RESAC

RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN ATLANTIC CANADA

RESAC 2026

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

September 25-26, 2026

Nexus Centre | Memorial University of Newfoundland

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Essential Conference Information

VENUE

- Nexus Centre, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's Campus.
- Primary conference room: Nexus Centre, Science Building (SN4022).
- Room exception: Panel 1A on Saturday, 8:15 AM-9:30 AM, will be held in SN2033.

WIRELESS INTERNET

- eduroam is available for visitors from participating institutions.
- @Memorial-Guest is available for casual visitors who do not have active MUN credentials.

AUDIOVISUAL & PRESENTATIONS

- The Nexus Centre is equipped with a computer, projector and screen, cameras, and microphones.
- Presenters are encouraged to keep a backup copy of presentation files (for example, on a USB drive or in cloud storage) and to arrive a few minutes early to set up.

Please consult the circulated schedule for session times, panel locations, and any final conference updates.

Saint Mary's University

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

THE NEXUS CENTRE

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Friday, September 25th and Saturday, September 26th, 2026

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Friday, September 25th

Time	Session or Event	Speakers / Presentation Titles
3:00 PM - 4:00 PM	Hybrid Virtual Seminar *Please register for Zoom link if necessary. Session also in SN-4022 (the Nexus Centre).	**Speaker:** Dr. Leslie Dorrough Smith *Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Religious Studies, Avila University, Kansas City, MO, USA.* "Reimagining World Religions: Teaching Critical Approaches to Religion in the Undergraduate Classroom"
4:30 PM - 6:00 PM	Conference Begins, Centre for Newfoundland Studies (QEII Library)	Exploration of the Muslim Narratives and Lives exhibit with brief presentations by scholars and community members. A light meal will be provided.

7:00 PM - 8:30 PM	Keynote	**Joint-Keynote Speakers:**
		Dr. Syed Adnan Hussain *Associate Professor and Chair, Department for the Study of Religion, Saint Mary's University* Dr. Margaret MacDonald *Professor, Department for the Study of Religion, Santamarian Chair, Faculty of Arts, Saint Mary's University* "Entanglements Not Solitudes: Comparative Work on the Family in Christianity and Islam"

Saturday, September 26th

Time	Session or Event	Speakers / Presentation Titles
7:45 AM - 8:00 AM	Welcome Gathering & Coffee	Nexus Centre (SN-4022, Science Building)
8:00 AM - 8:15 AM	Opening Remarks	Nexus Centre (SN-4022, Science Building)
8:15 AM - 9:30 AM	Panel 1A: Christianity, Gender, Pilgrimage, and	**Chair:** Jennifer Selby; SN2033 **Presenters**:

	Contemplative Traditions	Sherry Simons Brown, "Enemies to Lovers: How Gendered Debates Mirror the Narrative and Obscure the
		Message of 1 Timothy 2:9-15" Hasan Habib, "Neofundamentalists, Muslim Seculars, Bangladesh: How Do You Make a Muslim Body without Organs" Dr. Trevor Pomeroy, "From Multiplicity to Unity: Alan Watts on Christianity and Metaphysic"
	Panel 1B: The Sex Abuse Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church	**Chair**: Barry Stephenson; Nexus Centre **Presenters:** Dr. Pat Dold, "Pilgrimage and Protest" Dr. Michelle Rebidoux, "Teaching on the Sex Abuse Crisis in the Church: Differing Dynamics" Fr. Tony Bidgood, "From the Perspective of a Roman Catholic Priest"
9:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Panel 2: Methods, Bodies and Material Religion	**Chair**: Pat Dold; Nexus Centre **Presenters**: Nasim Makaremi Nia, "Threads of Belief: Women, Religion, and Migration"

		Dr. M. Willis Munroe, “Permanent vs. Transitory Markers: Replication in the Study of Religion" Dr. Jenn Selby, "On Capturing the Rituals and Aesthetics of Secular Sensibilities" Zea Jones, "Remembering How to Play: Methods in Indigenous Archaeology of Religion" Dr. Jennifer Porter, "Discoveryland and the Eschatological Imagination: Retro-Futurism at Disneyland Paris"
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM	Break	
11:15 AM - 12:30 PM	Panel 3: Religion and the Marvel Cinematic Universe (and a Surprise Plus-One)	**Chair:** Jennifer Selby; Nexus Centre **Presenters:** Dr. Mary Hale, "An Atheist, A Superhero, and a Wee Italian Marxist Walked into My Classroom: Empathy, Religious Imagination, and a Dream of Social Change" Dr. Lindsay Macumber, "The Witches Road: Representation, Agency, and Revolt in Agatha All Along" Dr. Syed Adnan Hussain, "Between Light and Fire: Nūr, Jinn, and the Making of Ms. Marvel" Ryan Jones, "Truth, Justice, and A Better Tomorrow - How Superman Embodies a Theology of Sound"

