

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Let me welcome all of you, including six new students and eleven graduates, to the 2024 Fall Term of the Course of Study School of Ohio (COSSO)! We offer the fall term classes in a hybrid format and look forward to meeting you in person on the campus of Methodist Theological School in Ohio!

According to the *Policies and Guidelines for Course of Study Schools*, the Course of Study (COS) program seeks to “prepar[e] local pastors in core competencies of biblical interpretation, historical and theological understanding, congregational leadership, and pastoral effectiveness.” Thus, COS courses are to be “rigorous and theologically robust educational experiences,” which require significant reading and writing assignments. Throughout their COS program, students are encouraged to cultivate the ability to think theologically and integrate theological thinking into their ministry.

Another important objective of the COS curriculum is to “provid[e] opportunity for personal growth and formation” of local pastors. Theological education is not just to be about conveying knowledge but to be about helping students be formed for ministry, which demands prayerful nurture of souls through the intentional practice of spiritual disciplines. John Wesley brought to the fore in both his personal devotional life and his ministry such disciplines as prayer, study of the Scriptures, Lord’s Supper, fasting, and Christian conference (life together).

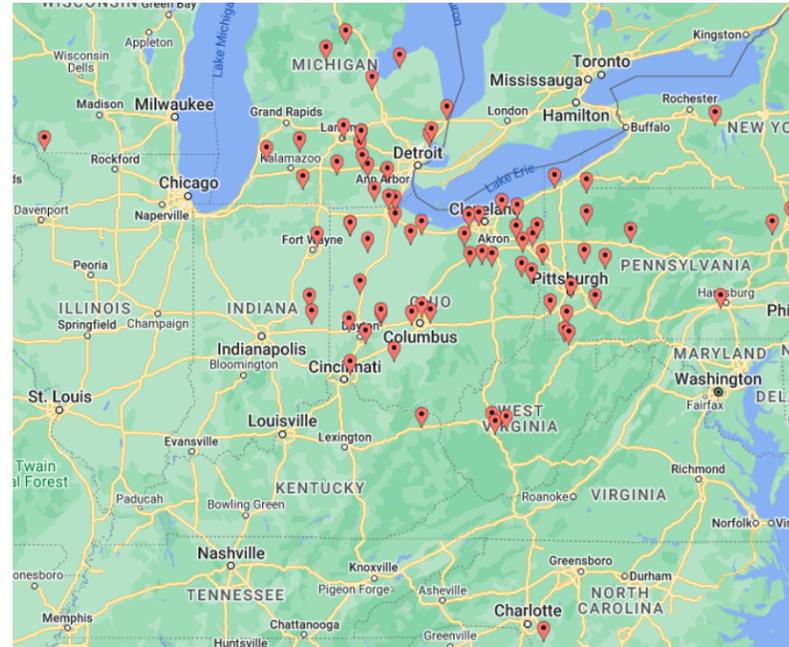
As Marjorie Thompson well put it, spiritual disciplines are “simply means of grace,” which “keep us open to the mysterious work of grace in our heart and our world” (*Soul Feast*, 10). To faithfully practice them, we would need a genuine desire to grow in our relationship with God and joyful commitment to embracing a structured life. We are to be reminded that “prayer [as well as other spiritual disciplines]... never touches us as long as it remains on the surface of our lives, as long as it is nothing but one more of the thousand things that must be done. It is only when prayer becomes ‘the one thing necessary’ that real prayer begins” (James Finley, *Merton’s Palace of Nowhere*, xvii).

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FROM THE COORDINATOR

COURSE PLANNING NOTES:

- Registration is open for all 2025 classes. Find the course planning grid to help plan your classes at the top of <https://cosohio.org/2025-schedule>
- Students from 11 Annual Conferences are taking classes this term:



Grace Wallace
Coordinator



COSSO NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE CHOIR ROOM

As the old saying goes, “the one who sings prays twice.” We look forward to singing together soon: the COS choir is still on hiatus.



