The Reverend Dr. Joyce Mercer, Professor of Practical Theology, at Virginia Theological Seminary, recommends the following books as part of the Bishop Payne Library's monthly series highlighting a faculty member's "picks":


Cadge, a sociologist of religion, in this insightful book explores how religion and spirituality are present in the day to day, on-the-ground experiences of patients and staff in hospitals. Based on her ethnographic study of religion in seventeen large medical centers, Cadge weaves together her own observations of these hospital environs with material from interviews with nurses, chaplains, CPE students, physicians, social workers, and other hospital staff, asking them how religion comes up in their work in the hospital and how they respond to it both personally and professionally. The resulting book offers a fascinating narrative that focuses especially on the work of hospital chaplains. Cadge considers how religion and religious differences come into play in the context of contemporary secular medical care. She is not uncritical about the evolution of chaplaincy in the history of American health care, in the wake of accreditation requirements and competing expectations about the appropriate place of religious and spiritual practices in secular health care. Cadge addresses not only the people who bring religious perspectives, values, and practices to their work in hospitals but also attends to spaces (chapels, intensive care units, surgical waiting areas) where religion come to bear on experiences of illness, healing, and dying. A must-read for anyone who makes pastoral visits in a hospital or interacts with chaplaincy staff and CPE students.


"Can there be a virtue in play?" asked Thomas Aquinas in the second part of the *Summa Theologica.* It might surprise some readers to learn that Aquinas responded with a resounding “yes,” appealing to none other than Augustine to do so! Play has been an important, though underdeveloped, focus of theological reflection for many centuries. Though not writing theologically on the subject, author Stuart Brown, a physician-researcher and founder of the National Institute for Play, contends that play is an essential aspect of the *being* of humans and other animals. Brown defines play as any sort of apparently purposeless, enjoyable activity in which we experience a diminished consciousness of self (the sense of losing oneself in play), the opportunity to improvise (i.e., openness—we never really know what’s going to happen when we play!), and ongoing motivation to continue doing the activity. In this book, Brown explores what happens in the brain and the body in relation to play, why play is so important to human development and well-being, and how play has the capacity to open up creativity and imagination.


Religious literacy involves the development of a basic, working framework for understanding diverse religious traditions and practices, both on their own terms and in light of one’s own faith. Dan Schipani is a veteran practical theologian and professor of pastoral care who brings together contributors from seven different religious perspectives (Aboriginal, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Humanist) to reflect on “core spiritual competencies,” sources, and practices important for intercultural pastoral care and religious literacy. As Christian faith leaders, we increasingly find ourselves called upon to interact with and respond to persons of other faith groups in contexts such as natural or human-made disasters, health care and school chaplaincies, civic celebrations, and other events in the public square. Focusing on core competencies (of knowing, being, and doing/companionship) of pastoral caregivers that speak to how caregivers do the work of intercultural spiritual care, Schipani also develops normative guidelines expressive of why we do so.