12:30 PM - 1:30 PM	Lunch and Group Photo	
1:30 PM - 3:00 PM	Panel 4: Teaching, Technology, and the Future of Religious Studies	**Chair:** Mary Hale; Nexus Centre **Presenters:** Dr. Stephanie Cavanaugh, "Teaching Early Modern Religion" Dr. Fiona Black and Dr. Andrew Wilson, "Is Community Engagement a Key for the Future of Religious Studies?" Dr. Ken M. Penner, "Digitizing Ancient Religious Texts in the Age of Artificial Intelligence" Dr. Rebekka King: "Countering the World Religions Paradigm with Contingency and Chance" Dr. Eva Mroczek: "Integrating Jewish Studies in Canadian Academia: Challenges and Possibilities"
3:00 PM - 3:15 PM	Break	
3:15 PM – 5:15 PM	Panel 5: Religion, Space, Law, and Institutional Power	**Chair:** Stacie Swain; Nexus Centre **Presenters:** Dr. Gerjan Alternburg: "On the Felling of Trees: Buddhist Monasticism and Law on Prince Edward Island" Dr. Barry Stephenson: "Faith-Based Organizations and the Financialization of Sacred Space in Canada"

		Tharuka Ann Kannangara: "Colonial Shadows: The Impact of Christian Missions on Buddhist Nationalism and Minority Segregation in Sri Lanka" Camden MacKenzie: “Legion Halls, House Churches, and Storefronts: Initial Findings on New Religions in Newfoundland” Dr. Alec Soucy: "Thich Nhat Hanh’s Buddhist Experiments" Dr. Harold Chad Hillier and Dr. Frankie Young, “Religion at the Supreme Court of Canada: trends over the past twenty-five years”

Conference Abstracts

Abstracts are listed alphabetically by presenter family name.

Dr. Gerjan Altenburg

Saint Francis Xavier University

On the Felling of Trees: Buddhist Monasticism and Law on Prince Edward Island

In August 2024, members of the Great Enlightenment Buddhist Institute Society (GEBIS) were clearing trees on Prince Edward Island (PEI). This community of Buddhist monks belongs to the Tibetan-inspired Bliss and Wisdom movement. Tragically, one monk was injured, and another died in hospital after a tree fell on a work crew. A representative for GEBIS subsequently pleaded guilty to three violations of PEI's Occupational Health and Safety Act. GEBIS, a Buddhist monastic organization, is now legally recognized as a formal workplace in Canada. In this paper, I put this provincial court case into conversation with passages from the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya, the canonical monastic code for most schools of Tibetan Buddhism. I show that cutting down trees remains a consistent concern for monastic lawyers throughout the history of Buddhist monasticism. And, when it comes to felling trees, secular laws in Canada might not align with religious ones.

Dr. Fiona Black and Dr. Andrew Wilson

Mount Allison University

Is Community Engagement a Key for the Future of Religious Studies?

This paper considers the future of Religious Studies through the lens of a new parallel program developed at Mount Allison University: Community Engaged Learning (CENL). Inspired in part by models of formation common to theological education, the program reimagines that concept in a secular, interdisciplinary, and community-based context. By connecting academic inquiry with collaborative work alongside community partners, CENL encourages students to engage questions of social justice, sustainability, civic responsibility, and community wellbeing while developing practical skills and professional experience. The paper explores the origins of the program, the motivations behind its creation, and its intersections with critical pedagogies, experiential education, and disciplinary Religious Studies. We argue that community-engaged learning offers one response to ongoing questions about the public relevance and vocational possibilities of Religious Studies. Finally, we reflect on both the successes and challenges of the program's early years, highlighting lessons learned from bridging academic study and community engagement.

