TS 805 The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation: Creating a Culture of JustPeace

Fall Term 2010: Mondays 2-5 PM
Boston University School of Theology
Room B22

INSTRUCTORS

Lead Faculty: Thomas Porter, Co-Director of the Religion and Conflict Transformation Program and Co-Executive Director, JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation with the assistance of Rodney Petersen, Co-Director of the Religion and Conflict Transformation Program and Executive Director of the BTI

Faculty Teaching Team: John Berthrong; Richard Deats; Bishop Susan Hassinger; Mary Elizabeth Moore; Rodney Petersen; Shelly Rambo

Teaching Assistant: Shandi Mawokomatanda, Program Director of the Religion and Conflict Transformation Program

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION (AND OBJECTIVES):

This course is a response to the experience of destructive conflict in the church and in the world, as well as the experience of religion as a source of conflict. More importantly, it is a response to the call to every Christian to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) and peacebuilders (Matt. 5:9).

This core course will introduce students to the theology, theory and practice of faith-based conflict transformation, preparing students to become religious leaders equipped with fundamental tools and skills for engaging conflict and transforming conflict in a way that advances God’s goal of shalom, a culture of justpeace.

The class is divided into three sections: (i) the preparation of ourselves and the coaching of others for engagement in conflict transformation; (ii) ways of engaging and transforming conflict; (iii) a study of three specific contexts for the work of faith-based conflict transformation in the public square: the church--its mission of reconciliation; world religions--the role of dialogue and a theology of religions; the world with its cycles of violence and retribution--the role of human security through creative nonviolence as well as the task of imagining and creating a culture of justpeace.

This course will go beyond the theology and theory to specific practices with training through weekly exercises. In this class we will do it as well as think about it. This course will give everyone a foundation and an introduction to specific areas for further study within the field of religion and conflict transformation.
II. COURSE PROCEDURE

This course is scheduled for three hours on each Monday of the semester, following the BU calendar, from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. (with a break after the first half of the class period). We will not have a class on November 1 and will conclude on December 13.

The class will include presentations from the instructors, class discussions of assigned readings, exercises and role play, and development of rituals for the beginning and end of the class that relate to the themes of the class.

III. RITUAL:

Each class will begin and end with a ritual. Students will be required to lead an opening and closing ritual for a class. A sign-up sheet will be made available on the first day of class. Depending on class enrollment, students may pair-up and share responsibility in designing and leading the ritual. The design of each ritual should engage the theme or topic of the day. Each ritual should last no more than five (5) minutes long.

Our course is particularly interested in relational covenants. Relational covenants define how we are to treat each other in any engagement and draws on the understanding of “covenant” in the Bible. As such, rituals should include the expression of a “commitment” to the process. Covenants and rituals are both important to peacebuilding in general and are basic to the circle process as affirmed throughout the course.

The use of rituals is intended to engage our imagination in envisioning, enacting, and embodying the life we seek as peacebuilders and ministers of reconciliation. Ritual engages symbolic action to make real the possibility of peace and transformed relationship. That is, ritual recognizes the space of conflict transformation as sacred space, creating “order, community and transformation” and helping us deal with our “liminality” in conflict, feeling betwixt and between, as we journey into the unknown to create a new relationship. Ritual is purposeful in helping a community define its most fundamental beliefs, and build trust and reliance on those beliefs. Through ritual a community can faithfully engage the fundamental conflicts, joys, and sorrows of life, while conceiving of new or transformed ways of living in light of them.

Good ritual will include the silences, words, images, music, action, and public and private wonderings that best serve the people’s needs. This includes leading and encouraging people to reflect, question, understand, accept or reject, and to commit to some ideals or values. Students designing rituals for the class should engage the theme of topic of the day. Creativity and imagination is encouraged! For more information about the purpose of ritual in conflict transformation see Marcia McFee’s article “Ritual Formation: Liturgical Practices and the Practice of Peacebuilding” in Thomas Porter’s Conflict and Communion (Discipleship Resources: 2006); and Chapter Six, “Creating Rituals and Covenants” in Thomas’ Porter’s The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation: Creating a Culture of Just Peace. (Upper Rooms: 2010).
IV. REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Students are expected to do the required reading and to participate in weekly classes, including careful preparation for rituals, exercises and role plays. Participants are asked to prepare a weekly one-page reflection and three (3) brief papers for this class.

A. Weekly reflection: You will read the assigned readings each week and prepare a one page single spaced reflection on the readings, which will include your thoughts on what speaks to you and is resonate with your experience, what is not resonate, and what questions are raised for you by the texts. These papers will be read by the instructors and will provide focus for our discussions in class. You will not be graded on content, but doing this weekly is important to your overall grade in the class. These one page, single spaced papers, should be sent to the instructors and teaching assistant by use of the course website by the Saturday night prior to the class for which the reading is assigned.

