

# Western Theological Seminary

## CHURCH RENEWAL IN THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT

### Specialty Doctor of Ministry Track

- Supervisors:** Dr. John Wagenveld & Dr. Keith Doornbos  
Various Western Theological Seminary faculty members
- Guest Instructors:** Uniquely gifted guest lecturers will participate in each of the six teaching units
- Length & Launch:** A three-year program launching in May 2021 (completion of thesis follows)
- Location:** Western Theological Seminary, Holland, MI
- Schedule:** Tuesday through Friday during the third full week of October and May  
May 18-21, 2021  
October 19-22, 2021  
Other dates in 2022-2023 TBD
- Reading:** Monthly renewal reading assignments will shape the learning experience

#### **Purpose of the program:**

The Doctor of Ministry in Church Renewal provides pastors with the training and skill development to lead a church revitalization movement in a local ministry context. A theology of church renewal will be taught with particular emphasis on the centrality of Gospel proclamation, discipleship formation and the practices leading congregations to join God on mission. Church renewal movements throughout the history of Christendom will be examined along with contemporary examples of churches thriving in the face of cultural headwinds.

Participants will examine the characteristics of “turn-around” pastors and be instructed in a three-step process for church renewal: “listen...imagine...do.” Particular emphasis will be placed on four essentials undergirding a renewal movement: abiding, vision, leadership and health. Throughout the renewal journey participants will be encouraged to discern the movement of God’s Spirit within the life a congregation so renewal remains Spirit directed and Spirit empowered.

A critical element of this Doctor of Ministry is the learning community created by the Doctor of Ministry students and their congregations. Congregational leaders will participate in this learning experience to increase learning and innovation.

The intended outcome of this Doctor of Ministry project will be leaders skilled at (1) **discerning** the missional purposes of our Triune God in a particular ministry context and at (2) **developing** intentional missional congregations that make more and better disciples who join the Holy Spirit in transforming lives and communities for the Kingdom.

### **Rationale for this program and its structure:**

The need for a Doctor of Ministry focused on church renewal in the North American context is apparent given that 80-85% of churches in North America are plateaued or in decline. For many churches that decline is precipitous. A recent survey of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (mirrored in the Reformed Church in America) revealed that the average loss of membership in declining churches has been 27.5% in the past ten years alone. Similar statistics are likely to be found in most Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. Additionally, churches are struggling to retain their youth. A Pew Research study discovered that Reformed churches retain only 34% of their youth into adulthood. The same study noted that the average age of self-identified Christians is getting older (52) while the average age of self-identified "unaffiliated" is growing younger (36). Simply stated, the majority of North American churches are struggling. It is estimated that 75-100 churches in the U.S. are closing each week. There is a great need for skilled ministerial practitioners in the area of church renewal.

The importance of developing skilled renewal pastors is especially apparent when considering the changing North American cultural context. Todd Bolsinger in his book *CANOEING THE MOUNTAINS* notes that the Western church has benefited from 1700 years of "Christendom." During this era Christianity has held a privileged place in the culture's community life. That epoch, Bolsinger claims, is coming to a close. He writes, "We are heading into uncharted territory and are given the charge to lead a mission where the future is nothing like the past" (Bolsinger, 2015, p. 23).

This church renewal Doctor of Ministry track is cohort-based to facilitate enhanced learning. Participants will join with other pastors and faith communities throughout North America in the quest for congregational renewal. Renewal challenges and discoveries will take place in a shared learning environment and problem solving will be enhanced by the cohort working as a whole. Participants must have an advanced theological degree and currently ministering in a congregation willing to participate in a multi-year -renewal process.

Additionally, a significant component of this specialized Doctor of Ministry track requires that the student develops a project that is "real-time" and contextualized to the student's current ministry context. Pastors seeking a church renewal D. Min. will form a church renewal team in each of their communities of faith. The renewal team will be tasked with facilitating renewal in the local context. Quarterly assignments will guide pastors and teams through a process of facilitating an actual renewal journey.

Given this model, participating congregations are requested to provide, minimally, 2/3's of tuition and expenses related to the Doctor of Ministry since the fruit of this process is the revitalization of the local church.

### **Methodology:**

The Doctor of Ministry program is built around a defined process for church revitalization. Each quarter renewal investments will be assigned that serve as stepping stones through a three-year revitalization process. First year assignments focus on developing leadership skills for renewal. Second year assignments focus on four-directional listening including listening from above (what is God saying in His Word about His will and His way), from among (what is the congregation saying about their gifts and passions), from outside (what is the community saying about their needs and opportunities) and from

within (what is the Holy Spirit calling us uniquely to do). The final year assignments focus on developing a vision for a God-preferred future and the implementation of that vision.

Throughout the Doctor of Ministry project additional renewal emphases will be woven into the instructional units including: preaching for renewal, cooperating with the Holy Spirit's renewing work and the importance of discipleship formation in a renewal journey.

Incorporated into the Doctor of Ministry Curriculum are two orientation seminars, two research seminars and two thesis seminars along with a final thesis project. These seminars will either be incorporated into the on-campus training or, alternatively, available on-line.

