

AM-672 - Women (and Men) at the Grave of Institutions.  
Understanding death, personally and collectively.  
Easter Reference Intentional

Online Course with Synchronous Sessions Tuesdays 4 – 5:30

On-Line Office Hours for Personal Consultation Thursdays 4 – 5:30

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### Course Description:

Grief is a form of love. Grief is not a bad thing; it is a good thing. It is normal and natural.

Everything ends. Death is a common experience to all living beings. It comes to individuals and to their institutions. This course will seek to better understand the dynamics that awareness of death gives us. We will learn how to grieve as well as how to grow into new life, following the life that is lost. We will also learn how to get out of the way. What clearings emerge after a loved one is gone, or an institution dies? What does emptiness offer? Is death always terrible or is it sometimes wonderful or something in between?

The Covid19 crisis brought the death of over a million people, at this writing. Many died alone, either unremarked or unattended at their deaths. 39 refrigerated trucks of bodies sit today at Pier 39. Today is June 12, 2020. They hold unburied bodies.

A second pandemic erupted in the middle of the first, when a cell phone video of a black man being choked to death by a policeman erupted, showing unjust agony in 8 minutes and 46 seconds, causing courageous and potentially contagious uprisings nationwide.

*By fall we will not have forgotten the double pandemics of virus and uprisings. In fact, we may just be ready to learn how to understand these experiences. Death is normal. Racist murders and pandemics are not normal. There remains the possibility that the virus will still be active among us and that the uprisings will have developed into large scale social possibility and/or unrest. What will not go away is the death of many people and many things. Unfortunately or fortunately, these moments are good moments to learn our way into grief, loss and death. We have good fortune if we learn; bad fortune if we do not.*

*Leaders of not for profits, religious leaders, spiritual entrepreneurs, policemen, parents and those who have lost a loved one are encouraged to take this course. We will grieve, understand, and move forward. We will clear the chaos in our hearts.*

*“Folk” people are much better at grief than modern or postmodern or post religious people. We have lost some wisdom along the way. This course will reach for that wisdom, without romanticizing “folk,” but instead reaching for the evidences of its wisdoms in today’s traditions. 9-11 piles of stuffed animals come to mind. We will look at developing rituals in today’s contexts. We will learn the gifts of death as well as their terrible teachings about what it feels like to suffer and not know that the suffering will end.*

### **Course Objectives:**

You will learn how to grieve as a person who help others to learn how to grieve. Grief is a universal aspect of life. Very few of us are expert at it. This course will not make you an expert so much as one who embraces grief as a life giving, life changing, common sense, one that can be anticipated, analyzed and encouraged. You will become a more conscious and aware human in such a way that you can also be a more conscious teacher and learner.

You will learn how to use religious language about grief without being clumsy about it.

You will learn the reality of suffering while understanding how to navigate it.

You will learn the common sense of living as though you – and others – and institutions – will die.

### **Course Outline Subject by week, Tuesdays to Tuesdays**

**September 8. The Death of Racism as an institution**

**September 15 The Death of Sexism as an institution**

**September 22. The Death of Poverty and the end of blaming the poor for their poverty.**

**September 29. The Death of Work and the Office as we Know it**

**October 6. The Death of Worship as We Know it**

**October 13. Shifting towards more personal and individual deaths. You will choose one of these institutional deaths and write a memorial service/ritual for it**

**October 20. Endings as Beginnings: How major religions join evolution and biology in understand endings and beginnings. Ashes to ashes, stardust to stardust means that we all begin in the great genome and all end up as stardust. There all that ever was shines. What does this physical, scientific and biological fact contribute to the meaning of suffering?**

**October 27 Personal Death: When you Die, what releases?**

**November 3 Your personal death and the process of your dying. Are you standing at a Grave Side or a baptism or a bar mitzvah? Personally, and institutionally? How do Jews and Muslims and Buddhists and Christians DIFFERENTLY understand death? How are they similar? How are you similar to a faith tradition not your own in your approach? Or are your own thoughts consistent with your own tradition?**

**November 10. What is the difference between personal death and institutional death?**

**November 17. If there were three ventilators available at the hospital and 7 people who needed one, and you were the decider, on what basis would you decide? How does triage become an actor in institutional forms of death? In personal forms of death?**

**November 24. Approval of Final Projects and teams by Instructor**

**December 8. Presentation of Final Projects**

**December 15. Presentation of Final projects**

**Weekly Assignments will come as the course develops and will use journaling as a primary form of recording, thinking, writing and rewriting. Also you will**