Sherry Simons Brown

Saint Mary's University

Enemies to Lovers: How Gendered Debates Mirror the Narrative and Obscure the Message of 1 Timothy 2:9-15

1 Timothy 2:9-15 is a provocative, complex passage, used throughout the centuries and in modern churches as justification for the subjugation of women. This paper will explore the ongoing, highly politically charged debate concerning the passage's apparent claim that a gendered hierarchy, apparently established within the Creation myth, persists in perpetuity in spite of Galatians 3:28. A close and contextual reading will consider the ways in which conflicting interpretations may find common ground, and how this unexpected dynamic may in turn lead to a deeper understanding of these verses, as well as their enduring relevance.

Dr. Stephanie Cavanaugh

University of New Brunswick

Teaching Early Modern Religion

My proposed presentation will reflect on new lesson plans and assignments I recently implemented in my upper-level undergraduate course, "Heretics and Witches in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe," at the University of New Brunswick. In particular, I'll talk about how my students used a historical fiction graphic novel alongside traditional primary sources to question the nature of supernatural beliefs and religious persecution in comparative historical contexts. As a historian, my courses cover topics such as religious reformation, conversion, belief systems, inquisition, and more, with a focus on the medieval and early modern eras. I use a wide range of primary historical sources in the classroom; these are invaluable for demonstrating the complexity of religion and for teaching students to read critically and think historically.

Hasan Habib

Memorial University

Neofundamentalists, Muslim Seculars, Bangladesh: How Do You Make a Muslim Body without Organs

Debates surrounding Muslim politics have become increasingly prominent in both scholarly and public discourse following the July 2024 revolution in Bangladesh. Much of these discussions, however, rely on essentialist narratives that reduce complex political developments to the decline of secularism and the rise of Islamism. This not only obscures the connections and conditions that enable political developments, but also the emergence of newer Muslim political assemblages. This paper critically examines the current state of analysis on Muslim politics in Bangladesh in the context of these debates, focusing on 'Neofundamentalists' and 'Muslim Seculars'. Building on the works of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Olivier Roy, this essay develops the concept of a "Muslim Body without Organs" as an analytical framework for exploring connections

and limits of Muslim politics in Bangladesh.

Dr. Mary Hale

Saint Mary's University

"An Atheist, A Superhero, And a Wee Italian Marxist Walked into My Classroom…: Empathy, Religious Imagination, and a Dream of Social Change"

A paucity of experience with lived religion often presents itself in the religious studies classroom as bewilderment or hostility towards the idea that anyone would choose of their own free will to embrace a religious worldview. Using the "What if…" television series in the Marvel Cinematic Universe as a starting point, this paper explores the use of popular culture and Gramscian conceptions of common sense narratives as a gateways for helping religious "nones" understand religious development and internal diversity. The development of empathy for the religious imagination is then explored as a tool for reconceptualizing religion, particularly new or marginalized religions, as examples of social possibilities (Feltmate, 2016), making the argument that framing NRMs as such assists students to examine religion in all its configurations and social ramifications with nuance and empathy.

Dr. Harold Chad Hillier and Dr. Frankie Young

Wilfred Laurier University & University of New Brunswick

"Religion at the Supreme Court of Canada: trends over the past twenty-five years"

Across the world, societies around the world have witnessed numerous high-profile court cases where religion, religious persons and religious freedom have been a crucible issue. Concerns over speech, accommodation, education, clothing, public health, etc., have found societies increasingly turn to their courts to resolve contentious social concerns instead of parliaments or politicians. Under Wilfrid Laurier Press, a dozen scholars of religion, law and philosophy have contributed to a volume that examines some of the most prominent cases that have come before the Supreme Court of Canada over the past twenty years. Drawing from these contributions, my paper will identify some of the distinctive trends the Court has taken, and some of the criticisms and concerns these authors have raised about these decisions.

Dr. Adnan Hussain

Saint Mary's University

Light, Heart, Home: The Islamic Imagination of Ms. Marvel

This essay explores how the Disney+ series Ms. Marvel draws on Islamic ideas to tell the story of Kamala Khan, a Pakistani American teenager becoming a superhero. The series goes beyond familiar signs of Muslim life such as mosques, prayer, hijab, and family traditions. It also builds Kamala's story around three important ideas in Islamic thought: nūr (light), qalb (heart), and waṭan (home or homeland). Her "hard light" powers echo Islamic traditions that connect light with divine guidance and knowledge. Her struggles with family, secrecy, responsibility, and growing up can be read alongside Sufi ideas

about cultivating and “polishing” the heart. Finally, the series’ treatment of Partition, migration, and family memory shows that home is not simply a place on a map, but something carried through memory, relationships, and inherited history. Through these themes, Ms. Marvel shows how Islamic traditions can shape the deeper imagination of a superhero story rather than simply providing cultural background.

