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You can book an appointment via [Calendly](#) for onsite (Room 418) or zoom

**SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS: PASTORAL MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND
FAMILIES PT/SP531
JANUARY INTERTERM 2026**

Course Outline
A Syllabus will be posted in Populi

PURPOSE: In ministry with children, youth, and their families we create space for spiritual conversations. Families seek support from ministers and congregational leaders on how to talk about God, death, and other existential questions such as, “Who am I?” and “What am I meant to be doing in my life?” with the children and youth in their lives. This short 1.5 credit course is intended to deepen our understanding of the importance of listening to and with children and youth. We will discuss ways to support families in their conversations regarding death, life, and meaning. We will explore power, posture, and intention in supporting young people in their spiritual journey. This course will examine ways to partner with families and caregivers to support them in the spiritual nurture of their children.

Students will:

- Explore the various ways that children and youth make theological meaning.
- Discuss supporting children and youth in conversations about God.
- Explore ideas of how the community of faith can partner with parents, grandparents, and other caregivers in the spiritual nurture of their children and youth.
- Explore ways to support conversations about death, dying, and life with children, youth, their families, and other caregivers.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

1. To develop an understanding and ways to support the spirituality of children and youth.
2. To identify ways to support children, youth, and their caregivers in their experience of death and life.
3. To identify hallmarks in the way children and youth make theological meaning

FORMAT AND CONTENT:

Format: Monday to Friday, 2pm – 5pm.

This course is synchronous and hybrid. There is no asynchronous participation.

TEXTS:

Specific readings, including other shorter readings, will be made available on Populi. Students are advised to purchase books online, from former students or access library reserve.

If you intend to purchase your books online, please allow at least four weeks for delivery, and five weeks for the UK. Copyright law prohibits copying more than 20% of a book, no matter when the book is shipped or arrives.

Please read prior to beginning the course.

Campen, Tanya M.E. *Holy Work with Children: Making Meaning Together*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021

Borgo, Lacy Finn. *Spiritual Conversations with Children: Listening to God Together*. DownersGrove, IL: IVP, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020.

Collicutt, Joanna, Lucy Moore, Martyn Payne, and Victoria Slater. "Taking Care When Talking with Children about Death and Loss." In *Seriously Messy: Making Space for Families to Talk Together about Death and Life*, 39-46. Oxford: BRF, 2019.

Csinos, David M. "Waymarks for the Road Ahead: Future Directions for Research and Pastoral Practice." In *Little Theologians: Children, Culture, and the Making of Theological Meaning*, 204-213. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020.

Dean, Kenda Creasy, and Ron Foster. "A Rhythm of Life: Practices that Shape the Soul." In *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, 105-122. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998.

Dean, Kenda Creasy, and Ron Foster. "A Circle of Friends: Inviting Spiritual Friendship." In *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, 123-136. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998.

Hay, David, and Rebecca Nye. "The Social Destruction of Spirituality." In *The Spirit of the Child*. Rev. ed, 33-48. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006.

Hay, David, and Rebecca Nye. "A Geography of the Spirit." In *The Spirit of the Child*. Rev. ed, 63-78. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006.

Stonehouse, Catherine, and Scottie May. "The Church Partnering with Parents." In *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*, 123-138. Ada: Baker Publishing Group, 2010.

Selected Bibliography:

Borgo, Lacy Finn. *Spiritual Conversations with Children: Listening to God Together*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020.

Collicutt, Joanna, Lucy Moore, Martyn Payne, and Victoria Slater. *Seriously Messy: Making Space for Families to Talk Together about Death and Life*. Oxford: BRF, 2019.

Csinos, David M. *Little Theologians: Children, Culture, and the Making of Theological Meaning*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020.

Dean, Kenda Creasy, and Ron Foster. *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998.

Kizinna, Doris E. *Go Deep: Spiritual Practices for Youth Ministry*. Kelowna, BC: CopperHouse, 2009.

Nye, Rebecca. *Children's Spirituality: what is it and why it matters*. London: Church House Publishing, 2009.

Smith, Traci. *Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home*. St. Louis: Chalice, 2017.

Smith, Traci. *Prayers for Faithful Families: Everyday Prayers for Everyday Life*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020.

Stonehouse, Catherine, and Scottie May. *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*. Ada: Baker Publishing Group, 2010.

COURSE POLICIES

1. **Attendance** For a weekly course, VST requires at least 80% attendance. For an intensive course, VST requires 100% attendance.
(If course is run both on campus and as distance, it's helpful to specify further for each status; for example: "For **on-campus students**, this means attending class on time with no more than 2 allowable absences for any reason. For **distance students**, this means attending class through Zoom synchronously with class with no more than 2 allowable absences for any reason.")
2. **Reading and assignments** Students are expected to read all required assignments before class and to complete all assignments as outlined in the syllabus within the specified dates of the course and term.
3. **Academic honesty** Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
4. **Inclusive language** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
5. **Assignment and Course Evaluation**
 - Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is "Not Approved") including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.
 - Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write.
 - For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.
6. **Late assignments**
Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional, and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course.
7. **Limitation on use of social media**
Ordinarily, the use of electronic devices in the contexts of classrooms or meetings will be to support the learning, formation, or agenda at hand.
8. **Limitation on use of class material and images**
No material from Zoom classes, including screen capture pictures of their fellow students, professors, and CTAs cannot be posted to Facebook or any other social media without the express consent of the affected individuals.

9. **VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment.** If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

CALENDAR – Monday to Friday, 2pm – 5pm
Further details will be in the course syllabus

EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS, AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

*This course is a 1.5 credit seminar course, and we will meet daily for five days during the interterm. It is synchronous and hybrid. **There is no asynchronous participation***

1. **Readings and Class Participation:** Students are expected to participate in class discussions, and do adequate preparation of in-class discussion exercises and readings.

2. **Assignments**

During the week of class, set aside at least one hour to reflect on your early experiences of spiritual conversation and formation as a child or teenager. Focus on how you encountered and made sense of life, meaning, and death in those years.

You might consider the following questions:

What kinds of conversations about life, death, or meaning did you hear or participate in as a young person? How did you understand or experience God, spirit, Jesus, or mystery in those moments? Who were the people who shaped or accompanied you – family, friends, faith leaders, teachers, or others? How did those early experiences influence your developing sense of faith, hope, meaning?

1. **Reflection Paper**

For Certificate Students: Write a 1000 words (4 pages) reflective paper on the key insights from your journal. Include at least three of the course readings and insights from your own faith tradition and scripture, as appropriate.

For Degree Students: Write a 1000-1500 words (4-6-page) reflective paper on the key insights from your journal. Include at least three of the course readings and insights from your own faith tradition and scripture, as appropriate.

2. Design

For Certificate and Degree Students: Drawing on the themes discussed in class, **create an outline for an event or gathering** for children, youth, and/or families that opens space for meaningful conversation about life, meaning, and death. Your event plan (500 words/2 pages) should include:

- The purpose and age group(s)
- A brief description of the flow or activities
- How you would create a safe and caring environment for such conversations
- Any theological or pastoral considerations guiding your approach

Due: February 13, 2026