



Spiritual Formation & Discernment of Place

Speciality Doctor of Ministry Cohort

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Kamalski [*DMin. in Leadership & Spiritual Formation (Portland Seminary); MA in Spiritual Formation & Soul Care (Institute for Spiritual Formation at Talbot School of Theology; Professionally Certified Spiritual Director, Gallup Strengths & Leadership Development Coach)*]

Length: A 36-credit degree comprised of six in-person seminars over three years, plus completion and defense of the Doctor of Ministry project during the final semester of the DMin program.

Locations:

1. **Residency Introduction (1) & Conclusion (6):** Holland, MI (*Western Theological Seminary*)
2. **Residency Week 2:** Washington, D.C. (*Missio Alliance & Christ City Church DC*)
3. **Residency Week 3:** Portland, OR (*Portland Seminary*) & Mount Angel Abbey (*Saint Benedict*)
4. **Residency Week 4:** San Diego, CA & Tijuana, México (*Thresholds Community, Journey Home*)
5. **Residency Week 5:** Cape Town & Jeffreys Bay, South Africa (*The Warehouse, Victory4All*)

Seminar Schedule (Residency Weeks):

1. **Fall (Year 1):** September 26th – October 3rd, 2026 (*7 nights, Sat PM – Sat AM*) (Holland, MI)
2. **Spring (Year 1):** February 21st – 26th, 2027 (*5 nights, Sun PM – Fri AM*) (Washington D.C.)
3. **Fall (Year 2):** *Likely* October 2nd – 9th, 2027 (*7 nights, Sat PM – Sat AM*) (Portland, OR)
4. **Spring (Year 2):** *Likely* Feb 27th – Mar 3rd, 2028 (*5 nights, Sun PM – Fri AM*) (San Diego, CA)
5. **Summer (Year 2):** *Likely* May 26th – Jun 4th, 2028 (*9 nights, Fri PM – Sun AM*) (South Africa)
6. **Fall (Year 3):** *Likely* October 1st – 6th, 2028 (*5 nights, Sun PM – Fri AM*) (Holland, MI)

***Note:** Residency Week 5 will take place during a Summer 2028 half-term. The second half-term will take place during Fall 2028 to allow plenty of time for final project and dissertation writing.

Guest Instructors: Seasoned Christian leaders (and their respective Kingdom initiatives) will help facilitate deep learning, reflective formation, and discernment of their particular social locations during each Residency Week. Additional subject matter experts in spiritual formation, holistic soul care, discernment, social location, and healthy missional expression will facilitate virtual cohort learning sessions in-between Residency Weeks. There will be an emphasis on *spiritual formation and discernment in one's place* maintained, plus an intentional effort to feature marginalized voices (*Women, People of Color, and Majority World voices*) as teachers. Please reach out to Dr. Kamalski (chris.kamalski@westernsem.edu) to learn about potential cohort partners.

Cohort Vision & Purpose: *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (Jn. 15:15-16).* Jesus' invitation of discerned collaboration in friendship extends to all Spiritual Formation & Discernment of Place students and is the formational foundation of this cohort. This invitation to vocational co-creation is rooted in listening discernment of place with God, for *"all theology is socially located."*

The vision of the Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation & Discernment of Place (SFDP) cohort is to lovingly develop and form honest, responsive Christian leaders with wise, flourishing hearts, who listen with God for the good of the world, rooted in Christ our Friend.

Together, we will create a safe and mutually-supportive cohort that is maturing in health and wholeness towards our vocational callings. This communal maturation will take place through deep listening and reflective discernment as foundational rhythms for those who are learning how to seek the flourishing of the *"Community of Creation"* that already exists in the particular social location that they call home.

Perhaps Quaker writer Parker Palmer envisions our cohort purpose best in *Let Your Life Speak*, writing *"As I learn more about the seed of true self that was planted when I was born, I also learn more about the ecosystem in which I was planted—the network of communal relations in which I am called to live responsively, accountably, and joyfully with beings of every sort. Only when I know both seed and system, self and community, can I embody the great commandment to love both my neighbor and myself"* (Palmer, 17).