Ryan Jones

Saint Mary’s University

Truth, Justice, and A Better Tomorrow – How Superman Embodies a Theology of Sound

In a world characterized by apathy and visual detachment, Superman’s refusal to turn off his super-hearing models a profound commitment to the community of sound. This paper addresses the public engagement and dissemination of scholarship by using Superman to make the concept of sound as divinity more accessible. Moving beyond his origins as an American icon, I analyze Superman through Stephen H. Webb’s Theo-Acoustics to explore the morality of listening. By examining the Luthor experiment in All-Star Superman and the auditory faithful witness in James Gunn’s Superman (2025), I illustrate how sound creates an inescapable ethical awareness. This work is a cross-cultural perspective on contemporary religious life, demonstrating how fiction can help the public explore and redefine concepts of altruism and communal desire. This paper argues that superheroes provide a space for public scholarship, teaching the lifelong discipline of listening to a society struggling to hear one another

Zea Jones

Saint Mary’s University

Remembering How to Play: Methods in Indigenous Archaeology of Religion

This paper, based on my ongoing Master’s thesis, critically evaluates methods for the archaeology of religion, particularly in Indigenous contexts. Inspired by archaeological research from Emsik/Port Joli, Mi’kma’ki, I argue that many approaches to Indigenous religion and archaeology are insufficient to stand on their own and often risk reproducing colonial understandings of what religion can look like. I look towards the work of theologian Hanna Reichel, particularly their concept of epistemic promiscuity or “cruising method”, as well as ongoing methodological advances in archaeological theory, to understand how archaeologists and scholars of religion alike may better approach the idea of “religion” in the material past.

Tharuka Ann Kannangara

Queen’s College

Colonial Shadows: The Impact of Christian Missionaries on emergence of Buddhist Nationalism and Minority Segregation in Sri Lanka

This paper examines the spread of Christian missionaries in Sri Lanka and the emergence

of Buddhist nationalism, which has mirrored the actions of Christianity during colonial times and continues to influence modern society. It explores how this nationalism has contributed to the segregation of minorities long after the colonial era and the civil war. Additionally, the paper investigates the ongoing relationship between state and religion, analyzing its impact on citizens' daily lives and political decisions during elections.

Dr. Rebekka King

Saint Francis Xavier University

Countering the World Religions Paradigm with Contingency and Chance

As many scholars have shown, the discourse of "world religions" is a problematic constructed category, rooted in Western ethnocentrism and essentialism (Masuzawa, 2005; Nye 2019; Owen 2011). In this presentation, I describe my attempt to push back against the world religions paradigm by introducing chance into an introductory course. Rather than organizing the semester around a predetermined sequence of "major traditions," the four religious traditions covered in each section are selected at random using a wheel populated with twelve options (one recent section of the course covered Buddhism, New Religious Movements, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity). Each section thus creates a novel configuration in which meaning emerges partly from sequence, proximity, and juxtaposition, rather than from a prescribed presentation of content. Along with describing the course structure and student feedback, I make the case for what I call a "pedagogy of happenstance" and point to its usefulness in our current political and technological moment.

Camden MacKenzie

Queen's University

Legion Halls, House Churches, and Storefronts: Initial Findings on New Religions in Newfoundland

This paper summarizes the first phase of research in a study on new religious movements in Newfoundland. Archival records characterize Newfoundlanders as being particularly receptive to charismatic new religious movements, and the data backs this up. Three out of the five of Newfoundland's largest Christian denominations are new religious movements. New religions in Newfoundland can be broken down into five categories: established new religions, which have already been in Newfoundland for some time and have served a specific congregation for a few generations, immigrant new religions, which serve particular ethnic communities, new plants, which have arrived within the past ten years and are attempting to expand, service providers, who offer free supplemental practices to the community, and spiritual businesses, storefronts or individual practitioners that provide religious services for a fee. Initial research suggests that Newfoundland is following similar trends to the rest of Canada. The established new religions are in decline, with aging members dying without a new generation to replace them. Immigrant new religions are finding success, drawing

numbers from both the immigrant community and native Newfoundlanders. Spiritual businesses are by far the most successful, reflecting an increase in the "Spiritual but Not Religious" and a mainstreaming of "New Age" beliefs.

