

Syllabus: Spiritual Leadership for a Climate-Changed World

Maine School of Ministry • Spring semester 2022
In collaboration with The BTS Center

Classes held online

Saturday, February 12, 2022 • 9:00am - 3:00pm (Eastern)

Saturday, March 12, 2022 • 9:00am - 3:00pm (Eastern)

Saturday, April 9, 2022 • 9:00am - 3:00pm (Eastern)

Saturday, May 14, 2022 • 9:00am - 3:00pm (Eastern)

Lead instructor: [Aram Mitchell](#)

Aram holds a Master of Arts degree in Religious Studies from Chicago Theological Seminary. He is a Registered Maine Guide and Wilderness First Responder, and he serves as the Director of Partnerships and Formation at The BTS Center.

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Required texts

Antal, Jim. 2018. *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mitchell, Sherri L. 2018. *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Schade, Leah D, and Margaret Bullitt-Jonas. 2019. *Rooted and Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy... and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation...”

—[James “Gus” Speth](#)

Course overview

Climate change is no longer the science community's prediction for the future. We are now living in a climate-changed world. This reality raises provocative questions, challenges, and responsibilities, especially for people whose worldview has been formed by a Western perspective, and in particular for spiritual leaders. We are offering this course as an opportunity for spiritual leaders in the Global North to engage those questions, navigate those challenges, and embrace those responsibilities in their particular contexts.

Over the course of four months, students will engage assigned readings and other multimedia resources, form and share personal reflections, participate in four day-long facilitated sessions featuring guest presenters, and complete a final project. This course is designed for self-directed students whose learning needs are related to their professional roles as ministers — ordained and non-ordained, clergy and laypersons, leaders of traditional religious communities and other communities of practice.

This course is not designed to be a definitive summary of climate change — instead it will provide fodder and opportunity to deepen reflection on how to respond in good faith to the urgent realities of climate change. Our present reality is a tumultuous reality. While we may not be able to smooth out the complications, this course will provide accompaniment and a community of mutual learning to form and inform how leaders might embody their vocation of spiritual leadership for a climate-changed world.

Pedagogical approach

Think of an oak tree growing in the forest, formed by nearby soil and distant sun. The trunk represents how the oak stands on the earth. The branches and leaves reach out into the world. The root system steadies and sustains the life of the oak.

This course is like that oak, and each of the four monthly sessions will trace the imagery conveyed by the four sentences above:

Session #1: Situate & Orient • What's going on? Where are we?

Session #2: Vocation & Identity • Who (and how) are we called to be?

Session #3: Active Engagement • Embodying an intentional response to climate change.

Session #4: Devotion & Practice • How do we sustain commitment for the long-haul?

We will engage these themes with an intentional focus during their assigned sessions, while acknowledging that each of the themes could, and likely will, emerge in the resources and discussions that we explore during other sessions. As such this course of learning will not be strictly linear. Instead, imagine yourself as a hawk circling the themes from the sky above, making occasional dives to specific targets of thought on the ground.

During the course students will engage two core texts, selections from one additional anthology, and supplementary multimedia resources that are accessible online. Required reading in advance of each monthly session will not exceed 150 pages, and required multimedia resources will not exceed one hour per month.

Along with assigned resources, each month after Session #1 students will engage in a “sit spot” practice (further explained during Session #1), designed to help balance our cognitive exercises — reading, reflecting, and discussing — with a contemplative and somatic experience of connection with the earth.

Throughout the course students will write field notes, tracking their gleanings from the materials that they engage, guided by the question: What knowledge, skills, mindsets, and practices are needed for effective and faithful ministry in a climate-changed world? Students will submit excerpts from their field notes to the course instructor in advance of each session.

During the monthly sessions students will engage in guided discussion and activities for further reflection. In order to enrich the course with a diverse array of perspectives, each month a guest presenter with expertise in the field of climate-change will contribute an offering pertinent to that month’s themes.

At the end of the course students will complete a detailed and annotated outline of a project to be implemented in their ministry settings. This might take the form of a worship service, a preaching series, a Bible study curriculum, a series of public conversations hosted in their community, or something else imagined by the student.