- 1. Attend the weekly zoom meeting and participate in discussion.**
- 2. Write at least two pages in your journal each week and turn it into a living document, one that changes over time, responsive to class learnings, instructors' questions and what others contribute in class and to you directly online. 8 prompts are required; the rest are student choice.**
- 3. Check in with the instructor personally during office hours at least once per month. (Or schedule another time so to do.)**
- 4. Read Three of the assigned books and write a book review 2 pages telling what you learned from each book. Book reviews are due by October 27. Extra credit is also possible by reading all the books.**
- 5. Read the weekly module assignments (forthcoming). Respond in Canvas to the weekly module assignments and post your response to at least two other students, remarking on what you learned from their work that informs yours.**

6. Prepare a final project by team, teams to be assigned no later than the week before Thanksgiving. Students are encouraged to develop teams as early as possible for the final project.

### Required Texts & Readings:

- *A Beginner's Guide to the End: Practical Advice for Living Life and Facing Death Paperback* – by Dr. BJ Miller, Shoshana Berger. Simon and Schuster, publisher.
- *Approaching the End of Life: A Practical and Spiritual Guide* by Donna Schaper. Rowman and Littlefield, publishers.
- *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death over the Last One Thousand Years* by Philippe Aries (Author), Helen Weaver (Translator). Vintage Books/Random House, publisher.  
*Being Mortal* by Atul Gawandi, Metropolitan Books, 2014. ISBN-10: 1250081246
- *Reading Scripture after the Virus* by Walter Brueggeman

### Course Assignments, Week One through 14:

Because of the highly personal and powerful nature of this subject, students will be encouraged to work with the instructor to custom design the methods by which they use their work. They will (1) journal and work, over time, to analyze and understand how they are changing in their understanding of grief; (2) use the specific modules, as they develop, that are two weeks in length and direct their writing assignments to the modules and the questions they ask; (3) direct their writings and journaling to the larger project of how you teach others in your system to become more prepared for grief. Instructor will review and respond to the journal weekly and at the writing assignments regularly. There will also be open discussions, calling attentions to events document and sources and inviting students to also submit same.

Overall, this structure will give us a balance between reacting in the moment and planned structures. The primary work will be the journal, ongoing, as a living and changing document. You will write at least two pages per week in the journal.

**Required Prompts for your weekly journaling. You may also get instructor's permission to write your own prompt. Or choose from the list in appendix of other possible prompts.**

1. Describe your narrative of race. What do you know about it and how do you know it?
2. Describe your narrative of gender. What does it mean to you that you are male, female or transgendered, gay or queer? Or something unnamed?

3. Describe your narrative of poverty and classism? What does it mean to our that some people are poor, and others are different? To what degree are the poor responsible for their poverty? If you are poor, why? How do you explain your poverty? Will poverty ever really die? Or is it already dead?
4. Study the web site <https://letsreimagine.org/about> which develops community-built resources and rituals for death and dying, especially during Kovid.
5. Class participation: Journal a description of your understanding of what happens when you die and how you personally respond to death when it has happened close to you.
6. Describe the death of someone close to you. Be sure to include rituals that surrounded the death. How did you say goodbye to the person? How do you wish you had said goodbye? How much did the funeral cost? How often do you think about the person? How long ago was the death? Be prepared to experience sadness. Ask for help if you need it. If you didn't experience sadness, say so. Tell the truth.
7. Listen to Leonard Cohen's Death and Dying video.
8. Listen to George Floyd's Funeral. Describe it in the same detail as you did the death of someone close to you.

You will choose a team to work on your final project. The final project is to develop a "class" that you could offer in your setting – your family, police station, shop, congregation, not for profit, book group, or business - which would help participants deal with death and grieve well. This class should cover at least six one-hour session which you should describe in enough detail that another person might also offer the class. What are your objectives with class? What resources would you use? How would you know if you were successful? This project is due within two weeks of the end of the class and you will also present its outline to the class during the final sessions.

You are likely already a master at understanding your setting. You might not know what is dying in it and what is trying to be born. Let the class teach that process of death and emptiness and what might emerge out of each.

### **Identified Seminary Learning Outcomes:**

#### **Master Level Learning Outcomes**

1. You will develop foundational and critical **knowledge** of your own religious, spiritual or secular traditions around death. What informs your view of death? Where do you come from?
2. You will demonstrate knowledge of the ritual **practices** of your own traditions and the capacity to appreciate the practices of other traditions.
3. You will gain the ability to relate the theory and practice of rituals and traditions to relieving the suffering surround death, both institutionally and personally and you will custom design them for your personal setting.