Dr. Lindsay Macumber

Saint Mary's University

Witchcraft All Along?: Community, Motherhood, and Religion in Agatha All Along

Agatha All Along (2024) coincides with a cultural moment in which more and more people are finding identity, power, and community through the figure of the witch. This widespread embrace of the witch as a liberatory figure within feminist spaces is, however, replete with tensions and often obscures the history of patriarchal violence this figure remains embroiled in. In this paper, I explore the representation, tropes, and promise of witchcraft in Agatha All Along. Focusing especially on motherhood and community, I argue that the series effectively satirizes constructions of the witch as the monstrous other but fails to subvert these constructions through a transnational and liberatory lens. Please note: Kathryn Hahn remains my style icon.

Dr. Eva Mroczek

Dalhousie University

Integrating Jewish Studies in Canadian Academia: Challenges and Possibilities

This presentation reflects on the first year of the new Certificate and Centre for Jewish Studies at Dalhousie University, Atlantic Canada's only program dedicated to the study of Judaism, and (to my knowledge) the only program that was launched post-2023. While Canadian academia is not safe from the problems plaguing our southern neighbours, there is potential in Canada - and specifically in our region - to build our academic spaces upon principles of collaboration, cross-cultural outreach, and positive engagement among diverse students and scholars. What is the future of the study of Judaism as part of Religious Studies and the Humanities more broadly, and alongside the study of Islam and Christianity, in Atlantic Canada? Given the highly politicized and divided nature of Jewish Studies, as well as the increasingly precarious state of higher education, how can we move forward in constructive ways?

Dr. M. Willis Munroe

University of New Brunswick

Permanent vs. Transitory Markers: Replication in the Study of Religion

Replication crises have impacted neighbouring fields of study, but thus far the Humanities have been relatively immune. This paper explores an attempt to replicate a classic study on the interaction between conflict and cultural markers using a new dataset. How people dress and mark their bodies is often determined (in part) by aspects of their religious beliefs or traditions. A 2007 study posited a relationship

between these markers (permanent and transitory) and the existence of external or internal conflict. An attempt to replicate this important paper has foregrounded the importance of things like dress and food taboos as being important markers of identity. This paper will explore these new results and comment on the procedure for replicating and expanding on existing humanities research.

Nasim Makaremi Nia

Memorial University

Threads of Belief: Women, Religion, and Migration

My presentation will discuss how my art practice explores the relationship between religion, memory, migration, identity, and the hidden forces that shape women's lives. I come from Iran and now live in Newfoundland and Labrador, so my work often moves between two cultural and emotional landscapes. Through drawing, painting, textiles, and mixed media, I use symbols, personal memories, historical references, and everyday materials to explore how religion, tradition, and social expectations shape the body, gender roles, and public life. In my artwork, I often refer to historical objects such as the Ardabil Carpet, which is connected to an important shrine in my hometown. I also use old photographs of women, their clothing, textile patterns, and materials related to women's bodies and menstruation. I approach religion not only as belief, but as something present in family life, visual culture, clothing, silence, history, and daily behaviour.

Dr. Ken M. Penner

Saint Francis Xavier University

Digitizing Ancient Religious Texts in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming how we access and interpret historical documents. However, commercial AI tools are prone to "hallucinations" when processing low-resource historical languages of religious scriptures such as ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. This paper presents the progress on an SSHRC-funded methodological investigation into validating generative AI for digital scholarly editions. I propose a "Human-in-the-Loop" (HITL) framework, where the text critic's role transitions from manual transcriber to prompt engineer, evaluator, and curator. Drawing on case studies from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint (specifically Codex Machalianus), I identify specific linguistic failure points and establish protocols to mitigate hallucinations. This project offers a reproducible methodological blueprint, providing professors with a practical strategy for integrating AI literacy into the classroom and ensuring that student engagement with the primary texts of foundational traditions remains historically rigorous in the digital age.

