



# **Contemplation and Justice for All God's People: A New Reality in Belonging**

## **Doctor of Ministry Cohort**

**Faculty Mentor:** Josh Banner

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

**Locations:** Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI  
Additional locations to be announced

**Seminar Schedule:** January 11-15, 2027  
July 16-30, 2027  
Subsequent years will follow similar patterns

**Guest Instructors:** Dr. Michelle Loyd-Paige  
Keith Reynolds  
Cami Beecroft Mann, Spiritual Direction Mentor

### **Tentative Guest Lecturers:**

- Rev. Michael Gulker, President of Colossian Forum
- Rev. Dr. Greg Thompson, Co-Director of Voices Underground
- Dr. L.S. Carlos Thompson, Assistant Professor of Christian Ministry and Disability Theology and Director of the Friendship House
- Rev. Dr. Darrell Griffin, Lead pastor of Oakdale Community Church (Chicago, IL)
- Cindy Lee, author of *Our Unforming: De-Westernizing Spiritual Formation*

*All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.*

- From the First Principle and Foundation of St. Ignatius of Loyola

*(An education)...that aims toward a new reality of affection and learning, a learning of God's ways with other peoples, a learning of God's love for people we did not believe we could love and be loved by.*

- Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*

*Liberation recognizes that I won't get free by someone else's bondage.*

- Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories That Make Us*

### **Cohort's Purpose:**

This cohort will study and practice spiritual direction as both a formal discipline and a way toward restorative, racial justice. We will explore ancient and contemporary approaches to personal healing in relation to the spiritual health of our communities and society. Our overarching focus is how contemplative listening and justice work together for the sake of becoming in the language of St. Irenaeus, "human beings fully alive." Together we will consider how soul care is an act of justice as well as how contemplation can help activism become not just sustainable, but creative and subversively hopeful.

This cohort is open to those seeking classical formation in spiritual direction, those seeking a spiritual practice that can sustain justice work, and anyone sensing a call to rediscover their ministry. While much of our study and practice will be communal, you will be given ample space to discern how their learning nourishes and clarifies their unique integration of contemplation and justice.

### **Rationale:**

The culture wars of our time fracture and polarize not only society but much of the church. A growing number of people have left or are struggling to hang onto organized religion. How do these real challenges offer an opportunity for us to rediscover, deepen, and widen our understanding of the Gospel? The inspiration of the cohort is framed by the writings of Dr. Willie James Jennings. As he discerns ours is a "diseased social imagination," the task at hand for Christ followers is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in reimagining what Jennings describes as a "new reality in belonging," how we belong to each other, to God, and to ourselves.

Contemplative spirituality and the discipline of listening is vital to our healing. Injustice squeezes. Oppression is a pressing down, a reduction, and constriction. Contemplation is an act of justice that creates space, expands, widens, and deepens. Oppression isolates and erases. Contemplation expands love and reveals a person's sacred dignity.

To recover contemplative spirituality is to also recover the wisdom of the desert. Contemplative spirituality originated in the third century when a group of women and men went out to the desert because they were discontent with the empire. Following the example of Jesus, they went to the desert seeking inner quiet to fight demons. For our purposes today, what can we learn from the ancients that helps us follow Jesus' cruciform path of kenosis, of emptying ourselves? How does this decentering free us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to actively practice koinonia, to embrace others deeply? Emptying ourselves to value others more highly than ourselves is central to a life in Christ, yet it is especially vital for anyone called to practice spiritual direction and activism.

While most are not called to a formal practice of spiritual direction, the practice and formation of spiritual directors can serve as an expansive arena to name and respond to injustice. This cohort will consider some of the creative ways different cultures and spiritual traditions practice contemplative listening to nourish the flourishing of counter-cultural, healing witness of God's love.

**Framework:**

Formation in spiritual direction is itself an extended practice of spiritual direction. This cohort offers structure and guidance for the entire cohort to journey together yet the creative flexibility for each participant to have their own unique experiences.

Each year of our study and practice will be anchored in two in-person study retreats, one in January and one in July. One in-person session in year two and another in year three will meet in locations that especially help us heal our social imaginations. After each in person session, we will have six 2-3 hour online gatherings. You will also meet with smaller discussion groups online throughout. Most of these online meetings will involve discussion that responds to video or audio of presentations from cohort mentors and guest instructors. Each meeting will include some form of group spiritual direction so that we regularly practice listening to God in ourselves and each other.

Those discerning into formal certification in spiritual direction will declare their intent by the end of year one and will further participate in a mini course on the standards and ethics of spiritual direction. This mini course will meet in six, online, 90-minute sessions for years one and two.

