

BTS – 4495/5310 Practices, Rituals & the Christian Imagination
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Course Syllabus – DRAFT

Description: The most vital and subtle lessons of the Christian faith and life are conveyed in practices, rituals and gestures, which are formative and powerful because they are embodied theology that refuses to separate the mind, heart and body. Since the period of the early church, Christian practices and rituals have been places of the revelation of God and the encounter with Jesus Christ. They function as a prism allowing Christians to view the world through a particular lens, providing a new frame for interpreting life and imagining the world. Through the actions and symbols of Christian ritual, worshipers encounter the living God, discover profound connections within the body of Christ, and experience the transforming power of the Spirit. Yet the rituals of the church often fall short of their potential for such encounter and transformation. This course will examine what makes rituals work and what hinders them from fulfilling their purposes. Special attention will be giving to three kinds of ritual events:

- Life cycle rituals such as funerals and weddings;
- Ongoing rituals in congregational life such as communion and baptism;
- Rituals created for congregational worship or other special occasions;

Textbooks:

Smith, Susan Marie. *Caring Liturgies: The Pastoral Power of Christian Ritual*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012. 978-0800697365

Gallagher, Nora. *The Sacred Meal* (Ancient Practice Series). Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009. 978-0-8499-0093-1

Long, Thomas G. and Thomas Lynch. *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2013. 978-0664238537

Additional readings will be available on the Student Portal

Course Requirements (see below for further assignment descriptions)

Participation and Attendance	10%
Reading Journal	30%
Daily Assignments	20% (4 x 5% - due in class)
Final Ritual Project	40%