Dr. Trevor Pomeroy

Memorial University

From Multiplicity to Unity: Alan Watts on Christianity and Metaphysic

Alan Watts is often associated with Vedanta and perennial philosophy. In The Supreme

Identity, however, his treatment of Christianity is more complex than is sometimes recognized. Rather than reducing Christianity to Eastern metaphysics, Watts distinguishes between religion and what he calls "metaphysic," treating them as different yet related modes of expressing truth. Christianity does so through history, symbol, doctrine, and sacrament; metaphysic through the language of the Infinite. Focusing on this distinction, the paper examines whether Christian themes such as fall, redemption, incarnation, and union with God can be understood as expressions of a more universal movement from multiplicity to unity. It concludes by considering whether Watts's distinction between religion and metaphysic offers a way of understanding Christianity's relationship to other contemplative traditions without reducing one to the other.

Dr. Jennifer Porter

Memorial University

Discoveryland and the Eschatological Imagination: Retro-Futurism at Disneyland Paris

Tomorrowland is the eschatology of Disney's implicit religion: the hope for a Utopian future, set against the death imagery saturating the rest of the park. But Disney's parks do not all locate that hope in the same tense. In the streamlined, modernist Tomorrowlands found in Disneyland Parks globally, the future is rendered as present and achieved; visitors do not anticipate the future, they walk into it. Discoveryland in Disneyland Paris is different. As its name points forward, towards discovery and scientific progress, its theming points backward, a steampunk-informed retro-futuristic homage to the science fiction works of Jules Verne. The signature ride that determines the aesthetic for the whole land was Space Mountain: From the Earth to the Moon. The 2017 conversion of the Verne-inspired Space Mountain ride into a Star Wars attraction kept the retro aesthetic and inverted the tense, relocating hope temporally backward and geographically elsewhere, "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away." Reading these design choices theologically, I argue that Discoveryland's trajectory converts eschatology into mythology: forward-facing hope swapped for backward-facing myth beneath an unchanged surface. In Disneyland Paris, guests find no access to the Utopian promise of the other global Disney parks.

Dr. Jennifer Selby

Memorial University

On Capturing the Rituals and Aesthetics of Secular Sensibilities

Critical Secularism Studies have increasingly understood secularism as a formative regime of embodied dispositions, affects, and modes of perception and ritual. Building on debates surrounding the "secular body" and "secular sensibilities," this paper examines how - in the midst of a qualitative study - we can chart secular norms through everyday rituals, aesthetic judgments, emotions, and bodily practices. In a new study on international French schools, my collaborator and I pay particular attention to secular

aesthetics and ritualized practices as sites through which dominant cultural dispositions are reproduced and challenged. By foregrounding the sensorial, affective, and embodied dimensions of secular life, the paper aims to contribute to emerging efforts to theorize secularism as a lived and contested mode in imagined-as-secular international schools.

Dr. Alec Soucy

Saint Mary's University

Thich Nhat Hanh's Buddhist Experiments

Thich Nhat Hanh is known for his innovative approach to Buddhism. This approach was rooted in the ideas from the Buddhist Reform Movement in Vietnam that started around the time of his birth. He was an enthusiastic proponent of the need for Buddhism to be relevant and active in contemporary society, carrying forward Taixu's ideas of humanistic Buddhism. After he was exiled from Vietnam and active in building an international organization, however, he reverted to more traditional modes of building authority. These include writing commentaries on sutras, asserting authority as a Zen master and claiming to be part of a Zen lineage. This paper will explore some of the ways that Thich Nhat Hanh asserted authority, and how it relates to the particular discourses of power, authority and legitimacy within the religious "field".

Dr. Barry Stephenson

Memorial University

Faith-Based Organizations and the Financialization of Sacred Space in Canada

Across Canada, mainline congregations struggle to sustain costly urban worship spaces, and many turn to new partnerships in hopes of saving their buildings. This conceptual and methodological paper sets the stage for a forthcoming study of how faith-based organizations (FBOs) and asset-focused intermediaries broker the redevelopment, lease, and sale of these properties. Drawing on philanthrocapitalism—the application of market logics to social ends—we develop a framework that positions specialized FBOs as urban brokers who mediate between religious communities, municipalities, and the financial and property sectors, recasting worship spaces as "under-utilized assets" in need of "saving." We then outline a research design—combining archival analysis, stakeholder interviews, and spatial methods—for examining how the language of social impact and adaptive reuse turns religious heritage into a frontier for investment. We ask whether such interventions serve communities or signal a "mission drift" subordinating spiritual and public purposes to financial returns.