

PERSON, PLACE, & THING:
BEYOND THE NOUN OF LEADERSHIP



2020-2022

SEMINAR 5

Preparation Invitations



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Fellowship FOR HUMAN
RELATIONS

In a six-part journey, Seminar Five holds the penultimate spot, which means there is one more road to cross on the way to an end game that could be a continuation or conclusion or something else entirely. What does your fellowship practice look and sound like? And how will we begin preparing to take our leave from one another? Before turning from firsts to lasts, there are ladders to consider, lives to lead, and deaths to deny, and to die, too. What kinds of things will we attempt in the remainder of our time together – as people in and from and beholden to particular places? And how much reverence (which is not the same as tolerance) will we grow for differences surfacing still? The waterways of eastern North Carolina beckon. Will we notice relations – between irrigation and intrusion, between salt and sky, between rising and falling – that are teachers, too?

The following invitations are for you and me and us and them. May they serve a kind of deepening and discerning that matters. Almost two years later, are we ready to get quiet? There is silence ahead, and that can take practice, too. What will make these final seminars count? Time will tell, and it remains a nonrenewable resource. Even so, from beginning to end, the water is wide. Many thanks for considering the balance of these invitations carefully. Each invitation that follows serves a Seminar Five session.

What must I do to die a good death?

What We're Working With

A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects (AHRO) – Chapter 4 “Cross” (Plate)

Ladders Two Ways – [Steven Charleston on Light](#); [Keith Payne on Inequality](#)

Your 2020–2022 Friday Fellowship experience

Seminar Five materials (shared in person on January 27)

Your fellowship journal

Your pinch pot

One another

The (Albemarle) Sound (of Silence)

Rest. Reflection. Relationship. Reckoning.

Courage. Curiosity. Creativity. Connection.

Ps to Grow On

Crossing and Reshaping – Leading in the Light

The Water is Wide – Life and Death on the Coastal Plain

[Anticipate & Engage]

Seminar Five will take place on the waters of the Albemarle Sound. The Albemarle–Pamlico Peninsula has an important and rich history that predates the state of North Carolina by thousands of years. In weighing the balance of so many things, will we look beyond our own (human) experience to consider the cycles of lifeworlds and ecosystems that precede and perish and also persist? The following materials invite engagement with and reflection on the long arc of life and death on the coastal plain. How far back will we remember? And what kind of curiosity (courage and connections, too) will keep us looking for and learning with people, places, and things that make meaning on different kinds of timelines?

Beth Roach. "Re-Storying the Indigenous Coast." A Project of the Coastal Conservatory.

The Seeds of Ghost Forests. Produced and Directed by Luke Groskin. [See also this Science Friday article by the same titled, authored by Luke Groskin and Lauren Young. Part of the Degrees of Change series, it was published on May 15, 2019.]

"North Carolina's Other Ocean." *Exploring North Carolina.* PBS North Carolina. Season 2, Episode 7. 2006.

Fellow by Fellow, Ladder by Ladder [Build & Bring]

Among other things, Seminar Five readings share a ladder motif. Choctaw elder and Episcopal priest Steven Charleston uses the ladder as a way to sequence the Spirit messages he shares rung by rung. Psychologist Keith Payne uses the ladder to describe the brokenness built into systems and perceptions of inequality. In our next chapter in Plate's *AHRO*, two crossed lines could also be a ladder of sorts.

As you read, would you reflect on ladders (broken, beautiful, becoming) in your own life? What are you climbing or descending or navigating in some other kind of direction? What/who is below or above you? Who/what stands or sits or speaks or silences or serves alongside you? Is your ladder leading (you) somewhere? Any rungs missing – by default or by your own design? And what about fellowship itself? Is it a ladder? Or a rung on a pathway marked by cornerstones, stumbling blocks, and crossroads, too?

Please build and bring your ladder to Seminar Five. That's the entire and entirely open-ended invitation. We will spend time each day listening to and learning from one another. An altar space will be prepared for your ladder offerings.

A Sound of Silence [Practice & Listen]

As we lean into and learn from the landscape of eastern North Carolina, we will also enter a new practice together. Being still exercises muscles that require a different kind of discipline. Please begin anticipating and preparing for a four-hour stretch of intentional and sacred silence. During this time (that will include a meal), you will be invited to trade in all sounds and screens for a great silence. We will not sit together – or even sit at all – but rather honor silence in community. Would you join us in preparing for this time together? What kind of quiet might you welcome or want for? Where and how might silence be reverberating in this season? What is the relationship between silence and silencing?

The [Encountering Silence](#) Podcast offers a variety of reflections on the work and wonder of stillness in different bodies, communities, and spaces. If the prospect of quiet is disquieting, consider listening to an episode or two. We'll make our way to the water together.

Summing Up Symbols [Read, Reflect, & Journal]

In the fourth chapter of *AHRO*, Plate contextualizes our next object – the cross – in different ways. He leans on anthropologist Sherry Ortner's definition of "summarizing symbols" to note that the cross "sums up and stands for a larger system; represent[ing] many ideas, attitudes, and meanings all at the same time" (p. 149). In other words, Plate contends that the powers of the cross derive, in part, from a kind of symbolism that can shape human behavior: "Such symbols speak, telling people how to behave, how to lay out their land, where to place their valuables, and with whom all these things should be done." (p.150) Importantly, Plate cautions that while symbols (like the cross) are often speaking, they rarely communicate with nuance.

If "the" cross or a cross or "two crossed lines" (p.139) can speak in many different registers – some sacred, some sacrilegious, some both – does it mean something to you? What other "summarizing symbols" are resonant and real for you? And what frameworks – conceptual or otherwise – make them visible or legible? What gives them (or any person, place, or thing) power?

Powers of Perception, Contexts of Comparison [Read, Reflect, & Journal]

In *The Broken Ladder*, psychologist Keith Payne uses the lens of perception to explore how relative difference shapes human belief and behavior. Highlighting the power of comparison and the role of context to both the experience and perception of inequality (p. 210), Payne ultimately asks readers to revisit their own value judgments: "Making the conscious effort to consider what genuinely matters interrupts the unconscious default pattern of looking to others to gauge how much we value ourselves." (p. 219)

Solving for change, Payne concludes that thriving often means "reshaping the ladder." How would you re-shape the ladders that structure the way we value ourselves and others?

A Practice of Curation— Crowdsourced Centering [Consider & Curate]

The 2020–2022 Friday Fellowship convening model centers (around) the wisdom of poets and prophets. In Seminar Five, we will be using Steven Charleston’s *Ladder to the Light* as our primary centering source. Will you join me in curating a list of passages that resonate? I’ll pull from a growing list as I build Seminar Five convening materials.

What’s Next? Queuing up a Final Question [Reflect, & Journal]

If you are counting along, you might remember that the *Fearless Dialogues* methodology (from which we are borrowing each seminar’s framing) provides only five questions. This means that the orienting framework for Seminar Six remains to be seen and spoken and shared. Would you spend time considering the balance of the first five questions?

Who am I?

Why am I here?

What is my gift?

How does it feel to be a problem?

What must I do to die a good death?

What comes next?

What question might hold enough space for the kind of fellowship you/me/we are solving for?

If this fellowship journey is ladder-like, what “final” rung might serve future chapters and circles?

Person, Place, & Thing:

Beyond the Noun of Leadership

