



**WESTERN**  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**Hungering for God: The Pastor as Spiritual Guide**

**A Doctor of Ministry Cohort**

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“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (Matthew 11:28–30, MSG).

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**Faculty Mentor:** Rev. Tom Schwanda, Ph.D.

**Length and Launch:** A three-year program launching in May 2023

**Location:** Western Theological Seminary (Holland, MI) with one off campus monastery retreat

**Schedule:** Two week-long seminars each year, in May and August.

**Reading:** See below for specific details.

**Purpose:**

This cohort focuses on the nature and dynamics of cultivating a personal and growing relationship with God. We will seek to “learn the unforced rhythms of grace” by “keep[ing] company with [Jesus]” so that we might “learn to live freely and lightly.” Guided by humility our goal is to become receptive and life-long learners in the spiritual school of Jesus and also model a similar hunger and desire for those with whom we live and minister. We can hunger for God because God first loved and delights in us and seeks friendship with us. The human longing for God is a response to God’s prior initiative in our lives and our world.

We will be shaped by the wisdom of St. Richard of Chichester, a thirteenth-century British bishop, who prayed:

“O, most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
May I know you more clearly;  
Love you more dearly;  
And follow you more nearly.”

The function of the minister has long been debated and the pastor fulfills many roles. Scripture and church history provide a resounding answer that, at least, it must include being a spiritual guide inspired by the Holy Spirit. This Doctor of Ministry cohort builds on this conviction and seeks to equip ministry leaders to assist others in knowing, loving, and serving God more fully.

A summary question for this cohort is: how can the principles and practices of Christian spirituality form and sustain the leader and support and renew them in ministry?

**Rationale:**

The North American culture is driven by busyness. This is true for the church as much as the general society. Busyness is dangerous to the spiritual life because it tends to drown out God's voice and also deceptively prompts leaders in assuming they can accomplish more by their human efforts. Often our consumeristic culture seeks to define pastors as religious entrepreneurs who become more focused on the externals than the inner life of the heart that Jesus always stressed. Further, ministers are lonely and exhausted from the many demands placed upon them by themselves and the growing expectations of their congregations or ministries. Amid this reality, pastors and people are spiritually starved for experiences, especially those which might fulfill them. Abba Poeman, a fourth–fifth-century Egyptian desert father, taught “do not give your heart to that which does not satisfy your heart.”

Through reading and reflecting on the devotional classics from the communion of the saints we will discover that every generation has desired a satisfying and sustaining relationship with God. While earlier and contemporary Christians might not always have gotten it right, they can help us critique our hunger and refine our longing for God. Central to any conversation regarding our communion with God is, to begin with, a clear sense of our identity. Pastors and ministry leaders must rediscover that this is established by union with Christ. This uniqueness will encourage students to deepen their own self-awareness. Once we understand who we are this can guide our next steps.

Through biblical, theological, and historical reflection and regular engagement with spiritual practices, we will examine how various individuals and movements across the history of the church have experienced and sought to nurture their relationship with the Triune God. This cohort also recognizes the critical need for creating a supportive community of disciples. The in-person seminars will be supplemented by Zoom lectures and discussions between classes to create trusted friendships for mutual encouragement and support. Our cohort will examine the foundation of union and communion with God, desiring maturing experiences with God, the proper use of spiritual practices, enjoyment and contemplation of God, and barriers and obstacles where people get stuck. A component of our time together is a week-long retreat in a Benedictine monastery to remind us of the importance of spiritual rhythms.

Hungering for God requires each participant to develop a final project that is grounded in their ministry setting. The goal is the integration of the cohort readings, spiritual practices, class discussions, and experiences to first deepen the student's spirituality and better equip them to guide those with whom they live and serve. A thesis will incorporate research and experience arising from the project. Regular written assignments will direct participants as they develop their project, and ongoing supervision from the mentor will assist students in completing their

thesis. Due to the nature of this cohort, participants are encouraged to seek support from their congregation or ministry organization.