### Year One: Orientation

In this first year, you will be invited to review what you have come to understand is essential to faithful Christian practice as you develop your own preliminary definitions of contemplative listening and justice. You will spend time throughout discerning and beginning to practice your personal rule of life as well as your individualized study and final project. Much attention will be given to learning how the cohort will nurture a spirituality of study, how prayerful reading, writing, and discussion can be led by the Holy Spirit. Those seeking formal certification in spiritual direction will declare their interest at the end of this year.

Pre-reading prior to year-one September study retreat:

- Brueggemann, Walter. *Spirituality of the Psalms*
- Jennings, Wille James Jennings. *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*
- Martin, James. *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*
- Moon, Gary & David Benner. *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls*
- Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*
- Arthur Riley, Cole. *This Here Flesh: Spirituality, Liberation, and the Stories that Make Us*

### Year Two: Disorientation

The second year of this cohort will study and practice the spirituality of the desert wilderness. We will consider how we can follow the example of the ancient mothers and fathers who fled into the desert by placing ourselves within proximity of those Howard Thurman defines as “the disinherited.” Our purpose is to decenter and understand the Gospel in and through others.

All participants, even those not discerning into formal certification, will begin to actively discern who they can practice contemplative listening with. Creativity is especially encouraged here. This practice of listening to others will shape how you practice your rule of life, how you read, write, and engage discussion, as well as the further shape of your final project.

Pre-reading prior to year-two September study retreat:

- Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*
- Coakley, Sarah. *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God*
- Cone, James. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*
- Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother's Hands*
- Valters-Paintner, Christine. *Desert Fathers and Mothers: Early Christian Wisdom Sayings*

Books of your choosing TBD.

- A set of texts approved by your mentor that will uniquely support the development of your final project.
- Choose a novel, memoir, or biography that might help you immerse your imagination in the journey you have begun.

### Year Three: Reorientation

This final year of reorientation is about integration, how we bring our learning together. In year three, you will have considerably more freedom over your reading and writing, yet we will frame our learning through the spirituality of the Beguines and the Philokalia.

Our time together will largely focus on group listening practices in relation to your final project. The focus here is not only on your integration but how your unique vocation is enriched by the learning of our community.

Pre-reading prior to year-three September study retreat:

- Murk-Jansen. *Brides in the Desert: The Spirituality of the Beguines*
- Smith, Allyne annotated by. *Philokalia: The Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts Selections, Annotated and Explained*
- A novel, memoir, or biography that might help you immerse your imagination in the journey you have begun.

You will be asked to discern a further set of books you can re-read from what you have read in the first two years.

**Final Project:** For your project, you can choose to write a substantial, original work of at least 5 chapters, or you can propose some other creative project (e.g. from a video teaching series or podcast production to an autoethnography). Your completed project will be presented before the faculty advisor and readers you choose.

**Other books you are encouraged to engage:**

- Baldwin, James. *If Beale Street Could Talk*
  - Bryant Johnson, Sherry, and Therese Taylor-Stinson, *Embodied Spirits: Stories of Spiritual Directors of Color*
  - Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*
  - Coakley, Sarah. *God Sexuality and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity*
  - Fleming, David L. *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises, A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading*
  - Jennings, Willie James.
    - *Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*
    - *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*
  - Laird, Martin.
    - *Into the Silent Land: the Practice of Contemplation*
    - *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, and Contemplation*
  - May, Gerald. *Dark Night of the Soul A Deep Dive Into the Shadow Side of Spirituality, Embracing Disorientation, Doubt, and Despair for Authentic Spiritual Growth and Wholeness*
  - Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*
  - Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*
  - Neale Hurston, Zora. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
  - Peacock, Barbara. *Soul Care in African American Practice*
  - Rah, Soong-Chan. *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*
  - Tran, Jonathan. *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*
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**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:**

<b>Course</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Location</b>
Launch <i>DM850</i>	January 11-16, 2027	West Michigan retreat space and WTS
2 <sup>nd</sup> Seminar <i>DM851</i>	July 26-30, 2027	Charlottesville, VA
3 <sup>rd</sup> Seminar <i>DM860</i>	January, 2028	WTS
4 <sup>th</sup> Seminar <i>DM861</i>	July, 2028	WTS
5 <sup>th</sup> Seminar <i>DM870</i>	January, 2029	WTS
Final Seminar <i>DM871</i>	July, 2029	WTS
DM 940	Spring, 2030	n/a
Commencement	April, 2030	WTS

**Possible travel sites:** Charlottesville, VA

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

**Questions? Please contact the following:**

*Cohort information*

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