## Grades

Class participation: 25%

Assigned Writing/Journaling 25%

Participation in Online Discussions 25%

Final Project 25%. The final project will accumulate your journal work and your other writing and reading work. It will show how you integrate your personal traditions into your own settings as they work with personal and institutional grief.

Extra credit, up to 10%, may be given for creativity and initiative.

## Course Expectations and Classroom Policies:

**Attendance Policy:** Active attendance in class is required. If you know you will be unable to attend a class session please inform the professor in advance.

The student handbook states: A paper submitted for credit in one course cannot be submitted for credit in another course without the prior permission of both instructors. Hartford Seminary strictly adheres to the Plagiarism Policy. Written papers and theses must be typed and should conform to the styles and format for footnotes and acknowledgments announced by the course instructor. For additional information on format, proper footnotes, acknowledgments, etc., students are directed to consult the *Hartford Seminary General Guidelines for a Research Paper*. These guidelines can be picked up in the student forms center or downloaded from our website at: <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/>. Students may also consult Kate L. Turabian's, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, (6<sup>th</sup> Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1996), upon which the guidelines are based. Seminary research paper guide <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-writing-resources/>

## Seminary Grading Scale

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|------------|---|
| A (95-100) | Demonstrates excellent mastery of the subject matter, a superior ability to articulate this, and provides helpful connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course. |
| A- (90-94) | Demonstrates mastery of the subject matter, ability to articulate this well, and makes connections to daily life or contemporary issues. Exceeds expectations of the course.                            |
| B+(87-89)  | Demonstrates a very good understanding of the subject matter, able to articulate lessons learned in the assignment well. Meets expectations of the course.  |
| B (83-86)  | Demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and the ability to articulate lessons learned. Meets expectations of the course.  |

- B-(80-82) Demonstrates an understanding of the material at hand, has some difficulty articulating this, and basic connection of the material to daily life or contemporary issues/life. Meets basic expectations for the course.
- C+(77-79) Demonstrates a basic comprehension of the subject matter, weak articulation and connections. Does not meet expectations for the course.
- C (70-76) Demonstrates a minimal comprehension of the subject matter and has difficulty making connections. Does not meet expectations of the course.
- F (below 70) Unable to meet the basic requirements of the course.

- Grades range from A to C and F; A+'s and C-'s are not part of the grading system.
- On a 4.0 GPA scale -- A(4.00), A-(3.66), B+(3.33), B(3.00), B-(2.66), C+(2.33), C(2.00) and F(0.00). A grade point average of no less than B- (2.66) is required to maintain good standing. The minimum G.P.A. required for graduation is 2.75.

**The DMin grade scale is different!** Any DMin student should be graded on fail, low-pass, pass, high-pass. High Pass(95-100), Pass (83-94), Low Pass(70-82), and Fail(below 70)

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:** Academic honesty and integrity are expected of all students. Plagiarism exists when: a) the work submitted was done, in whole or in part, by anyone other than the one submitting the work, b) parts of the work, whether direct quotations, ideas, or data, are taken from another source without acknowledgement, c) the whole work is copied from another source [especially a web based source], or d) significant portions of one's own previous work used in another course. See "Plagiarism" at <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/>.

### **Inclusive Language:**

Hartford Seminary is committed to a policy of inclusion in its academic life and mission. All members of the community are expected to communicate in language that reflects the equality of genders, openness to diverse cultural and theological perspectives, and sensitivity to one another's images of God.

**Extensions:** Extensions for papers will be given for illnesses or family emergencies only in consultation with the instructor.

**Official Handbooks:** For all other questions you might have regarding policies or procedures, please check the student handbook <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/student-handbook/> and seminary policies at Academic policies are listed at <http://www.hartsem.edu/current-students/policies/>

### **Additional Prompts for Journaling**

### **Upcoming #MemorialForUsAll and Link to entering Names**

Weekly Broadcast Honors Those Lost During COVID-19 Pandemic <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/tnyradiohour/episodes/amid-pandemic-catharsis-seven-oclock>

"The streets of New York City are so desolate now that you half expect tumbleweed to blow along the pavement," David Remnick says of the city under quarantine. Yet he finds hope and joyful catharsis in the daily 7 P.M. mass cheer that celebrates all those who are risking their own health to keep the city alive. A scholar explains how the COVID-19 pandemic lays bare the inequalities of the American health-care system, which creates worse outcomes, in many different ways, for people who are disadvantaged. Yiyun Li explains why she turns to "War and Peace" during times of trouble and uncertainty. And—in lieu of watching baseball—Remnick talks with Roger Angell, the greatest observer of the game, about baseball seasons past.