### **Methodology:**

Two questions will guide our reading and discussions: How can we cultivate our own desire and experience of God so that we might know and love God more fully and how can we deepen our skills to guide others in growing in their relationship with God? Academic training does not always prepare us for the best means of reading Christian spirituality. Eugene Peterson rightly critiques this and suggests a better approach is to develop a “hermeneutics of adoration” (Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 68–9). Towards that end, we will not ignore the critical issues raised by the texts, but we will also want to be grateful for how they might challenge and form us as friends of Jesus Christ.

The first-year writing assignments focus on John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Students will write two papers, the first is your spiritual autobiography based on Christian’s journey, the main character of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. This is due for the initial seminar. The other paper, written for the second seminar, will examine how you would offer spiritual guidance to Christian, in his pilgrimage. Second-year assignments center around the devotional reflection of selective Psalms related to hungering for God and the creation of a rule of life (using Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*) to guide the ministry leader in both deepening their own inner life and ways in which they will engage and seek to encourage their congregation to mature in Christ. Throughout the three years, students will be writing their thesis/final project. This will become the primary writing assignment during the two third-year seminars.

The third seminar (May 2024) will be a retreat at a Benedictine monastery to introduce students to the rhythms of prayer and work. Periodic Zoom lectures and discussions (3 times a year) between seminars on key figures and movements in Christian spirituality will enhance our interaction with the themes of this cohort. This will also serve to build a more dynamic community for learning and support of each other.

### **Description of Seminars:**

**NB:** Seminar readings progressively reduce in number of pages to allow students to expand their specific readings for their projects.

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### **Reading and paper before the first seminar:**

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (There are many editions of this work, I have found those edited by Roger Sharrock, Roger Pooley, or W. R. Owens to be most reliable. For further details on all writing assignments see Canvas section on assignments.)

## **Seminar #1: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Foundations for Hungering for God (May 15-19, 2023)**

### **Readings:**

Andrews, Charles Wesley, ed. *Memoir of Mrs. Anne R. Page* (124 pp)

Augustine, *The Confessions* (I will be using the New City Press (1997) edition translated by Maria Boulding, which is considered an excellent translation (300pp)

Brother Lawrence & Frank Laubach. *Practicing His Presence* (116 pp)

Francis de Sales. *Introduction to the Devout Life* (315 pp)

Henry, Matthew. *Daily Communion with God* (112 pp)

Kelly, Thomas. *A Testament of Devotion* (124 pp)

Schwanda, Tom. *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative–Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (254 pp)

Sheldrake, Philip. *A Brief History of Spirituality* (232 pp)

Thurman, Howard. *Disciplines of the Spirit* (116 pp)

Tozer, A. W. *The Pursuit of God* (123 pp)

Underhill, Evelyn. *The Spiritual Life* (118 pp)

Canvas Readings (Jonathan Edwards, *Personal Narrative*, Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers)

### **Suggested Reference Source:**

Calhoun, Adele. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

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## **Seminar #2: Pastor as Spiritual Guide (August 28–September 1, 2023)**

### **Readings:**

Anyabwile, Thabiti M. *The Faithful Preacher: Recapturing the Vision of Three Pioneering African American Pastors*

Baxter, Richard. *The Reformed Pastor*

Gregory the Great, *The Pastoral Rule*

John Chrysostom. *The Six Books of the Priesthood*

Father John of Kronstadt, *Spiritual Counsels*

Peterson, Eugene. *Working the Angles*

Senkbeil, Harold L. *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* (292 pp)

Spener, Philip Jacob. *Pia Desideria*

Swan, Laura. *The Forgotten Desert Mothers*

Canvas Readings (Selective readings from Hild of Whitby and Brigid of Kildare (Celtic spiritual leaders), Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila, *Life*, Anne Dutton, Katherina Schutz Zell, Phoebe Palmer, Thomas Charles, *Spiritual Counsels*, Philip Doddridge, *Lectures ...on Several Branches of the Ministerial Office*, Theophan the Recluse, *Letters*)

**Suggested Reference Sources:**

John T. McNeill, *The History of the Cure of Soul* and Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend*, ch 2.

