



The Active Contemplative: Formation for Leaders Living Between Silence and Service

Doctor of Ministry Cohort

Faculty Mentor: Dr. [John DelHousaye](#)

Co-Facilitators: Dr. Caleb Campbell, Dr. Dave Beldman, Mrs. Dennaë Pierre, Dr. Ted Wueste

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

Locations: The first, third, and final seminars will be at Western Theological Seminary. The second, fourth, and fifth seminars will be at the Franciscan Renewal Center.

Overview: Gathering, we'll normalize silence, beginning and ending our days with Centering Prayer (contemplation). The pauses in between will allow us to explore our shadows in a world that lives in masks. We may also feel stuck, struggling to clarify what originally seemed a simpler calling and vocation. The life of a leader is filled with challenges. Sometimes it feels so full that meaningful spaces of quiet and reflection seem impossible. Sometimes it feels so busy that a sense of purpose seems elusive. In this cohort, we explore the challenges of contemporary leadership, inviting leaders into deeper action and contemplation. The insights, virtues, and intentions cultivated in quiet, thoughtful communion with God are the seeds that grow into compassionate, wise, and purposeful action in daily life.

Discernment, practiced individually and communally, is vital to living in the tension of contemplation and action. How do we know how and when to act? How do we know when to move toward or stay in contemplation? Discernment practiced and embodied will highlight the cohort journey in ways that the leader can take into the realities of their life and leadership context.

Through slow meals and unhurried conversation, we'll attend to the challenges of holding together what the ancients call the contemplative and active life.

Throughout history, Christian leaders have resisted the temptation of falling into an either/or. Meister Eckhart (d. 1328) notes: "What we plant in the soil of contemplation, we shall reap in the harvest of action." Thomas Merton (1915–1968) observes: "Action is the stream, and contemplation is the spring." Merton became a passionate advocate for social justice, especially later in life. He believed that genuine spiritual life could not be separated from concern for the suffering and injustice present in the world. Through essays, letters, and public statements, Merton addressed racial inequality, war, nuclear proliferation, and poverty, urging Christians and all people of conscience to engage in nonviolent action and solidarity with the marginalized. At times, though, Merton reflected on the possibility of going too far in his cultural engagement, fearing that activism could distract from contemplation, leading him to periodically withdraw from public debate to preserve his integrity.

Contrary to popular myth, Rosa Parks' (1913-2005) refusal to surrender her seat was not a spontaneous outburst of fatigue but the fruit of years of moral formation, communal involvement, and attentiveness to injustice. Her awareness did not begin on a Montgomery bus in December 1955 but was cultivated over decades of living under Jim Crow segregation, where daily humiliations pressed against conscience and dignity.

We'll have three years together to explore participation in the Trinity, being led by the Spirit, in the Son, before a loving Father, a formational journey that we do alone and together through the wilderness.

Objectives:

- To offer seminars in academic and retreat spaces, encouraging reflection on a personal and communal rule of life that seeks always to be aware of and responsive to God's presence

- To create a communal space for the cohort to share experiences, struggles, and questions with one another
- To provide interactive case studies of contemplation and action in collaboration with Surge Network (AZ) and the Spiritual Formation Society
- To produce post-graduate-level research on historical and contemporary spaces that have experienced the fruit of contemplation and action,

Schedule:

Seminar Dates and Location

1. June 7-11, 2027 Orientation Seminar - Western Theological Seminary
2. January 16-21, 2028 Orientation Seminar - Franciscan Renewal Center
3. June 5-9, 2028 Research Seminar - Western Theological Seminary
4. January 8-12, 2029 Research Seminar - Franciscan Renewal Center
5. June 4-8, 2029 Thesis Seminar - Western Theological Seminary
6. January 7-11, 2030 Thesis Seminar - Franciscan Renewal Center

The Franciscan Renewal Center

The Franciscan Renewal Center—affectionately known as “the Casa”—was founded in 1951 when the Franciscan Friars purchased the former Kachina Lodge, a rustic dude ranch on what was then the rural outskirts of Scottsdale. They renamed it *Casa de Paz y Bien* (“House of Peace and Good”), echoing the traditional greeting of St. Francis of Assisi. From the beginning, the friars envisioned the Casa not as a secluded monastery but as a place where clergy and laity alike could withdraw from the demands of everyday life for prayer, spiritual renewal, and healing. Initially serving diocesan clergy through retreats, the ministry soon expanded to welcome the wider public.

