SFS 564C Young Adults and the Franciscan Imagination: Formative Implications

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Course Description:

Research indicates that upwards of 60-80% of all young adults who participated in church as teens will leave the Church before the age of 30. This course looks at the hopes and concerns of young adults today and their perceptions of religion, both positive and negative. We will study the research that indicates how this new generation is “discontinuously different” from anything we have seen before. We will analyze ways that the Franciscan imagination can provide an alternative new religious narrative to help young adults respond to the intensity of today’s social, technological and religious changes. We will then study the formative implications of this research, analyzing emerging “formative methodologies” for their ability to serve these young adults. Attention will be given to the formative implications of Pope Francis’ apostolic letter, “Gaudium Evangelii” and the literature “intentional discipleship.”

The course then will be divided into three sections:

1. Young Adults and Religion: Understanding how young people think (or don’t) about faith.
   
   This section will look at the latest research on two groups of young adults, between the ages of 18 and 29, and how they see religion and faith. First, we will study the perceptions of young adults outside the faith and how they see Christianity and Catholicism. Then, we will study the experiences of young adults who were formed inside the faith to learn why the vast majority of them will leave religion by the time they reach the age of 30. This research will form the baseline of our understanding of the challenges of the New Evangelization and Franciscan Formation.


   This section of the course will look at the idea of a distinct “Franciscan imagination.” Using the work of contemporary Franciscan scholars, we will tease out the basic elements of a Franciscan imagination and its potential for engaging a contemporary spiritual and pastoral journey of faith.

3. Emerging Formative Methodologies and the Pastoral Care of Young Adults in Franciscan Formation

   Having teased out a theology of the Franciscan imagination in the previous section, we will investigate contemporary formative methodologies for their ability to engage young adults today. We will demonstrate why some formation initiatives fail to engage young adults at deep enough levels of thought, feeling and conscience. We will introduce three writers with theories of formative engagement with young adults. This section will consider specific topics in the pastoral care of young adults in Franciscan formation.

Course Objectives:

1. To understand the religious, social, political and theological imagination of young adults today;
2. To explore and understand the latest sociological research on young adults and their perception of religion, including young adults who have walked away from religion after years of religious formation;
3. To outline the elements of a Franciscan imagination and contrast it with the emerging forms of secular imagination;
4. To study “formative methodologies” for their capacity to engage the concerns of young adults today;
5. To understand the formative implications of what has been described as a “new Franciscan age” under Pope Francis;
6. To understand how contemporary theories of “intentional discipleship” critique inherited formative methodologies;
7. To help students test their assumptions about Franciscan formation today and develop new approaches to engaging young adults in Franciscan formation.

Required Texts:


Requirements of the Course:

1. Read carefully and critically the assigned texts, essays and selected bibliographic materials. (Recommended readings are only suggested. They are NOT required. They are provided to students as a supplement.)

2. Participate actively in class discussions. Class participation reflecting critical reading and a careful engagement of the issues of young adults and Franciscan imagination are critical to success in this course. The course is designed to explore present and pressing issues associated with the young adult imagination, community, and worship in Franciscan life and ministry.

3. Three forms of examination will form the basis of this course’s assessment:

   a. July 8th – A four page reflection on the readings to date. The student should share key initial (even if tentative) insights deriving directly from the readings assigned in the class to date. The student should also demonstrate a level of engagement with the readings that shows comprehension and insight, consistent with a graduate level education. (30%)

   b. July 18th - [Students have two choices]
A 7-10 page paper on a topic related to the themes of this course, chosen by the student and approved by the professor. (60%)

—or-

Students may choose to take a short exam on the last day of class that will include questions and an essay section. A study guide will be provided ahead of time for those who choose this option. (60%)

c. Class participation and engagement (10%)

4. Students will shut off all cell phones and social networking devices during class time. We ask that students not troll the internet during class so as to maximize engagement in the class discussions. Violations may result in a penalty of the grade structure.

Format of the Course:

The professor of this course will propose topics related to the topic of young adults and the “Franciscan imagination.” He will shape the content of the course, raise critical issues, direct discussion and facilitate a creative integration of the course material. Critical for the success of the course is the students’ careful and thoughtful preparation and reading of texts and participation in class discussions.

Topics for the Course:

Part One: Young Adults and Religion: Understanding How Young People Think (or Don’t) about Religion and Faith Today

1. Young Adults and The Catholics we are Becoming: On the Horizon of a New Religious Imagination that is Urgent, High Stakes and Uncertain


2. Forgettable Faith: What a New Generation of Young Adults Really Thinks about Christianity.

   Reading:


3. Faith Interrupted: The Religious Imagination of Young Christians Leaving the Church and What it Means for a New Evangelization

   Reading:

   David Kinnaman, You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church, pp. 19-88.

   Sherry A. Wedell, “God has no Grandchildren, “ in Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus, pp. 15-47.
4. **Funding the Postmodern Imagination – The Counter-Imagination of the Old Testament in the Thought of Walter Brueggemann**

Reading:


5. **From Jesus to Francis – Refounding the Franciscan Imagination for the Mosaic Generation**

Reading:


6. **The Fraternal Imagination: Violence, Sine Proprio and the Military Consumerism affecting Young Adults**

   Joel Kotkin, The Rise of Postfamilialism: Humanity’s Future? (Singapore: Civil Service College, 2012). [This study will be provided electronically. Students are asked to scan the main line of the argument in this text.]


   **Recommended Reading:**


7. **The “Fraternal Cliff” and Franciscan Poverty: The Fraternal Economy as Prophetic Imagination.**

   Reading:


   **Supplemental Readings:**


__________“Pastoral Planning and the Economic Meltdown,” Church Magazine (Fall, 25:3, 2009), p. 4-8.

_________The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics (South Bend, IN: Cloverdale Books, 2007).


8. Postmodern Transformations: Minority and the Psychology of Entitlement

Recommended Readings:

Ilia Delio, OSF, The Humility of God: A Franciscan Perspective (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005);


9. “I Still Desire to Work”: Young Adults after the Great Recession of 2008 and the Franciscan Imagination of Work

Readings:


Recommended Readings:


Section III: Young Adults and New Formative Methodologies

10. New Franciscan Formation Methodologies: Intimate and Intentional

Readings:

Sherry A. Waddell, Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2012), pp. 125-184;


Readings:


12. Reconstructing a Desconstructed Franciscan Imagination: David Couturier’s Quadrilateral Theory of Spiritual Transformation

Readings:

David B. Couturier, “Personal Conversion,’ in The Four Conversions: A Spirituality of Transformation (South Bend, IN: The Victoria Press), pp. 17-60. [This text will be supplied electronically to all students in the course.]
13. Taking Franciscan Formation to the Next Level: Developing the Franciscan Leader of the 21st Century

Recommended Reading:


14. Young – Adult -Women: A New Formative Imagination

Readings:


Recommended Reading:


15. Summary and Review: Young Adults and the Franciscan Imagination

Assessment:

Students are expected to attend each class. Absences require prior notification of the professor. Students are to turn off all cell phones and are not to access or troll the internet during class times, so as not to interfere with class participation and engagement.

All written work should conform to the norms of good grammar and standards of scholarship at the graduate level. Students from other cultures or languages can write their papers in the following languages: French, Italian and Spanish.

Any form of plagiarism will result in an “F” grade for the course.

Appointments:

By arrangement with the professor.