

LAUGHTER, FLOURISHING, AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

Exploring Religious Questions Series (Fall 2023)

SERIES DESCRIPTION:

Most people have a hunch that laughter and humor are related to well-being. After all, we often hear the phrase, “laughter is the best medicine.” What is perhaps less well-known is that religious traditions have long noted the positive benefits of laughter and joy for mental, physical, and spiritual life, and today an ever-increasing number of scientific studies are focused on the significance of laughter and humor for health and well-being. In this series, religious scholars and social scientists explore multiple aspects of how and why laughter can nurture the spirit and cultivate human flourishing.

DATES: October 9, 16, 23, and 30

TIME: 7 to 9 p.m. (with 15-minute break)

PLACE: Heritage Room, Jackson Center, Gustavus Adolphus College

TITLES OF SESSIONS AND SPEAKERS:

OCTOBER 9

“How Laughter Benefits our Mental and Physical Well-being: Insights from Positive Psychology”

Speaker: Dr. Patrick Heath

Heath is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Gustavus Adolphus College. He earned his B.S. in Psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, his M.A. in Counseling and Student Personnel Psychology from the University of Minnesota, and his Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from Iowa State University. His research focuses on self-compassion and how it can help reduce the stigma some people associate with mental health concerns. He is currently focused on developing and testing brief interventions designed to increase self-compassion.

OCTOBER 16

“The Positive Role of Laughter and Humor in Jewish Faith and Life”

Speaker: Dr. Samuel Kessler

Kessler is Assistant Professor of Religion and the Åke and Kristina Bonnier Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies in the Department of Religion at Gustavus Adolphus College. Kessler received his BA in History from New York University and his MA and PhD in Religious Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His research focuses on Jewish religious thought and practice in modernity.

OCTOBER 23

“Holy Hilarity: Humor in the Biblical Court Tales”

Speaker: Dr. Michael Chan

Chan is the Executive Director for Faith and Learning at Concordia College (Moorhead, MN). Chan completed a Ph.D. at Emory University and undertook a year of research and teaching at the University of Helsinki. He is also a graduate of Luther Seminary (M.A. in biblical theology) and Pacific Lutheran University (B.A. in elementary education). His writing and teaching focus on theological interpretation of the Old Testament for Christian communities.

OCTOBER 30

“Divine Laughter: Theology, Faith, and Humor”

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Rolf Jacobson

Jacobson is Dean of the Faculty, Professor of Old Testament, and the Alvin N. Rogness Chair of Scripture, Theology, and Ministry at Luther Seminary. Jacobson is ordained in the ELCA and earned his Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. Rolf learned to laugh at himself and life when he faced cancer at age 15. He writes extensively about the Psalms and ministry and recently co-authored *Divine Laughter: Preaching and the Serious Business of Humor* (Fortress Press, 2022).

The Exploring Religious Questions series is open to the public, held annually in the fall, and co-hosted by Rev. Grady St. Dennis, Director of Church Relations at Gustavus Adolphus College, and by Dr. Marcia J. Bunge, Professor of Religion and the Bernhardson Distinguished Chair of Lutheran Studies.

For more information or to register for this or any future series, please contact Jodi Maas, Assistant Director of Church Relations at Gustavus Adolphus College, 800 West College Avenue, St. Peter, MN 56082. Phone: 507-933-7001. Email: church-relations@gustavus.edu. Registration for the public is typically a minimal fee of \$35.