

An Ecumenical Spiritual Community

By Martha Gilliss

Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Bellarmine University have partnered to offer the Master of Arts in Spirituality degree. Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, a.k.a. LPTS, is of course one of the ten seminaries of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Its nationally-known field education and marriage and family therapy programs and the high quality of theological education in general make LPTS an exciting place to be engaged in preparation for ministry both in and outside of the parish. Most current students and alums would claim that these strengths are complemented by a very real experience of spiritual growth at the personal that also connects them with the world beyond themselves and the seminary over their course of study.

Located about 3 miles away from LPTS, Bellarmine University was founded in 1950 by the Archdiocese of Louisville as a Catholic college for men. Today it is a growing coeducational, ecumenically-minded university, although the influence and value of the Catholic shines through much of course curriculums, and chapel worship is in this tradition. Bellarmine is not only committed to the liberal arts, but to the health sciences, education, nursing, business, and the fine arts as well.

The MAS program is an ecumenical, collaborative experience of LPTS and Bellarmine that draws on the strengths of both and that upholds the truth that persons are all engaged in a spiritual journey within God, and that all students accepted into the program have something to contribute to the learning

experience. The focus is on Christian Spirituality expressed in Scripture, the monastic and mystical traditions, the sacraments, moral and constructive theology, and in relation to faith development. The program builds on the strengths of both educational institutions. Professors from both Bellarmine and LPTS and other well-qualified instructors interact with students throughout the thirty hours of coursework. An important feature of the MAS program is its cohort structure. Up to twelve students are accepted each year to be a new cohort who will walk together over the course of this two-year spiritual journey.

The journey begins in early June with an Introductory Seminar. This is an intensive two-week introduction to major aspects of spirituality, including a brief period of time in a local secular or religious relief agency. Some students may opt to take “Child Advocacy and the Church,” which is a one-week three-hour elective course offered each July at the Children Defense Fund’s Proctor Institute on their property in east Tennessee. Altogether, students complete eighteen hours of electives. A four-hour-credit Practicum, involving a period of hands-on participation in an agency related to social justice or pastoral care is usually taken at the end of the first year. Students are highly encouraged to participate in “Spirituality and Justice: An International Experience.” In the past students have journeyed to Guatemala, Mexico, and El Salvador and have engaged life in these places firsthand. The outcome has been their discernment of ways in which they might respond to the need for solidarity with the peoples to make peace and justice a more complete reality there. An Integrating Seminar at the end of the second year completes the requirements for the MAS program.

Students at LPTS can opt to complete a dual degree—a Master of Divinity or a Master of Arts in Family Therapy--coupled with the MAS by taking the three required seminars plus one elective with the other students in the program.

As stated on Master of Arts in Spirituality brochure, there are three guiding theological principles shaping the MAS program:

1. The “anthropology of the unquiet heart, summed up in Augustine’s well-known prayer: ‘You have made us for Your self and our heart finds no rest until it rests in You.’
2. “What is most fundamental about human persons is their ***need and desire for God.***”
3. “***Faith*** enacted in prayer has public, social consequences. In both the shaping of our character and in our outward behavior in the public world, ***Christian spirituality*** is a sign of God’s reign.”

In addition to the courses mentioned above, a list of selected courses offered in the Master of Arts in Spirituality program are:

- Sacred Persons and Sacred Places
- Faith and Money
- A Comparative Inter-religious Study of Mystical Writings
- Engaged Spirituality: Contemplation, Service, and Resistance
- Introduction to the Life and Thought of Thomas Merton
- Theological Themes in Contemporary Film
- Evil Suffering and Death in the New Testament

- Women, Mysticism and Liberation
- Prayer in Christian History
- Spirituality of Nature

For more information, visit the Master of Arts in Spirituality website at

<http://www.bellarmino.edu/cas/theology/>