**One of the beauties of vigil-keeping is that we can bear witness simultaneously to [Naming The Lost](#), [Black Lives Matter](#), [Free Them All](#), and ALL of our imperatives to mourn AND organize.\***

*"Don't mourn, organize!"* abbreviates a telegram of immigrant labor activist and songwriter Joe Hill before his execution in 1915 — but his final words actually expressed concern about [what would happen to his body](#). At a time when so many of us face deep questions about how to be most effective during this crisis, the capacity to sit quietly for an hour to honor the dead can help us continue to clarify our priorities for engaged action on behalf of the living. — ["Share the Vigil" Frequently Asked Questions](#)

**Today we reached 70 days of "Share the Vigil." We are currently sustaining this multi-faith vigil for 37 out of 168 hours each week — across faith traditions, three generations and three time zones. We still have 131 weekly hours available — and, as one of our daily (7 hours a week) vigil-keepers recently shared, *"It would be nice to have a person to associate with the passing of the torch."***

\* ["Naming The Lost" and Sustaining the Vigil: How to Mourn AND Organize](#)

**[The unclaimed and unnamed dead](#) deserve our caring attention for many, many days and nights to come. We would welcome your committed presence for an hour each week if you are not able to spare an hour each day.**

We hope you will join us. Please share this message with others in your networks, and please let us know your questions and concerns.

Rabbi Regina Sandler-Phillips, MSW, MPH  
Executive Director, [WAYS OF PEACE Community Resources](#)

**Women at the Grave initiated multi faith prayers, via Drone and Zoom, at Potters field to memorialize those who died unattended and unnamed**



[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/zoom-funeral-covid-19-pandemic\\_n\\_5eea1fafc5b68fc6dded380f?ncid=engmodushpimg00000006](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/zoom-funeral-covid-19-pandemic_n_5eea1fafc5b68fc6dded380f?ncid=engmodushpimg00000006)

**ReimaginingDeath web site: A Place where Artists create new funeral services and more**

[https://eolupodcast.com/2020/05/18/ep-247-reimagining-death-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-with-lucinda-herring/?fbclid=IwAR1qya4UVEI\\_l2DZ8lnyJISEyRXeT7KNcM7kUzEgDz606zwGdkNsA9VXVpo](https://eolupodcast.com/2020/05/18/ep-247-reimagining-death-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-with-lucinda-herring/?fbclid=IwAR1qya4UVEI_l2DZ8lnyJISEyRXeT7KNcM7kUzEgDz606zwGdkNsA9VXVpo)

**Podcast #2**

<http://www.buzzsprout.com/627256/1771852-reimagining-death-with-lucinda-herring>

**Podcast #3**

<https://www.blogtalkradio.com/voicesofwomenwithkrissteinnes/2020/02/03/reimagining-death-with-lucinda-herring>

**Podcast #4**

<https://anchor.fm/deathdialogues/episodes/17--Reimagining-Death-Lucinda-Herring-e3ed8g>

**Podcast #5**

<https://americanthanatologist.com/ldt/episodes/019>

**Podcast #6 (not her book but may be relevant)**

<https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/dance-with-god/episode-3-reimagining-death-06w3t1SCbJj/>

**TedX Talk on the Subject -** [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsRNoUx8w3rNbxS9KQdPNLX-trCBav\\_aZz](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsRNoUx8w3rNbxS9KQdPNLX-trCBav_aZz)

"Share the Vigil" is a [How to Mourn AND Organize](#) initiative of WAYS OF PEACE.

Lincoln Center Weekly Memorials for all who Died of COVID in NYC  
Weekly Broadcast Honors Those Lost During COVID-19 Pandemic

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/05/11/how-david-beats-goliath>

Robin DiAngelo: How white fragility supports racism and how whites can stop it. By Sandee LaMotte, Sunday June 7, 2020

<https://www.homefuneralalliance.org/home-funeral-books.html>

<https://lucindaherring.com/lucindas-blog/>

“A Sacred Moment – Home Funeral Vigils, Green Burials and Life Celebrations” article by Lucinda Herring for Natural Choice Magazine Seattle.

[https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/burial\\_in\\_the\\_age\\_of\\_covid-19/](https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/burial_in_the_age_of_covid-19/)

by Editor, Paul Bass.

<https://crosscut.com/2019/10/how-die-good-green-death>

### **How to die a good, green death**

<https://medium.com/@micheleregallie/reimagining-death-a-closer-look-at-darren-aronofskys-the-fountain-8f4059a09500>

Michael Hebb, the founder of [Death Over Dinner](#) and author of *Let's Talk About Death (Over Dinner)*, for use by families in intimate ways.

Adam Gopnick, Memorials: Stones and Bones, July 7, 2014.





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