

**PT560: Where Theology Meets the Soil:
Experiential Learning in the Okanagan**

**Vancouver School of Theology
June 28 – July 7, 2024
3.0 Credits**

Instructor(s):

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PURPOSE: This course offers students an immersive experience in a unique rhythm of hands-on learning: organic farming, theological reflection, prayer, and conversation all deeply rooted in a local faith community context. Students will engage with a holistic practice of discipleship cultivation, explore the importance of food security and sustainability, and grow a theological understanding of the gift economy grounded in the reality and hope of their faith. This course offers students the ability to learn with, and from, the faith community of St. Andrew’s Anglican, Kelowna, who experienced extraordinary renewal during the pandemic, with a focus on leading through visioning, discernment, cultural and structural change and the birth of a new ministry grounded in their understanding of the Kingdom (Kin-dom) of God, the Spirit’s work of new creation. “The Gift Farm Garden” – now grown beyond the parish to the wider ecumenical community - grows organic food that is given freely to those living in food insecurity in the City of Kelowna. Neither a church plant nor a program, *The Farm* is a living metaphor for the necessary and life-giving co-cultivation of the people of God and the land in the midst of rapid institutional decline and the climate crisis. From seed to cupboard all is gift.

This is a Learning Hub course, developed and financially supported by the ‘Leaders for a New Day’ project that is redeveloping Theological Field Education (TFE) at VST. Using the dialogical teaching methodology of TFE, a *reflective conversation* will take place between the student and one or more of these:

- people in a site location
- student peers
- faculty
- other experts, practitioners, mentors

The student's own self-reflection is a key part of *the conversation*. This course provides an experiential learning opportunity, with a strong expectation of Theological Reflection grounded in theological concepts and language, church tradition, sociological analysis (understanding of context) and pastoral application. Course content will be offered by local leaders, school faculty and experts in the field of food sustainability through online delivery. Students will spend most mornings in the farm-garden and the afternoon in conversation, listening and learning.

This Learning Hub course will be located in Kelowna, BC. Accommodation, and some meals, will be provided through the Lilly Endowment Pathways Project support of this course. Travel subsidies will also be available. The usual VST course registration fee will apply. Auditors are welcome but are not eligible for the travel or accommodation subsidies. In this case, please contact the Registrar (registrar@vst.edu) to register.

EXPECTATIONS AND COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

- Students will engage in a **daily** rhythm of prayer, learning and reading, hands-on farm-work, group reflection and seminars, and personal reflection.
- Students will be expected to engage in hands-on practice and self-reflection to recognize how their home culture has formed them and how this may differ from God's culture, particularly regarding vocational leadership.
- Students will have the opportunity to listen and learn from Syilx Okanagan Nation.
- Students will be able to articulate theological understandings from the experience of the course, integrating it into their own, and/or their denominational, faith expression.
- Students will understand the reality and pastoral importance of contextual issues raised in the onsite learning, for example, food security, care of the land, climate crisis, community challenges, etc.
- Students will be expected to demonstrate an awareness of the relevant literature and how it connects to the experiential learning of the course by means of a final, integrative paper or comprehensive project.

REQUIRED READINGS:

Berry, Wendell. Selected poems and readings.

Davis, Ellen. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. Cambridge: CUP, 2009. (excerpts)

Williams, Rowan: "Being Disciples". Zoom address, Christ Church Greenwich. (Transcript 8 pages)

Wirzba, Norman. *Agrarian Spirit: Cultivating Faith, Community and the Land*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2024. (264 pages)

Other short readings will be assigned on the syllabus.

Selected Bibliography

Bhanson, Fred. *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 2013.

Bahnsen, Fred and Norma Wirzba. *Making Peace with the Land*. Illinois: Intervarsity Press. 2012.

Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch. *On Earth As in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012. Selected essays.

Roxburgh, Alan. *Joining God in the Great Unravelling: Where We are & What I've learned*. Oregon: Cascade Books. 2021

ASSIGNMENTS

As this is an intensive course, the required reading will be expected to be done prior to arrival at the course site.

Participation in the onsite activities and seminars is required, as well as some group leadership responsibilities and these will all be part of the in-course evaluation.

Daily Journal reflections that include writing plus photos, video, or voice.

Summative paper or project (3000-3750 words) 12-15 pages

1. Reading and participation in onsite activities and seminars: All Students including auditors are expected to do all the required readings and participate in onsite activities and discussions. 100% attendance is required of Certificate and Degree students.
2. Certificate students: Certificate students are required to hand in 5-6 pages of writing that demonstrates the ability to thoughtfully engage the material and reading for the class and gives a personal reflection on the reading and material covered.

3. Basic degree students (Diploma; MA; M.Div): are required to do any required oral assignments during the course itself and submit any combination of written assignments totaling approximately (3000-3750 words) 12-15 pages.
4. Advanced degree students (Th.M): are required to do any required oral assignments during the course itself and submit any combination of written assignments totaling approximately 3750-4250 words/15-17 pages.

Further details about assignments will be provided on the course syllabus.