As the Phoenix metropolitan area grew, so did the Casa’s mission. It developed into a center for retreats, adult education, spiritual direction, counseling, parish formation, and ministries of compassion. Faithful to the Franciscan tradition, it sought **to unite contemplation and action**, forming disciples whose lives of prayer naturally overflowed into service of their neighbors. Today, the Franciscan Renewal Center continues to welcome Christians from many traditions, as well as those exploring faith, offering hospitality, worship, education, and opportunities for spiritual growth.

The Casa occupies an important place within the Christian ecology of Phoenix. Unlike the great monasteries of medieval Europe, which often gave rise to hospitals, universities, and other institutions of learning and service, the Franciscan Renewal Center emerged in a modern city where those institutions already existed. Its vocation has therefore been different. Rather than building new institutions, it has helped renew existing ones by offering a place where pastors, educators, healthcare workers, ministry leaders, and ordinary believers can recover rhythms of silence, prayer, and attentive presence before returning to their vocations. In this way, the Casa serves as a modern expression of the ancient monastic tradition, reminding the Church that every lasting work of healing, learning, innovation, and service must continually return to communion with God.

Core Readings: (additional titles forthcoming)

DelHousaye, John. *ARDoR: a theology of presence*. This is an integrated curriculum, developed in collaboration with Surge Network and the Spiritual Formation Society, that systematically works through the dynamics of contemplation and action, providing a theological grounding. The Acronym stands for Awareness, Response, Distraction, Resistance.

Richard Rohr and friends. *Contemplation in Action*. Father Rohr, a Franciscan priest and well-known teacher, founded the New Jerusalem Community in Cincinnati (1971) and the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque (1987).

Additional Readings:

Avila, Teresa. *The Interior Castle or the Mansions*. There are multiple translations/editions.

Day, Dorothy. *The Long Loneliness*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1996.

Laird, Martin. *Into The Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Marsh, Charles. *Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions, 1961.

There are multiple editions.

Year One – Orientation: Awareness

Like bees collecting pollen, we'll meditate through Scripture, sound, image, and the wisdom of previous generations on how we might grow in our awareness of God's presence.

We'll give special attention to the contemplative practices of Thomas Merton, discussed above, and Teresa of Avila.

Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) was a Spanish Carmelite nun, mystic, and reformer whose writings—especially *The Interior Castle* and *The Way of Perfection*—mapped the soul's contemplative ascent toward union with God through a series of “dwelling places,” while her own life as founder of the Discalced Carmelite reform demonstrated that deep mystical experience need not retreat from institutional engagement but can fuel it. She's particularly apt for a seminar on contemplation and action because she embodied their integration rather than their opposition: she is often cited alongside her famous line (paraphrased) that God can be found even among the pots and pans, meaning ordinary active labor is itself a site of prayer, and she spent decades traveling difficult roads, negotiating with church authorities, and founding seventeen monasteries even as she was producing some of the deepest contemplative literature in the Christian tradition.

Seminars

Summer: Three Books

Winter: Hidden God

Readings

ARDoR

Into The Silent Land

New Seeds of Contemplation

The Interior Castle

Ongoing Engagement

Monthly Summaries of Assignments and Reading to mentor

Assignments (Disciplines)

Lectio (Viso, Audio) Divina
Personal Direction
Centering (Lord's) Prayer
Jesus Prayer
The Examen
Departure (personal retreat)
Personal Rule

Year Two – Research

Description: Having spent a year together and alone attending to our contemplative practice, we'll focus more attention on the invitations and openings that may be emerging—moving from awareness to response. We'll practice group spiritual direction, employing tools like the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

We'll have conversations with leaders who have pursued a rhythm of contemplation and action that led to, among other things, church plants, non-profits (501c3s), networks, and schools. This cohort is a collaboration between Western Theological Seminary, Surge Network, and the Spiritual Formation Society.

Surge Network is an organization whose mission is to put Jesus on display through the collective witness of God's people across the city. It grew out of a 2007 gathering of pastors from various denominations who asked how they might work together in God's mission for their city. It's a collaborative partnership of many local congregations throughout Arizona—not a parachurch or separate nonprofit, but a family of pastors and church leaders serving the church together. Surge School is a 4-module discipleship pathway that has graduated over 1,000 students in Arizona, with participants nationally and internationally as well.

