

St. Mary's Ecumenical Institute
Fall 2017

SP 647.1 Spiritual Practice & Early/Medieval Church History
(1-credit spiritual practice module)

Dr. Olsen

Christian spiritual practice has occurred in many different forms across the centuries and continents. As we study the history of Christianity, the movement of its cares and concerns, we will explore the spiritual aspect through the practice of three different forms of prayer that nurtured the church in three different times and places. The first, with which we will begin the semester, is the breath prayer. This practice grounded the Desert Fathers and Mothers in the first great laboratory of Christian spirituality, the deserts of Egypt and Palestine. As we move into the early medieval period, we will explore the second which is the practice of *lectio divina*. This meditative reading of Scripture formed the mainstay of monastic spirituality in its Benedictine expression. Finally, we will explore the Little Hours. Originally a product of the monastic milieu, this practice became a dominant form of lay spirituality in the High Middle Ages enshrined in the beautifully decorated Books of Hours.

Course Requirements

1. Readings: As students begin each of the three practices, a set of brief readings from period primary and modern secondary sources will guide them in the practice. Taken together, these readings will total less than one hundred pages across the whole semester.
2. Spiritual Activity: Engagement with the assigned practice for 20 minutes each three to five times a week.
3. Written Output: At the conclusion of each practice, a two to three page reflection paper will assess the student's personal engagement with the practice.
4. Meetings: An initial meeting will clarify expectations and answer any questions about the practices. An optional meeting at the introduction of the second practice will answer any student questions regarding its use. A mid-term meeting will assess progress through the semester and introduce the third practice. A final meeting at the end of the semester will provide an opportunity for sharing, discussion, and reflection upon these practices.

Required Text

Course packet