To facilitate this renewal process, participants will meet Tuesday through Friday on the campus of Western Theological Seminary in the third full weeks of May and October. Additionally, one hour distance coaching sessions will take place in November, January, February, March and August.

### **Description of the Instructional Units**

**In preparation for the launch of the D. Min. in Church Renewal the following titles are to be read:**

Bolsinger, T. (n.d.). *Canoeing the Mountains*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.  
Dudley, Carl S., and Nancy Tatom Ammerman. *Congregations in Transition: a Guide for Analyzing*, Gelder, Craig Van, and Dwight J. Zscheile. *Participating in God's Mission*, Eerdmans, 2018.

#### **Unit 1: A Theology & History of Church Renewal (May 2021)**

This unit focuses on the biblical and theological dimensions of church renewal. The history of church renewal movements will be examined to identify principles undergirding Spirit-directed & Spirit-empowered church revitalization. A primary focus of this unit is the changing North American culture and the appropriate biblical/theological response to that change. This course also reflects on the centrality of the Gospel in authentic renewal movements especially as it is expressed in compelling Gospel preaching and practicing the Gospel in its multiple forms throughout the life of a congregation.

#### **Reading list for unit 1:**

Ammerman, N. (2006). *Studying Congregations*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.  
Wright, N. T. *Surprised by Hope*. Harper One, 2018.  
Keller, T. (2012). *Center Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan.

#### **Unit 2: Leadership for Church Renewal (October 2021)**

This unit focuses on missional leadership in the rapidly changing North American cultural context. Reflecting on the apostolic leadership of the Apostle Paul will be a particular focus along with the Ephesians 4 mandate to equip God's people for works of service. Additionally, key characteristics and practices of renewal leaders will be identified especially as it relates to managing turbulence which change creates. Assessment tools will help participants identify their leadership styles and how to

maximize the leadership outcomes for that particular leadership approach. Transferable principles from marketplace leadership will be discussed. A process for identifying and developing leaders in a renewal congregation will be noted. This unit will also reflect on the importance of churches “growing young” and the leadership decisions that facilitate making today’s disciples who will transform tomorrow’s world.

### **Reading list for unit 2:**

Kotter, J. (2010). *Leading Change*. Boston (Mass.): Harvard Business School Press.  
Barton, R. Ruth, and Gary A. Haugen. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*. InterVarsity Press, 2018.  
Vanhoozer, K. and Strachan, O. (2015). *The Pastor as Public Theologian*. Grand Rapids: Baker

### **Unit 3: Essentials for Church Renewal (May 2022)**

This unit identifies the essentials of congregational revitalization. The snapshot of a Spirit-born church from Act 2:42-47 will be examined in-depth. Additionally, the four essentials of renewal will be unpacked: abiding (staying connected to the vine), vision (having a clear picture of a God-preferred future), leadership (the capacity to move people from “here” to “there”) and health (nurturing a community of grace and permission). During this unit the three-step renewal process of listen...imagine...do will be introduced with emphasis on making discoveries while sitting at the intersection of four-directional listening. A number of assessment tools will be introduced to help name the present condition of a congregation’s missional health.

### **Reading list for unit 3:**

Long, R.(2009). *Growing the Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.  
Pope, R. (2006). *The Intentional Church*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.  
Koster, Tim and John Wagenveld (2014). *Take Your Church’s Pulse*. Sauk Village, IL: Multiplication Network Ministries.

### **Unit 4: Gospel-telling & Disciple-making for Church Renewal (October 2022)**

This unit focuses on Gospel-telling and disciple-making in renewal congregations. Participants will be taught the practices of Gospel-telling in the context of peaching compelling biblical sermons. Additional instruction will be provided for developing communication skills that enhance “feet that bring good news” in a 21<sup>st</sup> century North American context. This unit will also examine the process of disciple-making with an emphasis on developing churches that have “gravitational pull.” Several investments of outreaching congregations will be examined. Finally, the four stages of faith development will be examined including practices that deepen a congregant’s relationship with Christ.

### **Reading list for unit 4:**

Barna, G. (2001). *Growing True Disciples*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: WaterBrook Press.  
Hagberg, Janet, and Robert A. Guelich. *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*. Media Production Services Unit, Manitoba Education, 2011.  
Hawkins, G. and Parkinson, C. (2011). *Move*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan.

## **Unit 5: Revisioning for Church Renewal (May 2023)**

This unit provides instruction in the process of developing a clear, shared and compelling vision for a God-preferred future. Participants will be instructed in the creation of a vision pyramid including God's mission, vision, values, goals, action plans and personal practices. Training in casting and sustaining vision will be provided. An important conversation will focus on the Holy Spirit's role in shaping vision through a divine-human dance of cooperation. This unit will also discuss the importance of being communities of blessing by focusing on justice and mercy as they seek the "shalom of the city."