The Spiritual Formation Society (SFS) is a network of regional Christian communities focused on contemplative spirituality and soul care. The SFS started in Arizona in

2013, and the broader SFS Network began in 2024. It has grown to include chapters in Arkansas, Texas, and Washington. Prayerful discernment and relational connection are at the center of the SFS's mission. Their desire is to foster the spiritual formation movement in Arizona and beyond, creating safe environments where learners and leaders can experience and grow in the love of the Trinity, through networking and co-laboring to bring spiritual formation resources to their region. Practically, this includes monthly gatherings for contemplative prayer, retreats, conferences, a directory of spiritual directors, and a mobile app called A Simple Pause rooted in the ancient monastic practice of Lectio Divina.

In addition to these ministries, we'll reflect on the lives and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothy Day.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), a German Lutheran pastor and theologian executed by the Nazis for his role in a plot against Hitler, embodies the tension between contemplation and action rather than simple resolution: formed by deep contemplative practice — communal prayer and meditation on Scripture at the underground Finkenwalde seminary (*Life Together*) — he nonetheless attacked “cheap grace” in *The Cost of Discipleship*, insisting that faith without costly, concrete obedience is worthless, and eventually moved from pacifism into an assassination conspiracy, taking on guilt for others' sake without ever fully justifying it theologically; in his late *Letters and Papers from Prison* he pushed further toward a “religionless Christianity” that finds God through full worldly engagement rather than retreat.

Dorothy Day (1897–1980) co-founded the Catholic Worker Movement with Peter Maurin in 1933, combining a radical newspaper, houses of hospitality for the poor, and a communal ethic of mercy, following her conversion from a bohemian left-wing journalism background to Catholicism in her late twenties. Her life refuses the split between contemplation and action: Day treated hospitality itself as a liturgical act, and her daily Mass, confession, and prayer were inseparable from the daily grind of running a soup line—her writings (*The Long Loneliness*, *The Duty of Delight*) are unsentimental about the boredom and spiritual dryness that came with that work, showing contemplative practice not as escape from action but as what kept it sustainable and honest.

Seminars

Summer: Response

Winter: Virtue

Readings

ARDoR

The Long Loneliness

Strange Glory

Ongoing Engagement

Monthly Summaries of Assignments and Reading to mentor

Assignments

Exegeting the City + Case Study
Field Engagement (local context)
Communal Rule

Year Three - Writing

Description: As we begin to write, we'll discuss best practices but also dissertation writing as a spiritual *discipline*, embracing the *askesis* ("training"), attending to the challenges of distraction and resistance along the way.

Seminars

Summer - Distraction

Winter - Resistance

Ongoing Engagement

Communicating with mentor on dissertation

Assignments

Biographical presentations

Projected Schedule:

Course	Dates	Location
Launch <i>DM850</i>	6/7-11 2027	WTS
2 nd Seminar <i>DM851</i>	1/16-21 2028	FRC
3 rd Seminar <i>DM860</i>	6/5-9 2028	WTS
4 th Seminar <i>DM861</i>	1/8-12 2029	FRC
5 th Seminar <i>DM870</i>	6/4-8 2029	WTS
Final Seminar <i>DM871</i>	1/7-11 2030	FRC
Commencement	April	WTS

DM 940, the Thesis Project, is typically concurrent with DM 871.

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 2027/2028 tuition rate, which will be set in February 2027. 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.

Costs for the Franciscan Renewal Center:

January 16 – 21, 2028

Singles - \$180.00 per night

Doubles - \$110.00 per person per night

January 7 – 12, 2029

Singles - \$185.00 per night

Doubles - \$120.00 per person per night

January 6 – 11, 2030

Singles - \$190.00 per night

Doubles - \$125.00 per person per night

These rates include 3 meals and begin with dinner on the check-in date and end with lunch on the check-out date. Meals are served buffet style and chef's choice. They accommodate vegetarians, vegans, gluten-free, and dairy-free allergies.

Check-in time is 4:00 pm and check-out time is at 10:00 am.

Main meeting room: St. Barbara

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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Application & Admission

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DMin Program

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