern sense of the sacred.” *Wicazo Sa Review*, 15, 1, Spring 2000, 183-205.


