



Holy Presence: Eugene Peterson and the Pastoral Imagination

A WTS Doctor of Ministry Cohort

WESTERN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Holy Presence: Eugene Peterson and the Pastoral Imagination

*A Cohort for the WTS D.Min. Program Offered Through
The Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination*

What is critical [for pastors] is an imagination large enough to contain all of life,
all worship and work as prayer, set in a structure (*askesis*) adequate
to the actual conditions in which it is lived out.

Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*

PURPOSE

This Doctor of Ministry track will nurture experienced pastors more deeply into the slow, holy work required to be faithful to our pastoral call. Centered in Peterson's pastoral theology, we will also include other diverse voices which will expansive God-saturated vision to roam wide and far.

TEACHING TEAM

Lead Faculty: Winn Collier | A pastor for 30 years and the founding pastor of All Souls (Charlottesville, VA), Winn is the director of the Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination and Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Christian Imagination at WTS. Winn is the author of *Restless Faith: Hanging on to a God Just Out of Reach*; *Let God: Spiritual Conversations with François Fénelon*; *Holy Curiosity: Encountering Jesus' Provocative Questions*; *Love Big, Be Well: Letters to a Small Town Church*, *A Burning in My Bones: The Authorized Biography of Eugene H. Peterson*, and the forthcoming *Thou Art Lightning and Love*.

Faculty: Mandy Smith | Pastor of St. Lucia Uniting Church in Brisbane (Queensland, Australia), Mandy embodies a unique intersection of pastor/writer/artist and brings fresh hope to the pursuit of a faithful pastoral imagination. Mandy is the author of *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry* and *Unfettered: Imagining a Childlike Faith Beyond the Baggage of Western Culture*, and *Confessions of an Amateur Saint: The Christian Leader's Journey from Self-Sufficiency to Reliance on God*.

Guest Lecturer: Ellen Davis | Amos Ragan Kearns Distinguished Professor of Bible and Practical Theology at Duke Divinity School, Ellen serves the church with her mind, heart, scholarship, and writing (numerous articles and twelve books, including *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, *Preaching the Luminous Word*, *Opening Israel's Scriptures*, *Getting Involved with God: Rediscovering the Old Testament*, and *Light Within Light: Psalms and the Arts of Insight*).

Guest Lecturer: Trygve Johnson | Executive Director of the PreachFor Foundation and for the previous 19 years the Hinga Boersma Dean of the Chapel at Hope College, Trygve has sought to work a pastoral imagination into the soil of a university context. Trygve is the author of *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist: Metaphor, Identity, and the Vicarious Humanity of Christ* and a contributor to *Theology and Tolkien* and other volumes.

Guest Lecturer: Claude Atcho | Founding pastor of Church of the Resurrection in Charlottesville, Virginia, Claude has written for *Christianity Today*, *Think Christian*, *Christ and Pop Culture*, and *Living Church* and authored *Reading Black Books: How African American Literature Can Make Our Faith More Whole and Just* and *Rhythms of Faith: A Devotional Pilgrimage Through the Church Year*.

PROJECTED SEMINAR DATES AND LOCATIONS

DM850	May 3-7, 2027	Holland, MI
DM851	January 10-14, 2028	Holland, MI
DM860	May 8-12, 2028	Flathead Lake, MT
DM861	January 8-12, 2029	Holland, MI
DM870	May 2029	Isle of Iona, Scotland & London (<i>subject to change</i>)
DM871	January 14-18, 2030	Holland, MI

RATIONALE

While pastors face constant pressure to reduce our callings and become “shopkeepers” leading religious enterprises for religious consumers, the Spirit beckons us to reclaim our vocation, to return to the vows we’ve made to be faithful to God, to the church, and to this noble work. We need to encounter God once more. And we need conversation partners who will help us renew our pastoral imagination so we can see and hear and have courage to serve God’s people with fidelity, compassion, and integrity.

