



**Wholehearted Leadership:
Cultivating an Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Grounded Ministry**
Doctor of Ministry Cohort

Faculty Mentor: Rev. Dr. Steve Norman

Length: A 36-credit degree comprising six in-person seminars over three years, plus completion and defense of the Doctor of Ministry project.

Locations: Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI
TBD (Fall 2027)
Israel/ Palestine (Fall 2028)

Those who apply for this cohort will demonstrate interest in exploring some aspect of transformational leadership as an outgrowth of an emotionally healthy and spiritually grounded life. While a wide range of proposed studies may apply, we seek to build a cohort with women and men whose research interests intersect in meaningful ways such that deep and rich lifelong conversation partnerships and friendships are cultivated.

Overview:

In the last few years, a growing number of resources exposed the dangers of emotional unhealth among church leaders. Spiritual abuse and toxic leadership are core themes in podcasts (*The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*), books (*Redeeming Power*, *Bully Pulpit*, *When Narcissism Comes to Church*, *The Lord Is My Courage*), and conferences (RESTORE).

While many of these resources rightly highlight how unhealthy power dynamics affect leadership, there's room to explore how such dynamics bleed into various forms of ministry, and how to prevent them.

In many instances, gifted leaders are given a pass on character issues and power abuses because of their charisma and skills. An integrated approach to ministry, however, argues that unhealthy leaders will lead unhealthy teams, and that, in time, unresolved personal and spiritual issues in the leader will emerge in his or her tone, posture, and relationships.

The goal of the Wholehearted Leadership: Cultivating an Emotionally Healthy and

Spiritually Grounded Ministry DMin model is to help students understand that all ministry is ultimately embodied in the leader and, as such, the well-being and flourishing of the leader is critical for compelling ministry. Content on emotionally healthy preaching, family history, creativity, soul care, self-awareness (enneagram), positive accountability, and encouragement networks will all be relevant material for the coursework. Final projects may include a ministry “rule of life” or strategic leadership model that is born out of the cohort experience.

Ezekiel 24:24 ‘Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.’

Objectives:

- To produce doctoral-level research for the church in the area of transformational leadership.
- To build a cohort-community of eager and earnest learners committed to building relationships and encouraging one another.
- To encourage personal transformation for vibrant and sustained ministry

Schedule:

Course	Event Dates and Locations
DM 850	Launch Sept. 21-25, 2026 WTS
DM 851	2 nd Seminar March 1-5, 2027 WTS
DM 860	3 rd Seminar Sept. 20-24, 2027 Arizona/Colorado
DM 861	4 th Seminar March 6-10, 2028 WTS
DM 870	5 th Seminar Sept. 14-22, 2028 Israel/Palestine
DM 871	Final Seminar March 5-9, 2029 WTS
DM 940	Project Thesis, Spring 2029
Commencement	Spring 2029 WTS

Core Readings: (additional titles forthcoming)

Students are required to read approximately 3300 pages in Year One, of which 1000 are chosen by the student. If one or more of the above books have been read previously, the professor/student will select an alternative.

Something's Not Right Mullen
When the Church Harms God's People Langberg
Healing What's Within DeGroat
Comfort in the Ashes Keener
When Narcissism Comes to Church DeGroat
Bully Pulpit Kruger
Too Great a Temptation Gregory
The Lord is My Courage Ramsey
Comfort in the Ashes Keener

Emotionally Healthy Leadership Scazzero
Emotionally Healthy Discipleship Scazzero
Leaf by Niggle Tolkien
The Gift of Limitations Hagerty
Gentle Power Lahti
Healing Leadership Trauma Rowe and Rowe
Amusing Ourselves to Death Postman
Dare to Lead Brown
The Preacher as Sermon Norman
Redeeming Power Langberg
Art and Faith Fujimura
Calling in Context Maros

Additional Readings:

The Creative Act Rubin
Dinner for Vampires Lenz
Educated Westover
Land of My Sojourn Cospers
The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory Alberta
Stolen Focus Hari
Rising Strong Brown
Atlas of the Heart Brown

Year One – Orientation

Seminars

Students will participate in two one-week face-to-face cohort gatherings, held in the fall (September) and in the spring (March).

Fall: The first gathering is devoted to engaging one another's stories through personal experiences of ministry (both in the pulpit and the pew), hearing initial project interests, and engaging rhythms of silence, solitude, and self-care.

Spring: The second gathering is devoted to exploring the fruit of Year One while refining and finalizing the primary question/topic the student wants to engage in his/her project.

Readings

During year one, students will be introduced to essential texts and crucial conversations in the area of deepening soul care, power dynamics, and leadership. Year One will require no fewer than 3000 pages of reading, with 2000 assigned and at least 1000 chosen by the student with approval from the mentor.

Ongoing Engagement

Students will engage in bi-weekly triad conversations via face-to-face online forum and a monthly full-cohort debrief for interaction with the mentor. Individual meetings with the mentor are scheduled as needed.

Assignments

1. Students will write a Personal Experience in Ministry paper prior to the first intensive to be shared with the group.
2. Students will write a 3-page book review of each book they read, due in March. The review will briefly summarize salient points of the book, noting key insights and important takeaways for the student's project.
3. Students will develop a 5-10-page draft of their research question or topic, highlighting the following:
 - The rationale for exploring their proposed question or topic.
 - A description of the ecclesial or organizational context for their research. a. A brief summary of relevant literature or research connected to this general question or topic.
 - A proposed pathway for research for Year Two, complete with additional yet unexplored relevant literature, interviews to be done, sites to be visited, etc.

Year Two – Research

Seminars

Fall: Through one-on-one meetings with the primary and/or secondary mentor, triad discussions, and cohort conversations, students will refine and finalize their question and Year Two pathway. In a presentation to the group, students will take 15 minutes each to present their finalized project and share what they will need from one another to accomplish their work. Spiritual disciplines to cultivate presence and focus will be explored.

Spring: Students will present the findings of their previous months of research and study, and will be invited into an exploration of the structure and expectations of their thesis project. A final proposal will be drafted after this intensive and forwarded to the DMin committee for approval.

Ongoing Engagement

Students will engage in bi-weekly triad conversations via face-to-face online forum and a monthly full-cohort debrief for interaction with the professor.

Assignments

1. Students will finalize their project proposal due one month after the Spring seminar of Year Two for approval by the DMin committee.
2. Students will write a 10-15-page literature review (due in March of Year Two).
3. Students will write a 10-15 summary of the fruits of their research (due at the

March seminar) to be presented to their cohort. The form and content of this will be agreed upon by mentor and student.

Year Three – Writing

Seminars

Fall: This intensive is devoted to a unique trip which cultivates community, celebrates accomplishments thus far, and motivates for the year of writing ahead. Details and costs will be presented at a future intensive.

Spring Graduation: Students will defend their theses during the final seminar, prior to late April/early May graduation.

Ongoing Engagement

Students will engage in bi-weekly triad conversations via face-to-face online forum and a monthly full-cohort debrief for interaction with the professor.

Assignments

1. Student will complete thesis project by February 1, 2029
2. Dates for thesis reception, reader review, etc. TBD.

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 DMin 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.

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

Questions? Please contact the following:

Cohort information

Rev. Dr. Steve Norman – stevenorman911@yahoo.com

Application & Admission

Drew Brown, Director of Admissions drew.brown@westernsem.edu

DMin Program

Yolanda Vega, Program Administrator - yolanda.vega@westernsem.edu