

Suggested Readings for "Sharing Our Faith through Writing" Class

Nov. 15, 29, 13, Room 12, 1A

Rev. Delle McCormick

- 1. Bolz-Weber, Nadia. *Pastrix: The Cranky Beautiful faith of a Sinner and Saint*. Jericho Books: New York, NY. 2014.**

Now a New York Times bestseller, Nadia Bolz-Weber takes no prisoners as she reclaims the term "pastrix" (pronounced "pas-triks," a term used by some Christians who refuse to recognize female pastors) in her messy, beautiful, prayer-and-profanity laden narrative about an unconventional life of faith. Heavily tattooed and loud-mouthed, Nadia, a former stand-up comic, sure as hell didn't consider herself to be religious leader material—until the day she ended up leading a friend's funeral in a smoky downtown comedy club. Surrounded by fellow alcoholics, depressives, and cynics, she realized: These were her people. Maybe she was meant to be their pastor.

Using life stories—from living in a hopeful-but-haggard commune of slackers to surviving the wobbly chairs and war stories of a group for recovering alcoholics, from her unusual but undeniable spiritual calling to pastoring a notorious con artist—Nadia uses stunning narrative and poignant honesty to portray a woman who is both deeply faithful and deeply flawed, giving hope to the rest of us along the way.

- 2. Held-Evans, Rachel. *searching for sunday: loving, leaving, and finding the church*. Nelson Books: Nashville, TN. 2013.**

Like millions of her millennial peers, Rachel Held Evans didn't want to go to church anymore. The hypocrisy, the politics, the gargantuan building budgets, the scandals—church culture seemed so far removed from Jesus. Yet, despite her cynicism and misgivings, something kept drawing her back to Church. And so she set out on a journey to understand Church and to find her place in it.

Centered around seven sacraments, Evans' quest takes readers through a liturgical year with stories about baptism, communion, confirmation, confession, marriage, vocation, and death that are funny, heartbreaking, and sharply honest.

*A memoir about making do and taking risks, about the messiness of community and the power of grace, *Searching for Sunday* is about overcoming cynicism to find hope and, somewhere in between, Church.*

- 3. Karr, Mary. *Lit: A Memoir*. Harper Collins Publisher: New York. 2009.**

*Mary Karr's bestselling, unforgettable sequel to her beloved memoirs *The Liars' Club* and *Cherry*—and one of the most critically acclaimed books of the year—*Lit* is about getting drunk and getting sober; becoming a mother by letting go of a mother; learning to write by learning to live.*

- 4. Lamott, Anne. *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*. Random House: New York, NY. 2000.**

Anne Lamott claims the two best prayers she knows are: "Help me, help me, help me" and "Thank you, thank you, thank you." She has a friend whose morning prayer each day is "Whatever," and whose evening prayer is "Oh, well." Anne thinks of Jesus as "Casper the friendly savior" and describes God as "one crafty mother."

Despite—or because of—her irreverence, faith is a natural subject for Anne Lamott. The people in Anne Lamott's real life are like beloved characters in a favorite series for her readers—her friend Pammy, her son, Sam, and the many funny and wise folks who attend her church are all familiar. And *Traveling Mercies* is a welcome return to those lives, as well as an introduction to new companions Lamott treats with the same candor, insight, and tenderness.

Lamott's faith isn't about easy answers, which is part of what endears her to believers as well as

nonbelievers. Against all odds, she came to believe in God and then, even more miraculously, in herself. As she puts it, "My coming to faith did not start with a leap but rather a series of staggers." At once tough, personal, affectionate, wise, and very funny, *Traveling Mercies* tells in exuberant detail how Anne Lamott learned to shine the light of faith on the darkest part of ordinary life, exposing surprising pockets of meaning and hope.

5. Mairs, Nancy. *A Dynamic God: Living and Unconditional Catholic Faith*. Beacon Press: Boston, MA. 2007.

God doesn't saunter in once for all and settle like a large cat plumping herself into your favorite rocker with an air that says, "Here I am! Now your life is complete!" God dances beyond the threshold and must continually be enticed into our dwelling. I hope these essays remind us all to extend that invitation, clean all the corners and polish the windows, throw wide the door.

In A Dynamic God, Mairs explores the subject of religion and spirituality and gives us a passionately individual book of meditations on a life of engaged faith. Raised Congregationalist in New England, Mairs is a convert to Catholicism. She is also liberal, feminist, and outspokenly activist—and all that in an increasingly conservative church that scorns her brand of progressive iconoclasm.

A Dynamic God explores through beautifully written personal essays the question of why and how Mairs became and remains a Catholic ("despite all odds"); what she finds to love in that tradition; and more broadly, as she writes, how she experiences the holy in her life and in the world.

6. Miller, Donald. *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*. Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN. 2003.

"I never liked jazz music because jazz music doesn't resolve. I used to not like God because God didn't resolve. But that was before any of this happened." ?Donald Miller

In Donald Miller's early years, he was vaguely familiar with a distant God. But when he came to know Jesus Christ, he pursued the Christian life with great zeal. Within a few years he had a successful ministry that ultimately left him feeling empty, burned out, and, once again, far away from God. In this intimate, soul-searching account, Miller describes his remarkable journey back to a culturally relevant, infinitely loving God.

For anyone wondering if the Christian faith is still relevant in a postmodern culture. For anyone thirsting for a genuine encounter with a God who is real. For anyone yearning for a renewed sense of passion in life. *Blue Like Jazz* is a fresh and original perspective on life, love, and redemption.

7. Wiman, Christian. *My Bright Abyss: A Meditation of a Modern Believer*. Farrar, Straus and Gireaux: New York, NY. 2013

Seven years ago, Christian Wiman, a well-known poet and the editor of Poetry magazine, wrote a now-famous essay about having faith in the face of death. My Bright Abyss, composed in the difficult years since and completed in the wake of a bone marrow transplant, is a moving meditation on what a viable contemporary faith—responsive not only to modern thought and science but also to religious tradition—might look like.

Joyful, sorrowful, and beautifully written, My Bright Abyss is destined to become a spiritual classic, useful not only to believers but to anyone whose experience of life and art seems at times to overbrim its boundaries. How do we answer this "burn of being"? Wiman asks. What might it mean for our lives—and for our deaths—if we acknowledge the "insistent, persistent ghost" that some of us call God? One of Publishers Weekly's Best Religion Books of 2013