

The Rev Canon Debbie Royals, Pascua Yaqui

Vancouver School of Theology

Email: revdebroyals@gmail.com or callingthefourwinds@gmail.com

III.4 Pastoral Theology & Practice in Indigenous Contexts (PTX551)

GRIEF: TEARS OF SORROW & TEARS OF HEALING

PURPOSE: Grief is described as a deep sorrow, a trouble or annoyance. But, as Indigenous people we know it as a lived experience. During this course we will form a community relating to grief in our lives and communities. We will engage some of the most prominent causes of grief in our lives and communities. We will begin and end in ceremony holding this experience as a sacred circle that can be modeled in our own communities.

PREREQUISITES: As outlined by the Registrar

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES: Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify with the historical traumas and grief aspects of their history
- Define and discuss the emerging implications of this history in our communities
- Develop skills to communicate their own grief as well as hear the grief of others
- Create pastoral/ceremonial responses to one's own self-care and the care of others who are experiencing grief.

FORMAT & CONTENT: This is a 15-hour (3 hours per day M-F) in person intensive course requirement for an MDiv. The class will run from 9 am to noon daily and will begin and end on time. Assignments are due at the start of the next day and will be returned the next day. Afternoon sessions will include the opportunity to engage further with the daily assignment, review their relevance to the final project and begin framing the final project.

TEXTS:

Required: *Please read these articles and books prior to course start as many of the discussions will be informed by these resources.*

Curtice, Kaitlin B. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Baker Publishing Group 2020.

Curtice, Kaitlin B. *Living Resistance: An Indigenous Vision for Seeking Wholeness Every Day*. Baker Publishing Group 2023.

Weaver, Hilary. *Trauma and Resilience in the Lives of Contemporary Native Americans: Reclaiming our Balance, Restoring our Wellbeing*. 2026 Routledge.

Articles available online:

Catherine E McKinley. Prayer is Universal: How Integrative Faith Practices Enable Indigenous People' Persistence and Resistance to Transcend Historical Oppression (Original article published in Psychology, Religion, Spirituality).

[Indigenous Healing Practices: Intergenerational Resilience](#)

[APA Presidential Task Force for Culturally Informed Trauma and Grief Recovery Toolkit](#)

Suggested Reading: (not required but may be helpful)

Keeping Christ's Sacred Promise: A Pastoral Framework for Indigenous Ministry August 9, 2024 by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Howard Bad Hand. Native American Healing. **Publisher date.** August 31, 2001

COURSE POLICIES:

1. **Attendance:** 100% attendance required
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 by the end of the course week. 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. There are four assignments due during the week as specified above. 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 and the final grade dropped by one (a B+ becomes a B). Repeated failure to submit assignments on time will 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. To be fully present and respectful of the setting, students will be asked to put their cell phones on silent or Airplane mode and to only use their laptop computer/tablet for note-taking during specified times. Photography is not permitted during ceremonial sections.

8. **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 requirements which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean by the first day of class.

CALENDAR

July 13, 2026 9 am Monday: Entering the Sacred

Introductions

Outline – caring for the wounded/healing ways

Break

Ceremony Circle (class discussion)

Assignment: It begins with me: Grief then and now (personal and corporate)

July 14, 2026 9 am Tuesday: Relationship to the Sacred

Review of Readings and Articles: Historical trauma and present grief

break

Ceremony Circle (class discussion)

Assignment: Grief in our life (personal and corporate)

July 15, 2026 9 am Wednesday: Realms of Resistance

Person Realm of Resistance

Communal Realm of Resistance

Break

Ancestral Realm of Resistance

Integral Realm of Resistance

Assignment: The Realms of Grief: yours and theirs

July 16, 2026 9 am Thursday: Nurturing the Sacred

Review of Readings and Articles: culture and tradition are central to healing

break

Discussion (Circle)

Assignment: Ceremony, Prayer, expressions of healing (Final Project)

July 17, 2026 9 am Friday: Tears of Grief & Tears of Healing

Ceremony – experiencing the Sacred (presentations by students)

Break

Ceremony – experiencing the Sacred (presentations by students)

Closing ceremony

EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS & EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

1. Class participation: Students are expected to participate in class discussions and do adequate preparation for in-class discussions.
2. Evaluative criteria: comments and questions show adequate preparation, an understanding of the assigned readings and exercises, and a readiness to apply readings to interpretive questions and insights.
3. Daily Assignments are expected to be typed (12 pt font) and single-spaced. The assignment topic listed above in the calendar is directly related to the presented material and discussions for the day. The daily reflection assignments should be at least 1000 words and no more than 1500 words. They may be submitted electronically before class begins at 9 am the following day or printed at the beginning of class.
4. Evaluative criteria: The daily reflection assignment should include the key themes for the day as well as significant personalization of how each daily theme is contributing to the student's personal application of the material in their own context.
5. Note-taking is an essential tool for learning and retention. You are required to keep a daily journal of the class discussions. You are welcome to use a laptop/tablet or written Journal.
6. Evaluative criteria: Journals will be checked at the end of the day each day.
7. Final Project: Each student will be responsible for presenting a final project that includes a description of your community (could be a church or tribe), naming the traumas that have caused grief in this community and the culturally relevant pastoral response (ceremony) most appropriate.
8. Evaluative criteria: Full participation during final class time and final project reflecting the three basic criteria for the presentation (community, trauma and response).

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ami, Pershlie. Broken Home, Healed Nest. Medicine Wheel Publishing, 2025.

Curtice, Kaitlin B. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Baker Publishing Group 2020.

Curtice, Kaitlin B. *Living Resistance: An Indigenous Vision for Seeking Wholeness Every Day*. Baker Publishing Group 2023.

Howard Bad Hand. *Native American Healing*. August 31, 2001.

Weaver, Hilary. *Trauma and Resilience in the Lives of Contemporary Native Americans: Reclaiming our Balance, Restoring our Wellbeing*. 2026 Routledge.

Morley, Janet. *All Desires Known*. Pages 89-92, 110, 113, 114, 142, 144-145, 147. Morehouse Publishing, 1988.

Iona Abbey Worship Book. Pages 109-128. Wild Goose Publications, 2017.

Keeping Christ's Sacred Promise: A Pastoral Framework for Indigenous Ministry. Pages 29-33. Copyright 2024 by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Suicide in our Land, Indigenous Theological Training Institute and the office of the Anglican Indigenous Bishop. Workbook and DVD July 2016.

Suicide Prevention Presentation, Sacred Circle 2015.

The Disciples Prayer Book, Indigenous Theological Training Institute or the Office of the Anglican Indigenous Bishop.

Brendtro, L, Brokenleg, M, Van Bockern, S. *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Futures of Promise*. National Education Service, 2009 (online pdf here: [Reclaiming Youth At Risk.pdf](#))

Articles available online:

Catherine E McKinley. *Prayer is Universal: How Integrative Faith Practices Enable Indigenous People' Persistence and Resistance to Transcend Historical Oppression* (Original article published in *Psychology, Religion, Spirituality*).

[Indigenous Healing Practices: Intergenerational Resilience](#)

[APA Presidential Task Force for Culturally Informed Trauma and Grief Recovery Toolkit](#)

[Violence Against Native Women Has Colonial Roots - Progressive.org](#)

[Culturally Relevant Best Practices | Best Practices in Use](#)

[Native American | Spirituality by 12 Wisdom Steps](#)

[Ojibwe Teachings on Grief and Loss: Indigenous Perspectives on Death, Healing, and Community — Anton Treuer](#)