**Sermon Assignment Outline** *This assignment works best if you have had a preaching course*.

This sermon outline assignment gives you the opportunity to reflect upon some aspects of sexuality that generates religious/spiritual/moral struggles[[1]](#endnote-1)---experiences of tension, strain, and conflict---about sexuality.[[2]](#endnote-2) Religious and spiritual struggles are widespread across a range of faith orientations; for example, among atheists ([Bradley, Uzdavines, Pargament, & Exline, 2016](#_ENREF_2)), Muslims, Jews ([Abu-Raiya, Pargament, Weissberger, & Exline, 2016](#_ENREF_1)), as well as the general population. Pargament et al. ([Pargament, Wong, & Exline, 2016](#_ENREF_4)) note that spiritual struggles are common and can have either life-giving or life-limiting outcomes:

Spiritual struggles have to do with the most fundamental issues of life – questions of ultimate meaning, good and evil, religious doubts, intimacy, the divine and one’s relationship with a higher power (Exline et al., 2014). These struggles are fundamentally dis-orienting; they shake people to their very core.  A number of studies have linked struggles in the spiritual domain to psychological, social and physical signs of distress (Exline, 2013).  But distress and dis-orientation are not the end of the story.

As people struggle, they try to re-orient themselves to the challenges posed by internal transitions and external events.  Although popular culture has sentimentalized the value of difficult life experiences, as we hear in statements such as “no pain, no gain” and “suffering builds character,” it must be stressed that efforts to re-orient following difficult life experiences are not necessarily successful. Some people experience only pain, suffering, and brokenness through their struggles.  In this regard, higher levels of spiritual struggles have been associated with decline in immune functioning (Trevino, Pargament, Cotton, Leonard, Hahn, Caprini-Faigin, & Tsevat, 2010), increases in depression (e.g., Pirutinsky, Rosmarin, Pargament, & Midlarsky, 2011), and even greater risk of dying (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2001).

It is true, however, that spiritual struggles can be a source of growth and greater wholeness… Empirical studies have shown some ties between spiritual struggles and reports of growth following trauma and major life events (e.g., Gall et al., 2011; Magyar-Russell et al., 2013; Trevino et al., 2012).  We suspect this growth is manifested by shifts in orienting systems that become more whole; that is, more deeply purposive, broader and deeper, more flexible, more coherent and discerning, and more benevolent and life-affirming.  In support of this notion, Desai and Pargament (2015) compared college students following a period of spiritual struggle who experienced growth or decline.  Those who reported greater growth were able to find greater meaning from their struggle, were able to draw on more positive religious coping resources, had a more secure relationship with God, and had integrated religion more fully into their lives. (Pargament et al., 2016, pp. 387-388)

Emerging research is demonstrating that if these kinds of struggles remain private they tend to become a source of shame, anger, and guilt that generate life-limiting theologies/orienting systems of sexuality triggered by stress.

Throughout this course we consider life experiences you or others have had that generate religious/spiritual/moral struggles over some aspect of sexuality[[3]](#footnote-1):

* Aspects of one’s gender and/or sexual orientation identity that do not conform to societal/religious norms and/or that make one a target for prejudice/aggression/violence.
* Work and family balance that generates moral stress over one’s gender roles and responsibilities.
* Experiencing sexual pleasure in ways that do not conform to societal/religious norms.
* Working through conflicts/power struggles in intimate and/or caregiving relationships that generate moral stress/spiritual struggles because of aspects of one’s sexuality (i.e., gender roles).
* Seeking personal and relational wholeness amidst the challenges of being single, dating, negotiating transitions in intimate relationships, and ending intimate relationships.
* Experiencing sexual trauma (abuse, harassment, assault).

These are the kinds of experiences that could be used in a case study on spiritual care to those experiencing religious/spiritual/moral struggles arising from some aspect of their sexuality.

**OUTLINE:** *Note: The final assignment should be about 5 pages single-spaced, including references. Please use all relevant readings and discussions from the course forums, especially the forums early on in the quarter focusing on pastoral and spiritual care.* You will need to **do a literature search** (using the guide provided on the requirements page) in order to find articles/chapters/books that help you think theologically and psychologically about aspects of sexuality, pastoral/spiritual care and, more broadly, religious, theological, and psychological studies. You will need to substantively use at least 5 references from your search and at least one needs to be from psychological studies.

*Please refer to the grading rubric to ensure you have done an adequate literature search and demonstrated course learning goals in competing this assignment.*

**Preface:** Why did you choose this assignment; what do you hope to gain from doing this assignment?

**Your spiritual practices:** Describe the intrinsically meaningful body-aware practices you used in working on this assignment that

1. Increased self-awareness of one’s stress-based reactions/emotions that give rise to life-limiting, socially oppressive beliefs, values, and consumer ways of coping, especially for coping with academic stress.
2. Increased self-compassion, self-transcendence, and relational systems that support use of meaningful body-aware practices as a basis for searching for meanings about one’s stress responses and life experiences.

2. **Text Selection**. A biblical or sacred text(s) can be selected at least by one of the following methods:

What is the text you chose for your preaching?

What was your method to select the text? What did motivate you to use this particular text for your sermon?

When selecting the text, consider it in a larger context.

What are the previous and later paragraphs of the text about?

What grammatical and literary factors caused you to determine the text (e.g., connectors between paragraphs, shifts in style, mood, location, and activity before and after the given verses, etc.) (Note: your literature search using this text could help you describe these details about the selected text)?

The selected text needs to either be translated from the original language or be compared with more than two modern translations in order to arrive at the most

accurate translation and make a smooth reading. What kind of translations did you refer to?

