



**Performing the Bible:  
Exploring the Performance Genres of Scripture**



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*A Doctor of Ministry Cohort*

*In affiliation with*

*The Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination*

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"... to convince aspiring actors and writers within the church that they are not imposing an art form on Scripture and on the church. Quite the contrary—they are heirs of a tradition."

Thomas Boogaart, in *Touching the Altar*<sup>1</sup>

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**Purpose:**

"Performing the Bible: Exploring the Performance Genres of Scripture" Doctor of Ministry Cohort invites those who love Scripture to deeply consider its performance genres. Applicants need only bring the scholarly disciplines of reading and writing along with a willingness to pray and play. We expect the cohort to include preachers and worship leaders as well as some scholars with gifts in the arts. Together we will learn to reclaim the action and orality that was lost when the Bible became a "book."

**Faculty Mentors:** Karen Bohm Barker and Jeff Barker

**Guest Instructors:** Gifted guest lecturers with a variety of relevant expertise will participate in each of the six teaching units.

**Length & Launch:** A three-year program, plus time for the writing and defense of the D.Min. Final Project. The cohort will launch in April 2023.

**Location:** Five of the seminars will take place in Holland, Michigan, with one including a theatre trip to Chicago. One of the seminars will travel to Israel or the United Kingdom.

**Seminar Schedule:** April 17-21, 2023  
October 2023  
Other dates in April/October 2024-2025 TBD

## A Long Adventure

In the fall of 2002, Jeff Barker read Hebrew scholar Tom Boogaart's essay "Drama and the Sacred" that was included in *Touching the Altar*, a book edited by Carol Bechtel and focused on the Old Testament for Christian worship. Jeff and Tom entered into an adventure, along with their students and various groups associated with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. That adventure resulted in the book *Performing the Plays of the Bible*.

More recently, Jeff has joined Greek scholar John Vonder Bruegge to explore the narrative parables of Jesus. Together John and Jeff are crafting new translations and writing commentary focused on the parables as stories to be told publicly rather than merely stories to be read privately.

But Jeff, Tom, and John are not alone. Various groups around the world have focused in recent years on studying the Bible's orality. Those groups include Biblical Performance Criticism, International Orality Network, Network of Biblical Storytellers, and many, many others.

## Rationale

Those who study this subject aim to encounter the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical tools needed to bridge the gap that biblical performance criticism scholar Peter Perry has called "the gap that has emerged from the academic study of the Bible."<sup>2</sup> Our goal in the scholarly journey of this D.Min. cohort is to rejoin theory and practice, performer and audience, text and context, intention and fulfillment, rehearsal and performance. Through these activities, we hope to rediscover biblical meanings that were born in an ancient world—a world that John Walton and Brent Sandy have said "was consistently hearing-dominant rather than text-dominant."<sup>3</sup> The participants of this course will aim to re-enter *a lost world of scripture* so that they may lead others to find their way to that world.

This course is an introductory level adventure in several key performance genres found in Scripture. Western Theological Seminary is not a theatre or music school, but this course intends to affirm a life-long journey with the Bible and its performance genres. This journey is not meant to be one in which the Bible is fenced off for a select few. The goal of this study is to empower leaders who will teach *perspicuity* as Eugene Peterson explained it- "the conviction that the Bible is basically readable as it is. It is not a body of secret lore accessible only to an academic elite."<sup>4</sup> Neither is it an artistic lore, but with a bit of coaching, all are welcome to find their place in the performance of the Bible.

## **The Rhythms of our Course of Study**

We will meet in person twice each year in two seminars (or intensives) - one in the fall and one in the spring. Most of those intensives will meet in Holland, Michigan on Western's campus. Two of the intensives will involve travel to another location.

Each seminar will have a central focus, but throughout the intensives we will consistently prepare for and share in the tasks of performances of biblical genres. We will analyze, write, memorize, rehearse, and present. We will learn new skills and refine old practices that involve our bodies, voices, and creativity, always with the Bible as our primary text. We will have many other texts alongside our Scriptures.