### **Reading list for unit 5:**

Barna, G. (1992). *The Power of Vision*. Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books.  
Bolman, L. (2017). *Reframing Organizations*. JOHN WILEY & Sons.  
Goheen, M. (2011). *A Light to the Nations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

## **Unit 6 Mobilization for Church Renewal (October 2023)**

This unit highlights the link between organizational structure and congregational revitalization. A history of church polity that has facilitated and/or responded to church renewal will be examined. A study of New Testament church structure will be considered for the purpose of gleaning lessons about empowering congregational renewal through the employment of new congregational wineskins. Reflections on the dynamics of leadership and structures as they are connected to church size will also be considered. A final review and celebration of progress in church revitalization will take place and ministry investments necessary for continuous renewal will be discussed.

### **Reading list for unit 6:**

Breen, M. and Kallestad, W. (2005). *The Passionate Church*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NexGen, Cook.  
Collins, J. (2009). *Good to Great*. New York, NY: Collins.  
Collins, J. (2006). *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*. London: Rh Business Books.  
McNeal, R. (2015). *Kingdom Come*. Carol Stream: Tyndale.

## **Final Thesis-Project**

Participants are expected to submit a final thesis project focused on one more of the multiple aspects of church renewal found in the emphases of this Doctoral program. The thesis project should be of particular importance for the student's present ministry context. Portions of this project will be developed during the three-year academic cycle of the Doctor of Ministry program.

The Doctor of Ministry Program Reference Guide (2019) states that D. Min. projects should, with appendices, range between 100-200 pages. The project proposal must be submitted to the faculty mentor for D.Min. committee approval.

Examples of these projects may include:

- How to conduct a community survey for renewal;
- How to participate with the Holy Spirit in a renewal movement;
- How to invest in a prayer movement for renewal;

- How to engage in congregational listening for renewal;
- How to create clear, shared and compelling visions for renewal;
- How to nurture abiding in a renewal congregation;
- How to empower leaders in a renewal congregation;
- How to foster community health in a renewal congregation;
- How to transition to a new missional leadership model for renewal;
- How to build governance structures that foster renewal;
- How to practice the Gospel in a renewal congregation;
- How to create a disciple-making culture in a renewal congregation;
- How to staff for renewal;
- Etc.

### Contact Information

Questions concerning this Doctor of Ministry in Church Renewal can be directed to the Doctor of Ministry office at Western Theological Seminary. See information at the WTS website <https://www.westernsem.edu/academics/degrees/doctor-ministry-degree/>

### A Suggested Bibliography

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- Barna, G. and Kinnaman, D. (2014). *Churchless*. Austin: Tyndale.
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- Brown, L., Penfold, G. and Westra, G. (2016). *Pastor Unique*. Bloomington: West Bow Pr.
- Buchanan, M. (2012). *Your Church is Too Safe*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.
- Collins, J. (2009). *Good to Great*. New York, NY: Collins.
- Collins, J. (2006). *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*. London: Rh Business Books.
- Davis, A. (2017). *Revitalize*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Dudley, Carl S., and Nancy Tatom Ammerman. *Congregations in Transition: a Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities*. Jossey-Bass, 2002.
- Frost, M. (2011). *The Road to Missional*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books.
- Gelder, Craig Van, and Dwight J. Zscheile. *Participating in God's Mission*, Eerdmans, 2018.
- Goheen, M. (2011). *A Light to the Nations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Granberg-Michaelson, W. (2018). *Future Faith*. Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse.
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- Harney, K. and Bouwer, B. (2011). *The U-turn Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.
- Hart, D. (2005). *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic.
- Herrington, J., Bonem, M. and Furr, J. (2000). *Leading Congregational Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hawkins, G. and Parkinson, C. (2011). *Move*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan.
- Im, D. (2017). *No Silver Bullets*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group.
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Malphurs, A. (2005). *Advanced Strategic Planning*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

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Martin, J. (2012). *The Just Church*. [Carol Stream, IL]: Tyndale Momentum.

Maxwell, J. (1995). *Developing the Leaders Around You*. Nashville: T. Nelson.

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Mead, L. (2014). *More than Numbers*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Osmer, R. (2008) *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Paas, S. (2016). *Church Planting in the Secular West*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Parkinson, C. and Scammacca-Lewis, N. (2015). *Rise*. [Colorado Springs, Co.]: NavPress.

Pope, R. (2006). *The Intentional Church*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

Powell, K. (2016). *Growing Young*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Rainer, T. (2014). *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group.

Rainer, T. (2009). *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.

Rainer, T. (2016). *Who Moved My Pulpit?*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group.

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Rendle, G. (2014). *Doing the Math of Mission*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Richardson, Rick (2019). *You Found Me*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.

Roxburgh, A. (2015). *Structured for Mission*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Scazzero, P. and Bird, W. (2003). *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.

Smith, J. (2013). *Imagining the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic.

Stanley, A. (2012). *Deep & Wide*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.

Stanton, Glenn T. (2019) *The Myth of the Dying Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academy.

Stetzer, E. and Dodson, M. (2007). *Comeback Churches*. Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Pub. Group.

Stewart, J. (2015). *Envisioning the Congregation, Practicing the Gospel*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

Van Gelder, C. (2000). *The Essence of the Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

Vanhoozer, K. and Strachan, O. (2015). *The Pastor as Public Theologian*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

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