



Theology in Place: *Ghost Ranch, New Mexico*

HT 567 | Spring 2022
UDTS Theology Elective, 3 credits

Six class sessions (1 credit):

Tuesdays in the second half of Spring –
March 8, 15, 22, 19, April 5, 19 –
on campus or *synchronously online*, 6-8 pm.

Trip (2 credits): May 7-14, 2022

Faculty

Dr. Mary Emily Duba (Theology)
Dr. Dale Easley (Environmental Science)

"Ram's Head with Hollyhock," by Georgia O'Keeffe (New Mexico, 1935)

How does place—our particular location and the meanings it holds—shape how we encounter and express *who God is, the difference Jesus makes, and the forms of witness and work to which the church is called?*

Course Description

This course explores Christian theologies of place, which retrieve from our deepest traditions a spatially-attuned, earth-honoring, incarnational faith. The course is interdisciplinary, weaving together Christian theology and environmental sciences, experiential learning and spiritual practices. Students explore contemporary theological movements and ancient geological layers, seeking new understandings of God's presence and activity in both the beauty of creation and its wounds. The course culminates in an immersion trip.

Spring 2022: This year we travel to Ghost Ranch, a Presbyterian retreat center located in the high desert of New Mexico. It is a landscape of fierce beauty (Georgia O'Keeffe did some of her finest paintings there) and great ecological devastation (the first atomic bomb was detonated in the New Mexico desert in 1945). With opportunities for connection with creation in a retreat setting and proximity to hiking opportunities, the Los Alamos nuclear site, and native pueblo dwellings, Ghost Ranch provides a rich setting for theological reflection.

Course Learning Outcomes

Engaged participation and successful completion of this course will enable you:

- to interpret a place through the lenses of a theological template, the geological and climate sciences, the arts, and the emergent concept of the Anthropocene;
- to correlate questions raised by the environmental sciences with theological reflection, especially on the doctrines of creation and incarnation;
- to interpret and evaluate theological responses to global ecological crisis;
- to express the importance of a Christian theology of place, drawing on contemporary theology, the environmental sciences, and experiences in place-based learning and liturgy.

Program Learning Outcomes

This course meets the following Program Learning Outcomes for UDTS degree programs;

- Engage contemporary theological and ethical issues with insight and humility (MDiv);
- Articulate and reflect critically and constructively on the biblical and theological foundations of God's mission to the world (MAMD).
- Articulate key theological affirmations of the church's theological tradition (MACL).

Course Schedule

This 3-credit course will meet for 2 hours on 6 Tuesday nights, from 6-8pm central, in the second half of the Spring 2022 semester: March 8, 15, 22, 19, April 5, & 19. Distance students participate via Zoom. During this classroom phase, students will read and discuss theological texts, watch videos, and present on topics related to Ghost Ranch, including its ecological context, history of human influence, and cultural heritage. **Ghost Ranch Trip: May 7-14.** Students are expected to arrive at Ghost Ranch in time for dinner on Saturday, May 7. Flights home should be made for the late morning or afternoon of Saturday, May 14.

Requirements

Given the immersive, experiential nature of this course, much of your grade will depend on engaged participation in the classroom phase, while traveling, and at Ghost Ranch.

Classroom Meetings (6 sessions)

- Attendance
- Participation in discussions
- Readings
- Précis assignments (concise summaries of a text's main argument)
- Site presentation

Immersion Trip

- Engaged participation (attendance, wholehearted attitude toward activities, positive contributions to our learning community)
- Theological Reflection Journals
- Baptismal watershed paragraph (bring to Ghost Ranch prepared)
- Various and sundry activities, excursions, etc.
- Final paper (due upon return)

Course Fee: \$395 + air travel to Ghost Ranch, NM

A \$100, non-refundable deposit is due Nov 1 (or upon registration, if later). The remaining \$295 will be due before we depart for the trip. Less expensive travel by van is possible for students interested in driving down from Dubuque together.

Required Materials

note: subject to change; consult instructor before purchasing texts

- Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
- Celia Deane-Drummond, ed., *Religion in the Anthropocene* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017).
- A Study Bible in a suitable translation for academic study (ie. NRSV, CEV, etc.)
- Additional readings will be made available on Moodle and in class.
- A bound journal for taking notes and writing theological reflections (and sketching, if desired) while on our immersion trip.
- A packing list will be made available in class.