

Spring Term 2017
SYLLABUS

Figures in Spirituality: Reading Henri Nouwen with his sources (*hybrid: onsite/online online*) with Dr. Michael J. Christensen, Ph.D.



Course Description: Henri J. M. Nouwen (1932-1996)—Roman Catholic priest, psychologist and professor—taught and wrote at the intersection of theology and psychology, which he called spirituality. Author of over 40 books on the spiritual life, this course covers his contributions to the field of pastoral psychology, including spiritual direction, Christian formation and discernment. The posthumous “Nouwen Trilogy”, developed from his documented life and works, forms the context for the course and the required reading. Online lectures focus on Nouwen’s unique approach to spiritual transformation, sustained by classical disciplines and Christian community. Onsite discussions focus on classical sources in the history of Christian spirituality that informed Nouwen’s approach to spiritual formation, as well as selected spiritual practices to increase one’s capacity to *live the questions, follow the movements* and *read the signs* of daily life.

Texts: The Nouwen Trilogy and Devotional Classics (HarperCollins)

- *Spiritual Direction: Living Life’s Persistent Questions*
- *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Heart*
- *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*
- *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*, Richard Foster, ed.

Instructor: Michael J. Christensen (M.A., Yale, Ph.D., Drew) is an author, speaker, trainer, professor and practical theologian affiliated with Drew University and Point Loma Nazarene University. During his 22 years at Drew Theological School, he served as Associate Professor of Spirituality and Ministry, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program, Director of the Center for Prophetic Leadership and Community Development, and National Director of Communities of Shalom for The United Methodist Church. Author of eleven books on spirituality and ministry, Dr. Christensen studied with Henri

Nouwen at Yale and served for several years as a founding board member of the Henri Nouwen Society in Toronto. In association with the Nouwen Legacy Trust and Estate, he and his co-editor, Rebecca Laird, developed previously unpublished portions of his seminary courses, journals, homilies and other writings as posthumous books known as the *Henri Nouwen Trilogy*--a definitive resource on Nouwen's unique approach to spiritual direction, formation and discernment.

Online Lectures available on Moodle hosted by NorthwindInstitute.org Jan 14 – April 8, 2017

Learning Goals:

1. Become familiar with the life, works and spiritual theology of Henri Nouwen and the classical spiritual writers who informed his teaching and direction.
2. Understand the ancient and contemporary art of spiritual direction, spiritual formation, and discernment of spirits as taught by Nouwen (including how Thomas Merton informed his contribution to these practices).
3. Gain greater personal wisdom on how to live life's persistence questions, follow the movements of the heart, and interpret the "signs of the times."

Design: Twelve micro-lectures offered by Dr. Christensen on the life and teachings of Henri Nouwen to complement content found in textbooks and in onsite discussions. Reading assignments are attached to each lecture followed by an "Exercise for Deeper Discernment" or opportunity to "Reflect and Journal" (found at the end of each chapter of the text). Also included for each text are *Study Guide* Questions to answer in preparation for the weekly chats.

Requirements: Fulfill six required tasks to receive a passing grade:

1. Listen carefully to each lecture and accompanying resources.
2. Read assigned chapters associated with each lecture.
3. Participate in online Forum Discussion
4. Attend at least 10/12 onsite discussions/practice sessions
5. Complete an "Exercise for Deeper Discernment" or opportunity to "Reflect and Journal" found at the end of each assigned chapters
6. Prepare for weekly onsite discussion and practice sessions by answering Study Guide questions for each text (download from publisher, HarperOne; submit to Instructor online).

Part One: Spiritual Direction: Living Life's Persistence Questions

Session One: *Orthocardia*: The Way of the Heart

- View Lecture on Heart Religion
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Chapter 1: *Discernment*, Chapters 1-2, and Appendix Two

- Reflect and Journal: Read the Guidelines for Journal-Keeping at the end of Chapter 1, p. 14. Spend about 15 minutes in your journal addressing two or three questions of your heart: *What do you love? What do you fear? What gives you joy? What brings you peace?* What does this say about what you truly believe and practice?
- Forum Discussion: Given your religious tradition and experience, do you tend to trust or distrust the intuitions of the heart (yours or others)? Do you tend to look within or look outside of yourself for the power and presence of God? Post and Respond on *Moodle*.
Onsite Discussion:

Session Two: Who is Henri Nouwen and Why is He a Worthy Guide?

