



Holy Presence: Eugene Peterson and the Pastoral Imagination

A WTS Doctor of Ministry Cohort

WESTERN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
THE EUGENE PETERSON CENTER
FOR CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION

Holy Presence: Eugene Peterson and the Pastoral Imagination

*A Cohort for the WTS D.Min. Program 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 to allow Peterson’s expansive vision to roam wide and far.

Faculty Mentor: Winn Collier

Director of the Eugene Peterson Center and Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Christian Imagination, pastor for 25 years, 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* and *A Burning in My Bones: The Authorized Biography of Eugene H. Peterson*.

Cohort Facilitators:

Trygve Johnson | Hinga Boersma Dean of the Chapel, Hope College, author of *The Preacher as Liturgical Artist*

Mandy Smith | pastor, University Christian Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, author of *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry*

Guest Lecturer:

Robert Smith, Jr. | pastor for 20 years of New Mission Missionary Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, author of *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation*; *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* and other titles.

Projected Seminar Dates and Locations:

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|-------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| DM850 | May 24 – 28, 2021 | Holland, MI |
| DM851 | January 10 – 14, 2022 | Holland, MI |
| DM860 | May 2022 | Flathead Lake, MT |
| DM861 | January 2023 | Holland, MI |
| DM870 | May 2023 | Isle of Iona, Scotland |
| DM871 | January 2024 | Holland, MI |

Rationale:

In a moment when pastors are under constant pressure to reduce their callings to be “shop-keepers” for the spiritual consumer, there is a deep need for conversational partners to help them reclaim their pastoral imagination. This imagination is required if pastors are going to be faithful to their unique callings, imbedded in a particular place, serving God with fidelity and serving God’s people with compassion and courage.

Attentive pastors know the seductive voices and temptations that lead away from the calling to care for the soul of the people and the gospel witness of the church. There is little incentive from our congregations to help pastors read and study, and little resources from our structural institutions to encourage needed networks for likeminded pastors to share substantive, sustained study and conversation in the context of spiritual friendship. Our current predicament reveals idolatries and temptations—and potent possibilities—that make the pastoral theology of Eugene Peterson as needed and hopeful as when he first began his work.

Peterson believed the pastoral life must be lived and experienced in the context of relationships. If one’s theology could not be lived interpersonally, then it was not a theology fit for the gospel of the Triune God who joined himself to humanity. Peterson spoke often of a “pastoral imagination,” the capacity to see, through the eyes of the Spirit, the truest world: God’s world, the “wide country of salvation.” Peterson’s pastoral writings offer pastors the gift of a mentor who takes them and their vocational calling seriously. Eugene’s writings unfold how pastors can become more biblically rooted, theologically robust, missionally aspiring, all the while offering others—and themselves—an expansive emotional canopy that shapes our shared human experience in Christ. The Holy Presence Cohort will be comprised of women and men who are committed to living out their calling as contemplative pastors in the company of like-minded pilgrims.

Framework:

Each year will revolve around two annual intensives, one in late Spring and one in 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.

//Schedule//

Year One: In addition to determining student projects, the first year of our cohort will be an immersion in Peterson’s pastoral writings, plumbing central themes of Eugene’s pastoral theology. We will begin with *The Pastor: A Memoir*, then his four foundational works yielding his pastoral convictions: *The Contemplative Pastor*, *Working the Angles*, *Five Smooth Stones*, and *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, finishing with selections from the five books making up 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*).

Year Two: The second year will continue to explore Eugene’s core themes, especially his 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), as well as sections from *The Message*. Secondly, we will read several voices who will play as conversational partners as we seek to expand and reanimate the pastoral imagination into various contexts: Samuel D. Proctor and Gardner C. Taylor’s *We Have This Ministry*, Thabite Anyabwile’s *The Faithful Preacher: Recapturing the Vision of Three African American Pastors* and Mandy Smith’s *The Vulnerable Pastor*.

[year two will include the off-site intensive to Flathead Lake, Montana, staying near Eugene’s house and spending group time there]

Year three: Reading for this third year will engage 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. The deeper focus of this final year, however, will be helping each cohort member to refine their project, as they interact with Peterson's pastoral theology and imagination for their own particular context. We will dedicate the bulk of this final year to writing, using our intensives as opportunities to share what each student has gleaned and present their respective writing and projects with each other.

[year three will include our pastoral/writing workshop retreat to Charleston, SC or Orlando, FL]

Ongoing:

We will have at least one whole-cohort meeting via Zoom between intensives. Mentors will host 1-2 Zoom gatherings with their smaller advising circle.

//Other Details//

Candidates:

Candidates for this cohort are open to those who have been in Pastoral Ministry for over 3 years, and who want to commit to intentional reading, conversation, and growing in friendship over the writings of Eugene Peterson.

Final Project:

For their thesis, students will write a substantial, original work of at least 5 chapters, to be presented before the faculty advisor and readers.

Where:

The Cohort will meet twice a year for a week (proposed May and January). Four seminars will be on campus at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. Two of our seminars will provide pastoral and writing retreats: one on Flathead Lake, with time in the Peterson home and one on the Isle of Iona in Scotland (pilgrimage location subject to change).

For more information and to apply please visit:

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