Cohort Rationale & Framing Question: Ronald Rolheiser writes provocatively that Christian leaders are struggling deeply with *"the pluralism of an age which is rich in everything, except clarity."* Why would we lack clarity in a cultural moment where everything is seemingly available by the tap of an app on our phones? Rolheiser suggests that our inability to make sense of the challenges—both in our own spiritual formation and in addressing wider systemic injustice—is in large part because *"our age constitutes a virtual conspiracy against the interior life."* In other words, Christian leaders, reflecting humanity's futility more broadly, far too frequently embrace shallow lives as broken cisterns (Jer. 2:13) rather than living rooted in a sustained, healthy manner as maturing friends of Christ (Jn. 15:13–16). When almost every cultural system creates some form of systemic inequality and our corresponding attempts as leaders at healthy formational habits are also not sustainable, it is no wonder that the Church often atrophies as a result.

Isn't there a more honest, healthy, and holistic pathway forward for maturing Christian leaders that is rooted in Christ, offering authentic *"streams of living water [that] flow from within?"* (Jn. 7:38b) Isn't it possible for growing Christian leaders to listen and discern the voice of God, calling us towards wholeness, shalom, and equitable restoration within our communities? Can Christian leaders faithfully learn to accompany others as they connect to, and abide in Christ? *They can and will within the safety of this cohort.*

The Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation & Discernment of Place (SFDP) seeks to answer this framing question in humbly charting a pathway forward: *What does a biblical, resilient, pragmatic, holistic, healthy, and transformational model of spiritual formation and reflective discernment of 'our place' for good look like in our cultural moment?* Through thoughtful analysis, listening reflection, and humble dialogue, the SFDP Cohort will develop, mature, and empower Christian leaders in their own formation, and in the art and skill of discernment of place, commissioning adaptive servant leaders for such a time as this. You are invited to prayerfully listen to God's heart, asking whether you are called *for such transformative work as this.*

Cohort Framework:

- **Year One:**
 - Fall 1: "Working Models of Formation"
 - Abstract: Developing a working model of spiritual formation, discernment of place, and holistic developmental soul care to frame the rest of our cohort program.
 - Core Question: What does a biblical, resilient, pragmatic, holistic, healthy, & transformational model of spiritual formation and discernment of place *'for good'* look like in our cultural moment?
 - Spring 1: "Working Rhythms & Methods of Discerning Place"
 - Abstract: Developing working rhythms and methods of *'hearing God as normal,'* listening prayer, introduction to discernment of place, and overall spiritual rhythms that posture the soul towards maturing, holistic listening and missional engagement with Christ, rooted in a particular social location.
 - Core Question: How do we hear God with open and responsive hearts, discerning God's voice accurately, with clear conviction, while posturing our bodies in a grounded, engaged way towards the world, in a culture of confusion that lacks clarity and focus?
- **Year Two:**
 - Fall 2: "Deep Streams within the Church Universal"
 - Abstract: Locating, understanding, and celebrating the major formational streams of the historical, universal Church. Seeking to internalize and own the gifts each stream brings to the global Body of Christ as we mature in

fullness as formational Christian leaders. Internalizing *'where we find our Truest Self within the Kingdom Story'* and what the implications of this ecosystem is for our ongoing vocational calling in this next season of life.

- Core Question: How do we celebrate our streams of faith while opening our souls to the formative practices, rhythms, perspectives, and growth available to the Church universal and historic? Where do I most naturally belong, find the most nourishment within, and *'speak the language'* of a particular stream (ecosystem) within the Church?
- Spring 2: *"Working Models of Discernment, Adaptive Listening, & Holistic Missional Engagement of Place"*
 - Abstract: Developing a working model of discernment of place that emphasizes holistic, communal flourishing for all, particularly those who have suffered from systemic injustice and inequality of formational opportunity. Introduction of the art and skill of adaptive listening (*"Getting on the Balcony"*) as a primary examen for missional engagement.
 - Core Question: How do we effectively accompany the soul of another human being down into their depths—the chaotic, unexplored mixture of true and false selves, defenses, and family systems? What are best practices in discerning how to encounter God in love within a particular social location? What is the art + skill necessary to flourish in the ministry of spiritual discernment and adaptive listening for healthy, sustainable missional engagement?
- Summer 2: *"Place Informs Posture: Global Formation Rooted in a Particular Social Location"*
 - Abstract: Putting down deep roots within the particular social location to which one is called, with eyes open to the cultural complexities, social realities, systemic injustices, and inter-connectedness of the Church's formation across the globe, yet embodied in an actual place you call *'home.'*
 - **Half Semester Session (May/June)*
 - Core Question: If my place informs my posture, how could the formation of my community be contextualized through a local + global lens? How could non-Western, non-Dominant culture, non-White lenses mature our formational and missional efforts in the US in this cultural moment?
- Year Three:
 - Fall 3: *"Understanding Seed and Ecosystem"*
 - Abstract: My own soul's formation with God, in light of the systemic realities and needs of my particular social location, is my vocational pathway forward where I am invited to co-create goodness within the Kingdom of God with my life.
 - **Half Semester Session (September/October)*
 - Core Question: How is my soul being formed by God in this season, as I am rooted within a particular social location? What am I being invited to co-create with God in the larger ecosystem where I live?

