

Walking the Sabbath Way
Living and Leading Within the Rhythms of Grace

WESTERN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Walking the Sabbath Way

A DMin Cohort Facilitated by Travis West

*The Sabbath is a day for the sake of life. . . .
It is not an interlude but the climax of living.*

~ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* ~

PURPOSE

In the biblical imagination, Sabbath is a practice enabling a rhythm of life that leads to the flourishing of family, neighborhood, and all of creation. It is the taproot nourishing the Gospel, whose branches are justice, whose leaves are delight, and whose fruit is *shalom*. Sabbath is not an add-on to an otherwise busy, distracted, or overwhelmed life, but is life's core organizing principle, the metronome by which our lives fall in step with the Spirit. As Heschel put it, Sabbath is "not an interlude but the climax of living."

It is also radically counter-cultural, a weekly protest against the formative powers of a culture steeped in speed, scarcity, productivity, achievement, and exclusion. Ironically, practicing Sabbath today is *really* hard work. And this is as true for those in full-time ministry as it is for those in business or industry.

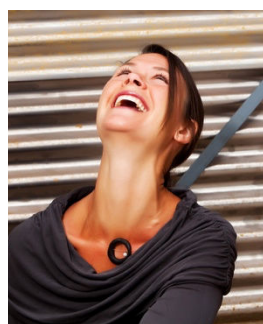
This Doctor of Ministry cohort will provide leaders in various forms of ministry a space to both explore *and* experience the transformative potential of Sabbath, in their personal and professional lives. We will explore Sabbath rhythms not as utopian and unattainable visions of luxury or privilege, and equally not as an abstract theory or a "good idea," but as a life vision grounded in flourishing and rooted in the warp and woof of our real lives in ministry and with family and friends. We will imagine together a way of reorienting our lives with God toward something that is slower, more intentional, more delight-filled, more abundant, more vital.

This Doctor of Ministry track is open to anyone who loves God, desires to live into more sustainable life rhythms, and longs to explore this in community with others who are similarly stumbling toward wholeness. The DMin is a ministry degree, and its purpose is to form people in lives of service to God, the church, and the world. You don't need to be in full-time vocational ministry to apply, but do expect a level of theological and spiritual reflection on themes inherent to lives devoted to ministering to a broken and hurting world.

TEACHING TEAM



Lead Faculty | Travis West is professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Western Theological Seminary. His most recent book, *The Sabbath Way*, prompted him to want to offer this DMin cohort. His previous books, *Biblical Hebrew: An Interactive Approach* and *The Art of Biblical Performance*, advocate for incorporating performance, embodiment, and play into the process of learning biblical Hebrew and interpreting biblical stories. When he's away from the classroom and the writing desk, he can be found searching for wonder while walking the fields near his house, going to a farmer's market, watching a movie, or hanging out with his wife, who is his most consistent source of delight and amazement.



Guest Lecturer | Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer is a poet, teacher, speaker, and writing facilitator who co-hosts *Emerging Form*, a podcast on creative process. Her daily audio series, *The Poetic Path*, is on the Ritual app. Her poems have appeared on *A Prairie Home Companion*, *PBS News Hour*, *O Magazine*, *Washington Post's Book Club*, and the Carnegie Hall stage. Her recent collections are *All the Honey* and *The Unfolding*. In 2024, she became poet laureate for Evermore, helping others explore grief and love through poetry. Since 2006, she's written a poem a day, sharing them on her blog, *A Hundred Falling Veils*. One-word mantra: Adjust.



Guest Lecturer | Ruth Haley Barton has been a student, a practitioner and a leader in the area of Christian spirituality and spiritual formation for over twenty years. She is the founding President and CEO of The Transforming Center, a non-profit dedicated to creating space for God to strengthen leaders and transform communities. In addition to being a spiritual director and sought-after speaker and retreat leader, she is the author of many books, including *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, *An Invitation to Retreat*, *Sacred Rhythms*, and, particularly relevant for our work together in this cohort, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again*.



