



Poetry and the Church

Abram Van Engen, Stanley Elkin Professor in the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis

FACILITATOR GUIDE

Thank you for choosing to facilitate this Carver Classrooms course with your small group! This guide is meant to help make facilitating this course as easy as possible for you while fostering rich and challenging discussions among your group.

Carver Classrooms are meant to explore how a deeper understanding of a particular subject area can impact the Church. Each course can be taken individually or as a small group. We hope this facilitator guide can help prepare you to make this time valuable for the people with whom you are exploring this subject.

Course Materials

Survey:

Included in the course are before-and-after surveys meant to help us gauge the impact that these courses have. Please encourage the participants of your group to take the survey on the Carver Classrooms course before and after going through all of the sessions.

Discussion Guides:

Discussion guides for this course are available on the course page. These guides are meant to help facilitators as well as participants navigate the course and draw out enriching conversation. While there is certainly no need to rigidly stick to the discussion guides, they can be quite helpful in steering conversation and working to translate inspiration into action. Feel free to use the discussion guides in the way that works best for your particular group.

Additional resources:

See the final module of the online course for all additional resources, including scripture references and supplemental materials from Professor Van Engen and other thinkers on the topics covered in this course.



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FACILITATOR GUIDE (cont.)

Tips for group discussions:

- Work to involve each participant in the discussion early on. Group dynamics, particularly on potentially sensitive topics, often present the need to ask some people to step up or step back at certain points. Use your wisdom and discretion to encourage a healthy balance from the start.
- Invite your group to get specific in their responses, especially when it comes to the application questions. Work together to find practical next steps for your community. These courses are meant to be a jumping off point for action in Christian life and ministry.
- Open yourself up to the edifying and redeeming work of the Holy Spirit in this experience. We can provide you with all the helpful tips and insightful resources, and still not know how God might use these discussions in your community. Our prayer is that each group and individual that goes through a Carver Classrooms course is drawn closer to the Spirit and is encouraged and inspired to advance Christ's kingdom through deep understanding and strong community.

Suggested schedule:

Your group can go through this course one session at a time (recommended) or all at once in a 2-3 hour event. If your group is doing one session at a time, you can plan on the video portion taking about 10 minutes and using the rest of the time to go through the discussion guide. Discussions on any given session can last anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour, depending on your availability, the group's dynamic, and the leadership of the facilitator.

If you do decide to go through all the sessions of this course in one sitting, we offer the following schedule as a suggestion for how to do that well.

0:00-0:15 Welcome and introductions
0:15-0:30 View video 1
0:30-0:50 Discuss video 1
0:50-1:10 View video 2
1:10-1:30 Discuss video 2
1:30-1:40 Break
1:40-1:55 View video 3
1:55-2:30 Discuss video 3, concluding comments



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About the Course:

How do we understand and approach poetry? What does poetry have to offer the Church?

Taught by Washington University English Professor Abram Van Engen, this course explores why Christians and especially ministry leaders might want to try out poetry and learn from this form of art.

About the Professor:

Abram Van Engen is professor of English and an affiliate faculty member in the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. His research, writing, and teaching focus on religion and literature, early American culture, and the literature and culture of the Puritans. Van Engen's first book, *Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England* (Oxford University Press, 2015) explored the broad role of sympathy in Puritan theology and its ramifications in early American literature. His second book, *City on a Hill: A History of American Exceptionalism* (Yale University Press), explains how the Pilgrims and Puritans have been remembered and remade in American culture. It is a study of collective memory, nationalism, history, religion, and literature tracking how the United States came to be thought of as a "city on a hill."

Beyond these books, Van Engen's work has appeared in multiple journals and online at Salon.com, The Conversation, Avidly, Religion and Politics, The Washington Post, and other venues. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Walter Muir Whitehill Prize in Early American History, the Peter J. Gomes Memorial Book Prize, a faculty fellowship and a Public Scholar grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and other awards.

Questions and Comments:

Questions about Carver Classrooms? Reach out via contact@carverstl.org.