During each seminar we will meet with guest scholars and artists to help us. We will travel for inspiration and hope. Each of us will write careful reflections on what we are learning, and we will develop projects within our home contexts—projects whose results can be shared on video or in person for analysis and encouragement. The six seminars will result in a final thesis paper/project.

Each intensive will include a variety of solo and group performances of scripture shared live and on video.

Guests and texts will be firmly determined about a month prior to each intensive at the time of the release of the syllabus for each of the six courses.

### **DM850 Seminar One: Biblical Performance Criticism**

#### **Suggested texts and experiences:**

*Eat This Book* by Eugene Peterson

*The Lost World of Scripture* by John Walton and Brent Sandy

*Story Journey* by Thomas Boomershine

*The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media* by Holly Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones

### **DM851 Seminar Two: Ancient Dramas of the Hebrew People**

Part of this intensive will take place in the city of Chicago where we will attend the theatre together.

#### **Suggested texts and experiences:**

*Performing the Plays of the Bible* by Jeff Barker and Thomas Boogaart

*Bible as Theatre* by Shimon Levy

Examination of biblical versions formatted for performance including the *Dramatized Bible*, *SourceView*, and *The Voice*. Given our proximity to Eugene Peterson Center, we will give careful consideration to *The Message* version along with standards (NSRV, NIV, NLT, KJV, YLT). We will also give attention to *De Nyew Testament* and some very new translations.

### **DM860 Seminar Three: Telling the Stories of Jesus**

#### **Suggested texts and experiences:**

*Tell it Slant* by Eugene Peterson

*Telling the Stories of Jesus* by Jeff Barker and John Vonder Bruegge

*Bringing the Word to Life* by Richard Ward and David Trobisch

*Stop Reading and Start Proclaiming* by Douglas Leal

*Scripture Memorization Made Possible* by Leilani Charis

### **DM861 Seminar Four: The Sermon on the Mount**

We move again to an off-campus site, either in Israel/Palestine or England.

#### **Suggested texts and experiences:**

*Performance in Preaching* edited by Jana Childers and Clayton Schmidt

*The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock*

*Preaching and the Dramatic Arts* by E. Winston Jones

*The Story Lectionary* edited by David McDonald

*Writing for the Ear, Preaching from the Heart* by Donna Giver-Johnston

*Preaching and Missional Engagement* by Jonathan Brown

### **DM870 Seminar Five: Testimony**

#### **Suggested texts and experiences:**

*The Storytelling Church* by Jeff Barker

*Craddock Stories* edited by Mike Graves and Richard Ward

*Story Proof* by Kendall Haven

## **DM871 Seminar Six: Psalms and Spoken Word Poetry**

### **Suggested texts and experiences:**

*Answering God: the Psalms as Tools for Prayer* by Eugene Peterson

*The Anglican Chant Psalter*

"Pop Star Poetics" by David Browne

*The Spoken Word Revolution* edited by Mark Eleveld

*The One for Whom Food is Not Enough* by Amanda Gorman

### **Ongoing:**

We will have at least one whole-cohort meeting online between intensives. Likewise between seminars, mentors will host one or two online gatherings with their smaller advising circle.

### **//Other Details//**

### **Candidates:**

This cohort welcomes candidates with a master's degree who are able to articulate a theological undergirding to their calling to biblical scholarship and demonstrate appropriate experience and competency. Writing samples will be required in the admissions packet. A recent TOEFL score of at least 650 is required if English is not the native language of the candidate.

### **Final Project:**

For their thesis, students will create or lead a significant performance in their biblical genre of choice. A corresponding paper will provide the text formatted as script, analysis, journal of process, and post-performance evaluation. The paper along with a video of the performance will be presented to an external supervisor, faculty mentor, and other readers.