Guest Lecturer | Randy and Edith Woodley are the founders and directors of *Eloheh Indigenous Center for Earth Justice* and *Eloheh Farm & Seeds*. Randy is *Distinguished Professor of Faith and Culture Emeritus at George Fox University/Portland Seminary*. His expertise has been sought in national venues as diverse as *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Politifact*, *Christianity Today*, *The Huffington Post* and *Planet Drum: A Voice for Bioregional, Sustainability*. He has written many books, including *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, *Becoming Rooted*, and *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview*, and, co-written with his wife Edith, *Journey to Eloheh*.

RATIONALE

In his book *Subversive Sabbath*, author and professor A. J. Swoboda reflected on his time as a pastor and named a significant problem facing so many ministry leaders today. Of all the Ten Commandments, he knew he would have lost his job if he'd broken nine of them. "But if I did not keep a Sabbath day," he lamented, "I would probably get a raise."

When busyness and over-commitment are baptized as markers of faithful discipleship and faithful leadership, when leaders are expected to be available 24/7, and when they feel obligated to continually prioritize ministry needs over their personal and familial needs, the result can lead to exhaustion, resentment, and burnout.

The Sabbath invites us to imagine an alternative to this unsustainable situation. Sabbath makes room for us to reflect on and interrogate the state of our lives and the reasons we make the choices we do. It helps us discern whether we are living in alignment with our deepest values. It also makes room for us to reconnect with what makes us feel most present and alive, to experience connection, delight, and joy. By giving us permission to stop working and *not* be available one day each week, the Sabbath offers us perspective on our work and our lives, while also pointing us toward healthier ways of living every day of the week. By reconnecting us to our truest selves and our deepest values, Sabbath holds out the possibility of also reconnecting us to the passions and enthusiasm that first compelled us toward ministry.

In light of this, the Walking the Sabbath Way DMin cohort will guide participants along two interweaving trails. The first and most important trail will involve participants making room in their complex lives to experiment with and embrace the regenerative power of Sabbath rhythms—what Eugene Peterson called "the rhythms of grace." It will be important for participants not to move too quickly to the second trail, which involves exploring how they might invite the people they lead to also embrace the transformative power of Sabbath rhythms in their lives—individually and as a community. Ruth Haley Barton speaks wisely on the logic of this sequence: "Sabbath communities do not happen by accident; they must be led by leaders who are practicing sabbath themselves so they have the inner authority to guide others."

Along the way we will consider many pressing questions, including:

- What are my deepest values? Am I living in alignment with those values?
- What brings me delight? When do I feel most alive?
- Do I consistently reschedule joy? If so, why? What are the consequences of that habit?
- How do I begin to cultivate a Sabbath practice?
- How can I invite my family/roommates/friends to join me on a Sabbath journey?
- What do healthy rhythms of work and rest look like for me in my current stage of life?
- How would I describe my relationship with time? What images, metaphors, or emotions would I use to articulate what time is and how I relate to it throughout my days?
- Why do I work so hard?
- How will I determine when I have worked or done “enough”?
- Why do I make the commitments I do?
- How do I translate what I’m learning on my Sabbath journey into effective leadership? How do I invite my community to join me on the Sabbath way?
- How do I get my leadership board to appreciate the importance of Sabbath, to hold me accountable to it, and to begin practicing it themselves?

PROJECTED SEMINAR DATES

The cohort will begin in October 2026. Each semester of the 3-year program we will gather in-person to enable more sustained, focused, and intensive conversation, research, connection, and play. Below are the tentative dates and locations of each of our six week-long seminars.

Year One: Living the Sabbath Way

October 26-30, 2026

Holland, MI

May 10-14, 2027

Holland, MI

Year Two: Leading the Sabbath Way

September/October 2027

Holland, MI

May/June 2028

Walk the Camino de Santiago, Spain

Year Three: Articulating the Sabbath Way

September/October, 2028

Possible Writing Retreat Off-Campus

April 2029 (Diss. Defense/Celebration)

Holland, MI

FRAMEWORK

Each year of the program will have a distinctive theme and orientation, which will prepare you to spend the third and final year writing and successfully defending your dissertation in the spring of 2029. The focal points of each year will be the two week-long seminars—one per semester—which will both launch and guide your work for that semester. Occasionally, during the seminars, we will be joined by a guest lecturer, either in person or via Zoom.