B. Three Brief Papers:
1. Self-Reflection Paper (5 pp. double-spaced). This paper is a self-evaluation of your own attitudes, theology, skills and spiritual formation for dealing with conflict. (Due: October 8)

2. “Theory & Practice” Paper (5 pp. double-spaced with endnotes as appropriate). This paper is a critical reflection on the theology, theory, skills, and practices presented in the course through the readings, the instruction and the exercises in light of your experience and wisdom in dealing with conflict. You can, if you like, do this in the context of an actual conflict with which you have been engaged, whether personal or communal. (Due: November 19)

3. Final Paper (10 pp. double-spaced with endnotes as appropriate). In this paper you will develop you own theology of reconciliation and your own understanding of what specific practices would contribute to creating a culture of justpeace. What role does dialogue, nonviolence, and the imagination play in your theology of reconciliation, your vision of a culture of justpeace? What role do the specific practices we studied in the first two sections of the course contribute to your vision and practice? This paper should thoughtfully engage course materials and instruction. It should illustrate your understanding of the integration of theology and best practices in conflict transformation. (Due: December 10)

V. GRADING

Class Participation, including participation in role plays and exercises (25%)
Weekly Reflection papers (20%)
First Two Papers (15% each or 30%)
Final Paper (25%)
VI. OUTLINE OF COURSE WITH READINGS:

Part I: Engaging Theologies, Skills and Roles of Conflict Transformation

How can we, as Gandhi says, be the changes we want to see in this world? We need to begin with the one person over whom we have some control in order to bring a peaceful presence into the room. We also need to coach others on how to prepare themselves so they can resolve their own conflicts.

Class 1 – September 13

Introduction to the Course and Attitudes toward Conflict: The starting point is our attitude to conflict. Instead of viewing all conflict as negative or destructive, we can experience conflict as a natural part of God’s creation, necessary for constructive change, growth and revelation. This conversion is ultimately an act of faith.

Required Reading: (18 pp)
- Thomas Porter, Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation, Creating a Culture of JustPeace, Prologue, and Chapter 1—Changing our Attitudes to Conflict, pp. 1-18

Resources for Further Exploration:
- Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, editors, Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation (Scottdale, PA.; Herald Press, 1999.)

Class 2 – September 20

A Biblical/Theological Grounding for Conflict Transformation: In dynamic relation with this change in attitude is our theology, which is the critical foundation and empowerment for all our work. Our theology matters! Through Biblical and theological reflection, we will study the relational nature of creation; a God who loves difference and who creates and enables relationship and the unity of all creation; a God who forgives and reconciles and calls us to be reconcilers, as practically described by Jesus in Matthew 18.

Required Reading: (77 pp)
Resources for Further Exploration:
- Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be*. (Galilee Press, 1999.)

Class 3 – September 27

Skills/Spiritual Practices of Conflict Transformation: Listening for Understanding and Speaking the Truth in Love, Using the Imagination and the Craft of Forgiveness: We need more than a positive attitude and a theology of peace. We also need skills. Foremost among the relational skills are listening for understanding, speaking the truth in love, using our imagination, and offering forgiveness. These skills are spiritual practices as well as essential and simple life skills.

Required Reading: (63pp.)

Resources for Further Exploration:

Class 4 – October 4 (Bishop Susan Hassinger)

The Role and the Spiritual Formation of the Peacebuilder: We will conclude the first part by exploring the character and values of the peacebuilder as well as an understanding of the role we can and should play—not being a fixer, but a mediating presence, a person with the courage to bring people together with their differences, creating a space that encourages openness to the Spirit and to each others’ stories, so they can solve their own problems and find healing together.

Required Reading: (117pp.)
- Ron Kraybill, *Restoring Those Who Heal Others*(available in manuscript on website).
Resources for Further Exploration:


**Part II: Engaging Theories and Practices of Conflict Transformation**

*The primary purpose of preparing ourselves is for engaging others.*

October 11 – HOLIDAY (NO Class – See BU Substitute Schedule)

Class 5 – October 12 (TUESDAY – BU Substitute Class Schedule)

Theories and Practice of Conflict Transformation: The heart and soul of good process is enabling, in the midst of conflict, honest conversation about things that matter, moving away from adversarial to collaborative processes. We will explore the theory of conflict transformation and focus on an in-depth study of one such process, the circle process.

**Required Reading:** (123pp.)


Resources for Further Exploration:


Class 6 – October 18

**The Role of Ritual and Relational Covenants:** Ritual recognizes the space of conflict transformation as sacred space, creating “order, community and transformation” and helping us deal with our “liminality” in conflict, feeling betwixt and between, as we journey into the
unknown to create a new relationship. A relational covenant defines how we are to treat each other in any engagement and draws on the understanding of “covenant” in the Bible. Both are important to peacebuilding in general and are basic to the circle process.