3. **Attentive Reading (Intuitive Imagination)**. After determining the text, the preacher reads it from the heart, without any aid of commentaries or books written about the text.

Read the whole text slowly, aloud, and repeatedly until the whole text is engraved in your mind and heart. Do not concentrate too much on single words or sentences within the text. Instead, read it comprehensively and meditatively.

Write down or draw any words, images, pictures, and symbols inspired from your imaginative and meditative listening to the text. You may compose a song or write a poem, a story, or a prayer, too.

What are your questions or concerns about the text?

4. **Critical Understanding (Historical Imagination)**. In this stage, the preacher deepens her understanding of the text with the help of critical studies. Biblical dictionaries, commentaries, and other theological books help us read the text as “the other” and stretch our imagination by providing background knowledge and information about the socio-cultural context of the original audience, the author’s intention, some images, metaphors, stories, historical events, doctrines, and theological terms in the text.

What kind of biblical resources or commentaries did you refer to?

If the preacher had specific questions or concerns about the text in Step 3, now it is time to research on them to gain appropriate answers. What are helpful information or answers to your questions or concerns?

5. **Sensitive Listening (Empathetic Imagination)**. Not all the knowledge and information about the text or every insight and imaginative idea gained in Steps 3 and 4 are useful for creating a sermon, for the sermon is targeted on a particular congregation that is situated in a particular socio-cultural and existential context. Thus, it is important for the preacher to listen to the daily lives of the congregation with pastoral sensitivity.

What are the characteristics of your congregation/community of faith as a group (race, gender, class, age, geographical location, theological orientation, etc.)?

How do you describe the larger world to which your congregation belongs (a “glocal” context)?

In your congregational/community context, how could the text be heard by your individual listeners? Can you imagine some of their facial or other bodily reactions when they are listening to the text? What might their initial reactions to the text imply?

6. **Dynamic Interaction (Analogical Imagination)**. The dynamic interaction or to-and-fro movement between the world of the text and that of the listeners is supposed to be done from the beginning of the interpretive process. In this step, however, the preacher narrows the gap between the text and the context and focuses on a specific theological theme or image among many insights and ideas that the preacher has gained in the previous steps.

Based on your pastoral assessment, what would be the theological theme or the topic relevant to your congregation’s particular situation?

7. **Theological Reflection**. Once the theological theme or the topic of the sermon is determined, the preacher needs to reflect on that at a deeper level by meditating it and referring to some theological resources in relation to that theme.

What kind of theological resources (books, articles, magazines, etc.) did you refer to in addition to the commentaries, in order to deepen your understanding of the theological theme?

Write down the focus statement of your sermon in 1-2 sentences. The focus statement means “what the sermon aims to say.”

When the focus of the sermon relates to a particular experience of the congregation and is reflected in a certain theological perspective, the function of the sermon is determined. The function of the sermon means “what the sermon aims to do.” In other words, what does the preacher expect the impact of preaching to be on the listeners? To comfort them? To challenge them? To teach them? To encourage them?

Write down the function statement of your sermon in 1-2 sentences:

*The process of the seven steps is not in a linear but in a spiral order. Some steps need to be visited again and again until the preacher creates a new meaning of the text relevant to her particular congregation.*

**Conclusion:**Describe how this assignment can become a resource for you as an intercultural spiritual caregiver in any or all of the following ways:

1. Using spiritual practices to connect with goodness in the midst of religious/spiritual/moral struggles over an aspect of sexuality
2. Becoming more self-differentiated by understanding my emotional reactions and being able to separate out my struggles from struggles of others, especially that might be imposed upon me
3. Becoming more culturally aware of difference and social privileges and disadvantages
4. Becoming more theological fluent about aspects of sexuality that might generate religious/spiritual/moral struggles
5. Continually being engaged with my own process of spiritual integration, especially as a form of self-care and growth.

1. There are three types of spiritual or religious struggles ([Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014](https://iliff.instructure.com/courses/1914534/discussion_topics/12762589#_ENREF_15)):

   * *Struggles with God* (e.g., questioning God’s love, feeling angry at God, feeling like God has abandoned or is punishing us because of some aspect of our sexual lives)
   * *Intrapsychic struggles within us*: moral stress over conflicting values, ultimate meanings, and doubts about aspects of our sexuality
   * I*nterpersonal struggles between us and our significant others* over aspects of our sexuality.

   These three kinds of religious and spiritual struggles are interconnected. For example, spiritual doubt can lead to interpersonal struggles. Interpersonal struggles lead to guilt and shame. Guilt and shame lead to fear of being punished by God and/or religious authorities/others. Fear of punishment and hell can lead to anger at God and organized religion. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. We are using the *Our Whole Lives* curriculum to define these five aspects of sexuality: *sensuality* (bodiliness and touch), *intimacy* (relationality), *sexual identity* (orientations and roles), *sexual health/reproduction* (physiology, procreation, etc.), and *sexualization* (power dynamics). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. In this course we will be using the 5-circle definition of sexuality used by the *Our Whole Lives* Sexuality Education curricula, a set of six comprehensive and medically accurate programs jointly created by the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association for a range of ages ([Tino, Millspaugh, & Stuart, 2008](#_ENREF_5)). “These curricula use five aspects of a “whole” concept of sexuality that are interlinked, but which can be spoken about separately. The 5 circles consist of Sensuality (body-liness and touch), Intimacy (relationality), Sexual Identity (orientations and roles), Sexual Health/Reproduction (physiology, procreation, etc., content that is most typically covered in "sex ed." curricula), and Sexualization (power dynamics)” (Tino et al., 2008 p. 8).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)