The reading load for each seminar will be around 4–6 books, with possible additional essays and/or poetry.

Year One | The theme of the first year is “Living the Sabbath Way.” Beyond the essential work of getting to know each other and connecting as humans, this year will focus on developing a Sabbath vision and cultivating an intentional and play-full Sabbath practice. This will establish the foundation upon which the rest of the program will be built. Relevant books may include *The Sabbath Way* (Travis West), *The Sabbath* (Abraham Joshua Heschel), *Becoming Friends of Time* (John Swinton), *Shalom and the Community of Creation* (Randy Woodley), *A Year of Jubilee* (Mariah West), *The Book of Delights* (Ross Gay), and *All The Honey* (Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer). Part of our second seminar will be a Poetry Playshop (instead of *workshop*) led by poet Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer exploring the poetics of play, delight, rest, and connection, and part will include a conversation with Randy and Edith Woodley about the importance of the land in relation to Sabbath, justice, and *shalom*.

Year Two | The theme of the second year is “Leading the Sabbath Way.” We will consider how to pivot from cultivating a personal Sabbath practice to developing tangible leadership strategies of how to change the culture of your ministry setting by infusing it with Sabbath values. Relevant books may include *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest* (Ruth Haley Barton), *Sabbath as Resistance* (Walter Brueggemann), *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Robin Wall Kimmerer), *Three Mile an Hour God* (Kosuke Koyama), *Rest as Resistance* (Tricia Hersey), and poetry anthologies edited by James Crews. During the fall seminar, part of our time will be led by leadership guru and Sabbath devotee Ruth Haley Barton, who will help us transition from living to leading the Sabbath way. In the spring we will take our seminar on the road and spend a week walking the final 100km of the Camino de Santiago, an ancient pilgrimage path in Spain where we will consider the themes of slowing down, paying attention, embracing our limits, and the necessity of companions.¹

Year Three | The theme of the third year is “Articulating the Sabbath Way.” It will build on the foundation of the first two years and will be devoted to refining your topic and writing your dissertation. We will consider the benefits/costs of a writing retreat off campus for the fall seminar and decide as a cohort whether or not to pursue that.

¹ If this amount of walking poses a problem for you, it is still possible to participate without walking. Alternatively, if international travel poses a problem for you, we could develop an alternate experience for you that didn’t involve traveling to Spain.

Ongoing | Students will submit written assignments 3-4 weeks prior to each seminar. Occasionally we will gather as a cohort (or in small groups) via Zoom to stay connected and discuss relevant matters in-between seminars.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

Costs | This cohort will follow the 2026/2027 tuition rate, which will be set in February 2026. For current D.Min. tuition and fees please see [the WTS website](#). 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. Students are responsible for all travel, food, and lodging costs associated with attending the six required seminars.

Potential Project Titles | To stimulate your imagination, the following titles indicate the sorts of final projects a student could develop for this cohort: Sabbath as Counter-Cultural Witness; The Holy Triptych: Sabbath, Justice, and *Shalom*; Sabbath as Protest; The Poetics of Presence: Embracing Sabbath in a Distracted World; Sabbath as Spiritual Transformation; Sabbath and Community: Practicing Belonging; Sabbath and the Poetry of Protest; Caring for the Creation that Cares for Us; Sabbath-Shaped Leadership: Cultivating Community in a Time of Hurry.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact the following:

- *Application & Admission* — Drew Brown, drew.brown@westernsem.edu
- *D.Min. Program* — Yoli Vega, yolanda.vega@westernsem.edu
- *Cohort Information* — Travis West, travis.west@westernsem.edu

To apply, visit: <https://www.westernsem.edu/academics/degrees/doctor-ministry-degree/>