### **Where and When:**

The Cohort will meet twice a year (Fall/Spring) for a week at a time. Five intensives will be on campus at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Two of our intensives will include traveling in order to provide artistic inspiration and a pilgrimage. All travel and lodging expenses are the responsibility of the student.

<b>Course</b>	<b>Planned Dates</b>	<b>Planned Location</b>
DM850	April 17-21, 2023	Holland, MI
DM851	October 2023	Holland, MI & Chicago, IL
DM860	April 2024	Holland, MI
DM861	October 2024	Israel or England
DM870	April 2025	Holland, MI
DM871	October 2025	Holland, MI

## **Mentor Bios**

The Bible is more than a book. Our beloved Scriptures are replete with genres intended to be publicly presented—in other words, performed. These biblical dramas, songs, sermons, parables, and testimonies are begging to leap from the page. There is much to be learned by embracing these ancient scripts in a manner in which they are not only read but seen, heard, and felt. Scholars of Biblical Performance Criticism work to understand performance genres and identify those genres within Scripture. Who better to guide that journey than scholars who have spent their lives learning the Scriptures alongside the genres of theatre, music, worship, and speech communication? Meet your cohort mentors, Jeff and Karen Barker.

### **Jeff Barker**



**Jeff** is Professor Emeritus of Theatre and Worship Arts at Northwestern College in Iowa. He continues to serve on the faculty of the doctoral program at the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies. He is a director, playwright, screenwriter, and author. Jeff has written more than 50 plays, including the award-winning *Kin: the Trial of Carrie Buck*, about a landmark Supreme Court case connecting Nazi and American eugenics. Jeff created the musical *And God Said* in collaboration with Broadway composer Ron Melrose, as part of the Ancient Hebrew Drama Project.

Out of that project grew his book, co-authored with Tom Boogaart, *Performing the Plays of the Bible*. Jeff's feature-length films include *Of Minor Prophets*, a modern re-telling of the Hosea story. Jeff's books also include the biographical trilogy of Reformed Church in America missionary Arlene Schuiteman (*Sioux Center Sudan*, *Iowa Ethiopia*, and *Zambia Home*). He holds a Master of Fine Arts from the University of South Dakota, a Master's degree in theatre performance from Northern Illinois University, and a Bachelor of Arts in theatre from Seattle Pacific University. He is married to Karen, and they have three children: Joseph, Hannah, and Daniel. Jeff was selected as Iowa Professor of the Year in 2006.

## Karen Bohm Barker



**Karen** is Professor Emeritus of Theatre at Northwestern College in Iowa where she also served as Dean of Arts and Humanities until 2020. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in acting from Northern Illinois University and a BA in psychology from Greenville University. She is a teacher, director, and writer. Her numerous acting credits include a recent performance at the Mississippi Delta Tennessee Williams Festival and a national tour of *Early One Morning*, a one-woman musical that tells the complete story of the biblical character Mary Magdalene. Karen received the Gold Medallion from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, and Northwestern awarded Karen its Faculty Inspirational Service Award in 2016. She has been married to Jeff since a long time ago, and together they have performed their comic characters Will and Jentina for countless church gatherings, including the Reformed Church in America's Spring Sabbath. Karen is an elder at Trinity Reformed Church in Orange City where she has served as Vice-President of Consistory. She and Jeff have one grandchild whose musical parents named him "Wolfgang."

Questions can be directed to the Admissions Office at Western Theological Seminary. See information at the WTS website: <https://www.westernsem.edu/academics/degrees/doctor-ministry-degree/>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas A. Boogaart, *Touching the Altar: The Old Testament for Christian Worship*, edited by Carol M. Bechtel (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 58.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Perry, "Biblical Performance Criticism: Survey and Prospects," *Religions: Special Issue—Current Trends in New Testament Study*, edited by Robert E. Van Voorst, January, 2020 [https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special\\_issues/New Testament](https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/New_Testament)

<sup>3</sup>John H. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 19.

<sup>4</sup>Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 167.