**Outline for developing a proposal for a religious education event**

**Shared Praxis Model**

This assignment gives you the opportunity to reflect upon some aspects of sexuality that generated 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 developing an education program that enhances 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. Please refer to the grading rubric to ensure you have done an adequate literature search and demonstrated course learning goals in competing this assignment. You will need to substantively use at least 5 references from your search and at least one needs to be from psychological studies (see guide to doing a literature search on the Requirements page)*

**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.

**Group Focusing Activity**: designed to “engage participants with shared focus in a generative theme for the teaching/learning event” (Groome, 1991, p. 155). This could be a spiritual practice followed by focus on some aspect of the topic of this event

**Movement 1: *“****invites participants to ‘name’ or express in some form their own and/or society’s ‘present action’” (Groome, 1991, p. 175).* This helps participants put into their own words what their experience of the topic is.

**Movement 2:** encourages critical reflection on that present praxis including:

1. its reasons, interest, assumptions and ideologies

2. its socio-historical and biographical sources

3. its intended, likely, and preferred consequences

**Movement 3:** makes accessible expressions of Christian [faith group] Story (scripture, tradition, practices, etc.)/sources of authority for this faith tradition (i.e. Buddhist sources for those within Buddhist traditions) and Vision (values/beliefs, especially oriented towards hope) as expressed by the church/community of faith, understood communally

**Movement 4:** puts participants’ critical understanding of current praxis and Christian/ faith group story/vision or faith tradition stories/vision into dialogue with one another (i.e. Movements 2 and 3)

**Movement 5:** the decision/response for live faith, which can be cognitive, affective, or behavioral decisions that could be on personal, interpersonal, or social/political levels

**Conclusion:** Describe how this assignment can become a resource for you 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. Being able to use evidence-based approaches to spiritual care that draw upon research on religious coping.
6. Being engaged with your own process of spiritual integration, especially as a form of self-care and growth.

References

Abu-Raiya, H., Pargament, K., Weissberger, A., & Exline, J. (2016). An empirical examination of religious/spiritual struggle among Israeli Jews. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 26*(1), 61-79. doi: 10.1080/10508619.2014.1003519

Bradley, D. F., Uzdavines, A., Pargament, K., & Exline, J. (2016). Counseling atheists who experience religious and spiritual struggles. In A. Schmidt, M. Chow, P. Berendsen & T. O’Connor (Eds.), *Thriving on the edge: Integrating spiritual practice, theory, and research*.

Groome, T. H. (1991). *Sharing faith: A comprehensive approach to religious education and pastoral ministry: The way of shared praxis* (1st ed. ed.). San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.

Pargament, K., Wong, S., & Exline, J. (2016). Wholeness and holiness: The spiritual dimension of eudaimonics. In J. Vittersø (Ed.), *The handbook of eudaimonic wellbeing* (pp. 379-394). Switzerland: Springer International.

Tino, M. J., Millspaugh, S. G., & Stuart, L. A. (2008). *Our whole lives: Sexuality education for young adults, Ages 18-35* Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

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).

   *“’…[S]hared Christian [Faith group] praxis’ is a participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical agency in time and place and on their sociocultural reality, have access together to Christian [faith group] Story/Vision, and personally appropriate it in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in…faith toward God’s reign for all creation” (*[*Groome, 1991, p. 135*](#_ENREF_3)*)* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)