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**Seminar #3: Desire, Motivation, and Gratitude (May 2024) Monastery Retreat**

**Readings:**

Benedict, *Rule of Benedict*

Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*

John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*

Madame Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (165 pp)

Schlink, Basilea. *My All for Him*

Sheldrake, Philip. *Befriending Our Desires*

Thomas à Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*

Canvas Readings (Samuel Rutherford, *Letters*, Richard Sibbes, *Breathing After God*)

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#### **Seminar #4: Contemplation and Enjoyment of God (August 2024)**

##### **Readings:**

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Prayer*

Holmes, Barbara. *Joy Unspeakable*

Laird, Martin. *Into the Silent Land*

Laubach, Frank, *Letters of a Modern Mystic*

Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Teresa of Avila. *Life*

West, Elizabeth, *Memoirs, or Spiritual Exercises*

Canvas Readings (Schwanda, "To Gaze on the Beauty of the Lord" evangelical contemplation essay in *JSFSC*)

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#### **Seminar #5: Barriers and Obstacles to Spiritual Maturity (May 2025)**

##### **Readings:**

Andrews, Williams, ed. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*

John of the Cross. *The Dark Night*

Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*

Voetius, Gisbertus. *Spiritual Desertion*

Canvas Readings (Steve Harper and Walter Trobisch on aridity)

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**Seminar #6: Evangelical Spirituality (August 2025)** This seminar will weave and integrate all of the previous five seminar themes together

Schwanda, Tom. *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield* (298 pp).

Canvas Readings (Early Evangelical Spirituality readings)

**Projected Schedule of Seminars:**

Launch <i>DM850</i>	May 15-19, 2023	WTS
2 <sup>nd</sup> Seminar <i>DM851</i>	August 28-Sept 1, 2023	WTS
3 <sup>rd</sup> Seminar <i>DM860</i>	May 2024	Monastery Retreat
4 <sup>th</sup> Seminar <i>DM861</i>	August 2024	WTS
5 <sup>th</sup> Seminar <i>DM870</i>	May 2025	WTS
Final Seminar <i>DM871</i>	August 2025	WTS
Commencement	April 2026	WTS

**Mentor Bio:**

Tom Schwanda is associate professor emeritus of Christian Formation and Ministry at Wheaton College and adjunct professor of Christian spirituality at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America and was a pastor for eighteen years in three churches. Tom and his wife, Grace, live in Grand Rapids and have two children and five grandchildren

He earned a D.Min. in Christian spirituality from Fuller Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in historical theology from Durham University (England) focusing on the contemplative spirituality of the Puritans. He is a trained spiritual director and has been privileged to companion others in their spiritual journeys for over thirty-five years.

His passion is to grow deeper in his relationship with God so that he might encourage others along the same path. One of his primary goals is to help Protestants recognize the nature and importance of contemplation and enjoyment of God. Most of his articles, book chapters, and books reflect this concern including *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative–Mystical Piety of Puritanism* and *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield*.



### **A Selective Bibliography:**

Paulist Press publishes an extensive collection of valuable resources in their Classics of Western Spirituality series.

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Bloom, Anthony. *Beginning to Pray*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1975.

Bunyan, John. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Edited and intro by W. R. Owens. London: Penguin Books, 1987.

Calvin, John. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. edited by John T. McNeill and translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.

Calvin, John. *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*. ed. Elsie Anne McKee. Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 2001.

Chan, Simon. *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Dyck, Cornelius J. ed. *Spiritual Life in Anabaptism: Classic Devotional Resources*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995.

Foster, Richard J. and James B. Smith. eds. *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

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Harmless, William. *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

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- Holder, Arthur, ed. *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*. London: Routledge, 2010.
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- Paris, Peter J. *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
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