- Spring 3: "Landing the Plane"
 - Abstract: All great and challenging journeys must come to an end—and yet, the end often feels like a new beginning. Our final semester focus will be on *"landing the plane;"* namely, in seeing your completed thesis dissertation project over the finish line as an approved doctoral project, resulting in the granting of your DMin. degree..
 - Core Question: What does it mean for you to faithfully *'land the plane'* of this three-year doctoral journey, submitting an *'imperfectly complete'* thesis dissertation project that illuminates a new starting line for vocational ministry for you as you graduate from this doctoral cohort?

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Kamalski, *DMin. Leadership & Spiritual Formation* (Portland Seminary)

Dr. Kamalski's doctoral work is entitled *['Place Informs Posture: Developing a Model of Spatial Lectio Divina for Under-Resourced African Christian Leaders.'](#)* He created a new model of spiritual formation that centers a spatial approach to practicing Lectio Divina within the crucible of an under-resourced leadership community, to help discern the vocational calling and holistic empowerment of African Christian leaders. His full CV is [here](#).

Chris is a professionally trained Spiritual Director and Gallup Certified Strengths Coach for [Restore Voice](#) who has extensive experience in forming leaders to serve others in a variety of cross-cultural contexts. He has served as the Editorial Director and Writing Cohort Director for [Missio Alliance](#) since 2022. Chris loves the developmental process of mentoring, coaching, & directing a person coming alive into their vocational call. He enjoys creating environments for people to experience God and their true self through facilitated teaching of spiritual formation, leadership and strengths-based development, practical theology, and discerned spiritual direction of the work they are made to create with their lives.

Chris lives with his family in Jeffreys Bay, South Africa. His wife Maxie is Afrikaans, and their girls are dual American/South African citizens! The formational complexities of place is their lived reality.

Tuition, Costs, and Fees:

Tuition rates remain fixed for the duration of the three-year program, with an additional cost if students need further time to complete their final projects. This cohort will be subject to the 2026/2027 tuition rate, which will be set in February 2026. For current D.Min. tuition and fees please see [the WTS website](#). Students are responsible for all travel, food, and lodging costs associated with attending the six required seminars.

Projected Schedule:

Course	Dates	Location
Launch <i>DM850</i>	September 26th – October 3rd, 2026 (7 nights, Sat PM – Sat AM)	WTS
2 nd Seminar <i>DM851</i>	February 21st – 26th, 2027 (5 nights, Sun PM – Fri AM)	Washington, D.C.
3 rd Seminar <i>DM860</i>	<u>Likely</u> October 2nd – 9th, 2027 (7 nights, Sat PM – Sat AM)	Portland, OR
4 th Seminar <i>DM861</i>	<u>Likely</u> Feb 27th – Mar 3rd, 2028 (5 nights, Sun PM – Fri AM)	San Diego, CA & Tijuana, México
5 th Seminar <i>DM870</i>	<u>Likely</u> May 26th – Jun 4th, 2028 (9 nights, Fri PM – Sun AM)	Cape Town & Jeffreys Bay, South Africa
Final Seminar <i>DM871</i>	<u>Likely</u> October 1st – 6th, 2028 (5 nights, Sun PM – Fri AM)	WTS
Commencement	April 2029	WTS

Possible travel sites: *See above.*

More information on the Doctor of Ministry at WTS is available at our [website](#).

Questions? Please contact the following:

Cohort Information

- Dr. Chris Kamalski, chris.kamalski@westernsem.edu

Application & Admission

- Drew Brown, drew.brown@westernsem.edu

D.Min. Program

- Yoli Vega, yolanda.vega@westernsem.edu