Attentive pastors are intimately familiar with the many seductions which lure us from our calling and tempt us away from humble presence, attentive prayer, and the cure of souls. We’re asked to be experts in management, leadership, preaching, administration, fundraising, corporate vision (the list goes on), but there’s little help or incentive encouraging pastors’ slow, lifelong commitment to deep pastoral formation. And our institutions offer few resources or spaces for likeminded pastor to pursue substantive, sustained study and conversation in the context of spiritual friendship. Our current predicament reveals idolatries and temptations—and potent possibilities—which make Eugene’s pastoral theology as needed and hopeful as when he first began his work.

Eugene believed the pastoral life must be lived and experienced in the context of relationships. If one’s theology could not be lived with another, then it was not a theology grounded in the gospel of the Triune God. Eugene’s writings offer pastors the gift of a mentor who takes us and our vocational calling seriously. And Eugene’s witness unfolds how pastors can become more rooted in the Scriptural story, integrating theological reflection, friendship, and serious attention to the heart and the soul.

The Holy Presence Cohort welcomes women and men who are committed to pursuing and strengthening their calling as contemplative pastors in the company of like-minded pilgrims.

FRAMEWORK

Each year will revolve around two annual residencies: May and January. We will have multiple mentors and lecturers, working from differing contexts and with distinct voices, to help us integrate the pastoral vision in our own unique settings. *Below is a representative flow to provide a general ethos, but details are subject to reworking and adaptation.*

Year One | In addition to determining student projects, the first year of our cohort will begin our immersion into Peterson’s pastoral writings, plumbing central themes of Eugene’s pastoral theology. We will begin with two of his foundational works yielding his pastoral convictions: *The Contemplative Pastor* and *Working the Angles* as well as an entrée into Peterson’s Spiritual Theology, invitations to live a thoroughly integrated life of faith (*Christ Plays in 10,000 places, The Jesus Way, Tell it Slant, Practice Resurrection* and *Eat this Book*). We will also read *A Burning in My Bones*, the biography of Eugene as well as Mandy Smith’s *The Vulnerable Pastor*.

Year Two | The second year will continue to explore Eugene's pastoral theology, centered on *Five Smooth Stones*, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, and *The Unnecessary Pastor*. We will venture further into the posture of indwelling scripture for pastoral practice, reading selections from several works integrating Eugene's Scriptural imagination: *Reversed Thunder* (Revelation), *Answering God* (Psalms), *Leap Over a Wall* (the Life of David), and *Traveling Light* (Galatians). We will also read *The Pastor: A Memoir*, Ellen Davis' *Opening Israel's Scripture*, and Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C. Taylor's *We Have This Ministry*.

Year Three | Reading for this third year will engage Eugene and Eric's book *Letters to a Young Pastor* as well as selected works from *Take and Read* - shaping our reading around Peterson's own expansive reading (novels, poems, essays, histories, lives of the saints, etc.) as we explore Eugene's cohesive, seamless experience of life and beauty with his Biblical and pastoral imagination. We will also read Claude Atcho's *Reading Black Books: How African American Literature Can Make Our Faith More Whole and Just*. The deeper focus of this final year, however, will be helping each cohort member to refine their project, interacting with Peterson's pastoral theology and imagination for their own context.

Ongoing | Cohort members will do their writing between residencies. Faculty will host 8-10 Zoom gatherings per year with their smaller research and writing circle.

OTHER DETAILS

Candidates | The Holy Presence cohort is open for candidates who have been in pastoral ministry for over 3 years, and who want to commit to intentional reading, conversation, and growing in friendship as we ponder the writings and witness of Eugene Peterson's pastoral theology.

Final Project | Students will write a substantial work (25,000-30,000 words) and offer an oral presentation of their project to the doctoral committee during our final residency.

Where | Our Cohort will meet twice a year for a week (May and January). Four residencies will be on campus at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. One residency will be on Flathead Lake (staying at the Lutheran Bible Camp with time enjoying Selah House, the Peterson home) and one will be a pilgrimage, currently planned for the Isle of Iona in Scotland (location subject to change).

Cost | Information on tuition and fees available from WTS. Travel and lodging are not included. For our Montana residency, we estimate \$800 + travel. For our Iona pilgrimage residency, we estimate \$3000 for double occupancy + airfare and some meals.

For more information and to apply, please visit:

<https://www.westernsem.edu/academics/degrees/doctor-ministry-degree/>