Required Reading: (73pp.)


Resources for Further Exploration:


Class 7 – October 25

**Appreciative Inquiry and Interest Based Mediation:** This class reflects two of the most important movements in peacebuilding and in the conversation of the circle: Appreciative Inquiry, and Interest Based Mediation. The first movement, in most situations, is to share and build on the positive and best in all the parties—peak experiences, grace-filled movements and dreams of a preferred future. This movement is informed by the field of Appreciative Inquiry, a methodology of searching for the best in the actual experiences of individuals and groups: the positive core. A focus here will be on the importance and role of questions, inspired by Jesus (“the one who knows how to ask questions”), and the Quaker Clearness Committee. The second movement is informed by Interest Based Mediation, moving from positions to interests and needs, generating and evaluating options to meet these needs, and coming to consensus in an agreement that is wise.

Required Reading: (162pp.)

Resources for Further Exploration:

(We will not have a class on November 1.

Class 8 – November 8 (Shelly Rambo)

Trauma Healing: This class will help create an understanding of the harm that is created by conflict and violence through a study of Trauma Healing. This class will focus on developing a theologically-grounded set of resources for religious leaders responding to situations of extreme suffering and harm.

Required Reading: (97pp.)
- Judith Herman, “A Forgotten History,” in Trauma and Recovery. pp. 7-32.

Class 9 – November 15

Restorative Justice: This class deals with what justice has to say in addressing the trauma and harm discussed in the previous class and reflects the third movement in peacebuilding in the conversation of the circle, building on the two movements in class 7. The third movement recognizes that in every conflict there is harm that needs to be addressed. We will study the way Restorative Justice deals with harm, accountability and healing.

Required Reading: (141pp.)
- Thomas Porter, Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation, Chapter 9: Addressing Harm, pp.119-130
- Rupert Ross, Returning to the Teachings (Toronto, Ontario: Penguin, 1996), pp.5-75

Resources for Further Exploration:
- Michael L. Hadley, The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice (Albany: State University of New York, 2001). Read selected chapters on the contributions and perspectives of different religious traditions to restorative justice
Part III: Engaging the Public Square and Global Communities

The third section of the course will situate the work of conflict transformation, reconciliation and developing a culture of justpeace in the public square and within global communities in three contexts: the church--its mission of reconciliation; world religions--the role of dialogue and a theology of religions; the world with its cycles of violence and retribution--the role of human security through creative nonviolence as well as the task of imagining and creating a culture of justpeace.

Class 10 – November 22 (Rodney Petersen)

Mission as Reconciliation: This class will situate the work of conflict transformation, reconciliation and developing a culture of justpeace in the public square and within global communities in the church and its mission of reconciliation.

Required Reading (135pp.):


Resources for Further Exploration:

- Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation* (Orbis/BTI, 1991 and later eds.).
Class 11 – November 29 (John Berthrong)

**Interfaith Dialogue and a Theology of Religions:** This class will situate the work of conflict transformation, reconciliation and developing a culture of justpeace in the public square and within global communities in the world religions and the work of interfaith dialogue and the development of a theology of religions.

**Required Reading (102pp.):**

**Resources for Further Exploration:**

Class 12 – December 6 (Richard Deats—BUSTh alumni and, for many years, the executive director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation)

**Human Security through Creative and Active Nonviolence:** This class will situate the work of conflict transformation, reconciliation and developing a culture of justpeace in the public square and within global communities in a world caught up in cycles of violence and retribution and the need for a deep commitment to creative and active nonviolence for real human security.

**Required Reading (116pp.):**

**Resources for Further Exploration:**
Class 13 – December 13 (Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore)

This class will begin at 1:00 and go to 3:50.

**Imagining and Creating a Culture of Justpeace:** This class will explore the work of conflict transformation, reconciliation and developing a culture of justpeace in the public square and within global communities as a way of imagining and building a culture of justpeace.

**Required Reading:** (139pp.)

- Mary Elizabeth Moore, “Imagine Peace: Knowing the Real, Imagining the Impossible,” in *Handbook of Process Theology*, eds., Jay McDaniel and Donna Bowman (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006), 201-216.
- Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, “Beyond Poverty and Violence: An Eschatological Vision 1-31
- Thomas Porter, *Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation*, Chapter 10, 131-144

**VI. REQUIRED READING**

**To be Purchased**


Porter, Thomas. *Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation, Creating a Culture of JustPeace*.

Porter, Thomas. *Conflict and Communion: Reconciliation and Restorative Justice at Christ’s Table*.


**Found on Blackboard**


Ron Kraybill, *Restoring Those Who Heal Others*(available in manuscript on website).