Student completion of the course will be evaluated based on:

- Monthly submission of field notes by the Thursday preceding each class session.
- Full and active participation in all four online class sessions.
- Submission of final project due May 28, 2022, two weeks after the final class session.
- (See page 7 for Maine School of Ministry Evaluation Rubric)

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course students will be able to:

- Share stories and express values, rooted in enduring wisdom traditions, that 1) challenge the dominant cultural paradigms that have led to this historic moment of crisis, and 2) imagine better ways to live as members of a shared planet.
- Navigate the importance of both systemic and personal transformation required by the climate crisis, and name examples of each variety of transformation.
- Ground personal and public response to climate change in moral, communal, and theological reflection.
- Identify intersections and tensions between climate change/environmental degradation and Christian theological traditions.

- Articulate their own understanding of the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and practices needed for effective and faithful ministry in a climate-changed world.

Required texts

Throughout the course students will read the entirety of [Climate Church, Climate World](#) and [Sacred Instructions](#), offering a parallel path to learning that is both grounded in the particularities of Christian ministry and receptive to wisdom rooted in indigenous experience.

In addition: 1) other readings, primarily from [Rooted & Rising](#), will be assigned to deepen student learning with a variety of faith-based perspectives, and 2) each month a podcast or other multimedia resource will be assigned to engage with the ongoing and evolving conversation surrounding climate change.

- Antal, Jim. 2018. *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mitchell, Sherri L. 2018. *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Schade, Leah D, and Margaret Bullitt-Jonas. 2019. *Rooted and Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Suggested preparation before the class begins

The course does not require a nuanced grasp of public policy, scientific, legislative, or political issues pertaining to climate change, but will assume a baseline of climate competency. Depending on your current understanding of the climate crisis we recommend these three sources for pre-course engagement (click the underlined text for a hyperlink to each resource):

- [What Is a ‘Carbon Footprint’? And 12 Other Climate Buzzwords.](#)
Einhorn, Catrin, Christopher Flavelle, Hiroko Tabuchi, Brad Plumer, and Winston Choi-Schagrin. 2021. “What Is a ‘Carbon Footprint’? And 12 Other Climate Buzzwords.” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2021, sec. Climate.
- [Climate Solutions 101 \(Series of six free videos, each 10-25 minutes long\)](#)
“Climate Solutions 101 Presented by @ProjectDrawdown.” 2020. Project Drawdown. December 22, 2020.
- [The Story of More : How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here](#)
Jahren, Hope. 2020. *The Story of More: How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division Of Penguin Random House Llc.

CALENDAR & ASSIGNMENTS

Saturday, February 12, 2022 • 9:00am-3:00pm (Eastern)

Session #1: Situate & Orient • What's going on? Where are we?

Guiding questions: What is the nature of the climate crisis? How do we grapple with complicity and responsibility? What is our relationship to specific places? How might we grieve the losses and harms done to earth?

Complete before class on February 12, 2022

- *Climate Church, Climate World*: Introduction and chapters 1 & 2
- *Sacred Instructions*: Introduction and chapters 1-5
- Article • [Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis](#)
White, Lynn. 1967. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis."
<https://www.cmu.ca/faculty/gmatties/lynnwhiterootsofcrisis.pdf>.
- Multimedia assignment TBD

Guest presenter and co-facilitator TBD

Saturday, March 12, 2022 • 9:00am - 3:00pm (Eastern)

Session #2: Vocation & Identity • Who (and how) are we called to be?

Guiding questions: How might we rearrange our lives, priorities, resources, and relationships in a climate-changed world? How does the climate crisis inform Christian ministry and discipleship? How might faith communities adopt supportive, comforting, and prophetic practices in a climate-changed world?

Complete before class on March 12, 2022

- *Climate Church, Climate World*: Chapters 3 & 4
- *Sacred Instructions*: Chapters 6-11
- *Rooted and Rising* and multimedia assignments TBD

Guest presenter and co-facilitator TBD

Saturday, April 9, 2022 • 9:00am - 3:00pm (Eastern)

Session #3: Active Engagement • Embodying an intentional response to climate change.