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Chapters 4, 8, and Epilogue
- Reflect and Journal: Identify and name a persistent question at this time in your life. How are you “living the question?”
- Going Deeper: In your journal, do the exercise “My History with God” in *Spiritual Direction*, p. 50-51.
- Forum Discussion: Post and Respond on *Moodle* to prompt questions
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Session Three: Practical Disciplines of Book, Church, and Heart

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Introduction, Chapters 6-7, and Epilogue
- Going Deeper: Finding God in the Word. Do the exercises in *Spiritual Direction*, pp 102-104.
- Forum Discussion: Given your religious tradition, which of Nouwen’s three sources of spiritual authority do you tend to prioritize--Book, Church, or Heart—and why? How do you allow the other disciplines to inform your spiritual life?
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Content Review: PPTx

PART TWO: Spiritual Formation—Following the Movements of the Heart

Session Four: Nouwen’s Approach to Spiritual Formation

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Formation*, Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1, and Epilogue.
- Reflect and Journal: Exercise 1, page 14.

- Forum Discussion: Which medium of Christian meditation do you most resonate with: *lectio divina*, *visio divina*, or *audio divina* (p. xi)? Why do you think this is so?
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Session Five: Nouwen's Place in Spiritual Development Theory

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Formation*, Chapters 2-7, and Appendix: "Nouwen's Place..." (pp. 127-135).
- Reflect and Journal: "*Spiritual formation, I have come to believe, is not about steps or stages on the way to perfection. It's about the movements from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms that reunite us with God, each other, and our truest selves.*" (*Spiritual Formation*, p. xvi) How do you feel and think about this approach?
- Discussion Forum: Do you tend to view the spiritual life in terms of performance and progress—i.e., what level you are on and how you can get to the next one? If not, how do you view it? What is the difference between viewing the spiritual life in stages or steps and viewing it in movements (pp. 134-135)?
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Content Review: PPTx

PART THREE: DISCERNMENT—Reading the Signs of Daily Life

Session Six: On Hearing a Deeper Beat

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment: *Discernment*, Preface, Foreword, Introduction, and Chapters 1-2.
- Exercise for Deeper Discernment: Chapter 2, page 36, number 4.
- Discussion Forum: Post and Respond on *Moodle* to prompt questions
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Session Seven: Discerning Guidance in Books, Nature, People and Events

Listen to the *CenterQuest* webinar on "Discernment: Reading the Signs of Everyday Life." Pause, ponder and process each of the four parts using Study Guide for text:

Read Your Way Forward

- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Discernment*, Chapter 3
- Exercise for Deeper Discernment: Number 2, page 52

Read The Book of Nature

- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Discernment*, Chapter 4

- Exercise for Deeper Discernment: Number 3, page 63

Pay Attention to People in Your Path

- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Discernment*, Chapter 5
- Exercise for Deeper Discernment: Number 1, page 81

Read the Signs of the Times

- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Discernment*, Chapter 6
- Exercise for Deeper Discernment: Number 1, page 93
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Session Eight: Discerning Vocation

- View Guest Lecture by Professor Rebecca Laird
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Chapter 9 and *Discernment*, Ch. 7
- Exercise for Deeper Discernment: Chapter 7, page 111, number 3.
- Discussion Forum: Post and Respond on *Moodle* to prompt questions
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Session Nine: Discerning Divine Presence

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Chapter 5; *Discernment*, Chapter 8
- Exercise for Deeper Discernment: Chapter 8, page 130, numbers 1 and 2.
- Discussion Forum: Post and Respond on *Moodle* to prompt questions
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Session Ten: Discerning Identity

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment: *Spiritual Direction*, Chapter 3; *Discernment*, Chapter 9
- Exercise for Deeper Discernment: Chapter 9, page 142, number 1.
- Discussion Forum: Post and Respond on *Moodle* to prompt questions
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Session Eleven: Know the Time

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment: *Discernment*, Chapter 10
- Exercise for Deeper *Discernment*: Chapter 10, page 162, numbers 1 and 5.
- Discussion Forum: Post and Respond on *Moodle* to prompt questions
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Session Twelve: Reading Henri Nouwen Through a Wesleyan/Methodist Lens

- View Lecture
- Reading Assignment:
Spiritual Direction, Going Deeper, pp 143-146 and Appendix 2

Spiritual Formation, Appendix A and Epilogue
Discernment, Epilogue and Appendix C

- Discussion Forum: What distinctive theological concepts in your faith tradition are important to know in order to read Nouwen through your lens?
- Onsite Discussion: Figure from Devotional Classics

Content Review: PPTx

Course Materials:

Lectures from professor's Youtube channel

Study Guides provided by HarperOne Publishers <http://www.smallgroupguides.com/tag/spirituality/>

Additional Nouwen material available online

Text books