Lori Douglas Weaver, MMEd
Choir Director



Course of Study School of Ohio

www.cosohio.org

| Term | Class Dates | Registration Deadline | Dorm Availability |
|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2025 Winter | Feb. 7-8 & March 7-8 | 12/10/24 | Online term |
| 2025 Spring | April 4-5 & May 2-3 | 2/4/25 | Online term |
| 2025 Summer | July 11-12 & Aug. 1-2 | 5/13/25 | Online term |
| 2025 Fall (Hybrid) | Sept. 12-13 & Oct. 10-11 | 7/15/25 | Available (1 weekend in-person) |

MEET YOUR INSTRUCTORS



Rev. Dr. Sarah Lancaster

COS 121 Theological Heritage I: Introduction

Dr. Lancaster received her M.Div. from Perkins School of Theology and her Ph.D. from Southern Methodist University. An elder in the North Texas Annual Conference, she is Professor of Theology at MTSO.

Rev. Robin Dillon

COS 223: Worship and Sacraments

Rev. Dillon received her M.Div. from MTSO. An elder in the East Ohio Conference, she is the Lead Pastor at Lakewood UMC and serves as Dean of the East-West Ohio Clergy Licensing School.



Rev. Dr. Xavier Johnson

COS 324: Preaching

Dr. Johnson received his M.T.S. from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and his D.Min. from Virginia Theological Seminary. Ordained in the Progressive National Convention, he is Assistant Professor in the Practice of Preaching & Black Church Studies at United Theological Seminary and pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Dayton.



Rev. Dr. Paul Kim

COS 421: Bible IV: Prophets, Psalms & Wisdom Lit

Dr. Kim received his M.Div. and Th.M. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and his Ph.D. from the Claremont School of Theology. A Presbyterian elder, he is Professor of Hebrew Bible at MTSO.



Rev. Dr. Scott Kisker

COS 523: Evangelism

Dr. Kisker received his M.Div. from Duke Divinity School and Ph.D. from Drew University. He is Professor of the History of Christianity and Associate Dean for Academic Programs at United Theological Seminary.



SPIRITUAL FORMATION

RULES TO BEING PERFECT, ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 5:43-48

I love watching the Olympics and, especially the Paralympic games - replays of boccia, goalball, wheelchair rugby, I love it all! There's so much of what we work for in the church, community and kindness, which seem to be lacking in our culture right now, but maybe it has always been this way. The divisions are stark, polarization is ever widening, and here we are coming up to another national election. What will happen? Democracy or autocracy? It seems there's nothing in between, no room for everyone at the table, no compromise or agreeing to disagree, only winners or losers. And where does that leave us as church leaders? How do we bridge these divides?

When I look for guidance from the church, the words of John Wesley come to mind, "Do No Harm" and the unfailing commands of Jesus, "Love your enemy." Both of these commands are related but sound a little like "turn the other cheek," which most of us aren't likely to spend much time trying to do. These commands seem too idealistic and impossible to follow in the "real" world. And yet, Jesus is dead serious, because eventually he dies for these and many other outrageous ideals. He outlines his vision for God's kingdom with another command, "be perfect," which seems even crazier. People throughout history on both sides of political and religious divides have criticized Jesus' teachings as ludicrous. Religion doesn't belong in politics, some say, and politics doesn't belong in religion, are you serious? When have religion and politics ever been separate?

When Jesus says "be perfect," he might as well say, it's a dog-eat-dog world where only the strong survive, and that's the point. He's not really trying to change the rules, he's calling into question our understanding of the rules, in order to redeem the very world that will put him to death. So, you see, nothing has really changed in the world, but our understanding of the rules is expected to change. Be perfect, bridge what separates you and your enemies, an endless struggle, but we have prophetic guidance for doing this - be perfect.

We've heard plenty of pundits on both sides of the religious and political divide and yet, as I continue to look at replays of the Paralympics, I am hopeful, because I know that people are capable of overcoming great odds and living in a world where everyone is a winner, no matter what side you are on. As we approach the upcoming election, I pray that you will be encouraged to replay Jesus' rules with the people you serve, to live in a more "perfect" way, where community and kindness are not an impossible dream but an everyday reality.

Rev. Dr. Rebeka Maples
Spiritual Formation Director



FROM THE DIRECTOR *continued*

I hope that classes at COSSO will help you engage in transforming theological reflection and be formed for an integral journey, both inward and outward.

All of us on the COSSO staff are excited to journey with you this term, and pray for God's continued guidance and blessings on you and on your studies and ministry.

Peace,

Dr. Joon-Sik Park

*Director of the Course of Study School of Ohio
E. Stanley Jones Professor of World Evangelism
at MTSO*



2024 SUMMER GRADUATE— CONGRATULATIONS!



Jackie Chambers, West Virginia Conference