Guiding questions: How do we align ourselves and our communities with climate solutions? How do we know where we should best put our limited time and resources? What do

inclusiveness, justice, and equity look like in a climate-changed world? How do we know if what we are doing is making a difference?

Complete before class on April 9, 2022

- *Climate Church, Climate World*: Chapters 5-7
- *Sacred Instructions*: Chapters 12-14
- *Rooted and Rising* and multimedia assignments TBD

Guest presenter and co-facilitator TBD

Saturday, May 14, 2022 • 9:00am - 3:00pm (Eastern)

Devotion & Practice • How do we sustain commitment for the long-haul?

Guiding questions: How will we as spiritual leaders maintain determination, courage, and empathy in this climate-changed world? What are the spiritual rhythms, relations, and reminders we need in order to sustain commitment for the long-haul? How do we deepen and employ an ecological imagination?

Complete before class on May 14, 2022

- *Climate Church, Climate World*: Chapters 8 & 9, and Epilogue
- *Sacred Instructions*: Chapters 15-18
- *Rooted and Rising* and multimedia assignments TBD

Guest presenter and co-facilitator TBD

Final project due by May 28, 2022

Each student will submit a detailed and annotated outline of a project to be implemented in their ministry settings. The project is meant to draw on lessons and gleanings from this course to create an opportunity for your community to engage in a thoughtful response to the climate crisis. You are invited to consider how collaboration with other students might strengthen your respective projects. Your project might take the form of a community worship service, a preaching series, a Bible study curriculum, a series of public conversations hosted in your community, or something else that you can imagine implementing in your ministerial context.

Note: This syllabus will be updated with names and bios of guest presenters and co-facilitators prior to the course.

Maine School of Ministry Evaluation Rubric

1. Completed with Distinction

Shows superior grasp of material presented in class and in readings; completed all assigned work in a timely fashion. Participates with intelligent questions and comments. Evidence of mature critical thought, analysis and insights in class and in assignments. Evidence of independent interest and pursuit of further knowledge in the subject matter. High level of competence in writing—grammar, syntax, spelling, clarity, organization and argumentation.

2. Completed with Promise

Shows ready grasp of material presented in class and in readings; completed all assigned work in a timely fashion. Evidence of understanding and growth in ability to understand the Bible critically and in context, and willingness to participate in discussions and interactions. Competence in writing—grammar, syntax, spelling, clarity, organization and argumentation.

3. Completed

Shows interest and basic level of understanding of material presented in class and readings. Completed all assigned work sometimes, but not always, in a timely fashion. Basic grasp of content and openness to growth in knowledge and proficiency. Limited participation in class discussions. Improvement needed in written work, e.g., grammar, punctuation, style, clarity, argumentation, and organization.

4. Did not Complete

Failed to turn in or complete assigned work without prior consultation with the instructor. Absent without contacting the instructor and arranging for a makeup plan. Submitted written work at an unacceptably low level of competence. Less than cooperative attitude or readiness to learn displayed in class.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Berry, Thomas, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim. 2012. *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*. Mumbai: St. Pauls.

Francis, Pope. 2015. *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*.

Jahren, Hope. 2020. *The Story of More : How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division Of Penguin Random House Llc.

Johnson, Ayana Elizabeth, and Katharine Keeble Wilkinson. 2020. *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*. New York: One World.

Keller, Catherine. 2021. *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy, and Other Last Chances*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Loorz, Victoria. 2021. *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred*. Minneapolis, Mn: Broadleaf Books.

Macy, Joanna. 2020. *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*. S.L.: New World Library.

Malcolm, Hannah. 2020. *Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church*. London, Uk: Scm Press.

Mcfague, Sallie, and International Society For Science And Religion. 2009. *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*. Cambridge: International Society For Science And Religion.

Mckibben, Bill. 2020. *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?.* S.L.: Holt Paperbacks.

Moore, Kathleen Dean. 2020. *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*.

Nadeau, Denise M, and Ched Myers. 2016. *Watershed Discipleship*. Cascade Books.

Rasmussen, Larry L. 2015. *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Note: Additional resources will be added to this list prior to the course.