

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Let me welcome all of you, including two new students and eight graduates, to the 2025 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.

In a homily titled "Such a Time as This," preached at the opening convocation of a mainline seminary, Christian ethicist Nancy Duff provides a deep reflection on the meaning and significance of the call of God. She asserts that "lives [of believers] are guided by divine purpose rather than by chance or fate" and that "[we] are here for a reason, and [our] being here makes a difference." Then, a most pressing responsibility on our part "lies in discerning the purpose for which God has called us to this time and to this place."

Faithfully answering the call, however, we might be overcome at times by anxiety, fear, doubt, or a sense of failure. Yet, even in those moments, the grace of God will continue to surround and carry us. As Duff says, "in [our] highest hopes and lowest failure, the love of God sustains [us]." We would thus need to trust that God's grace and strength will be sufficient despite all our frailties and weaknesses.

Theological education is not only about conveying knowledge but also about forming those who have been called for integral ministry and mission. And formation requires prayerful attention to the nurture of souls. As James Finley well put it, "Prayer 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" (*Merton's Palace of Nowhere*).

I hope that classes at COSSO, enabling you to engage in transforming theological reflection and spiritual formation, will help you clearly discern and faithfully fulfill God's purpose for you this time and this place.

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,

Joon-Sik Park

Dr. Joon-Sik Park

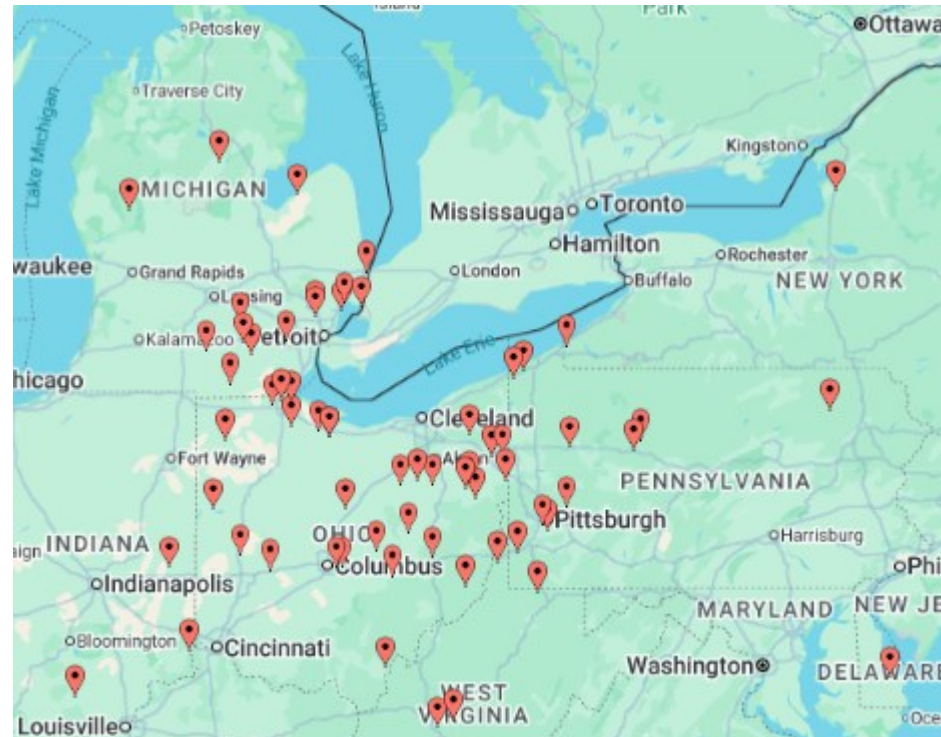
*Director of the Course of Study School of Ohio
E. Stanley Jones Professor of World Evangelism*



FROM THE COORDINATOR

COURSE PLANNING NOTES:

- Registration is open for all 2026 classes. Find the course planning grid to help plan your classes at the top of <https://cosohio.org/2026-schedule>
- Students from 9 Annual Conferences are taking classes this term:

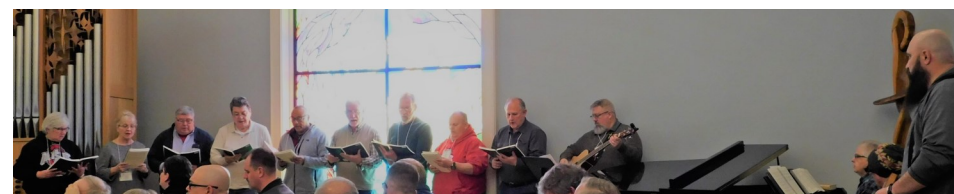


Grace Wallace
Coordinator



FROM THE CHOIR ROOM

Anyone interested in singing/playing an instrument in the choir when on-campus for 2025 Fall should join [the COSSO Choir group on Populi](#) and [come to choir rehearsal Saturday at 7:30 am in the Centrum](#)

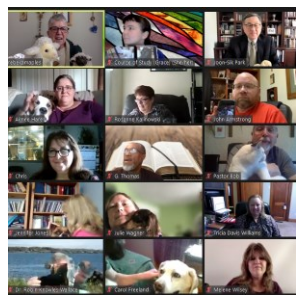
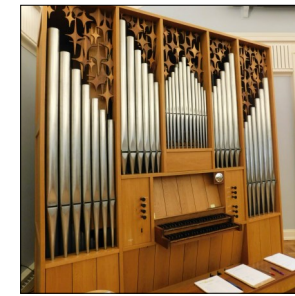


Lori Douglas Weaver, MMed
Choir Director



COSSO NEWSLETTER

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Course of Study School of Ohio

www.cosohio.org

Term	Class Dates	Registration Deadline	Dorm Availability
2026 Winter (COS 323 is FULL)	Feb. 13-14 & Mar 13-14	12/16/25	Online term
2026 Spring (COS 324 is FULL)	Apr. 17-18 & May 8-9	2/17/26	Online term
2026 Summer	Jul. 10-11 & Jul. 31-Aug. 1	5/12/26	Online term
2026 Fall (Hybrid)	Sept. 11-12 & Oct. 9-10	7/14/26	Available (1 weekend in-person)

MEET YOUR INSTRUCTORS



Rev. Dr. Brenda Buckwell
COS 123: Formation & Discipleship
Rev. Dr. Brenda Buckwell received her M.Div. from Boston University and D.Min. from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. An elder in the West Ohio Annual Conference, she is the founder and spiritual director of Living Streams Flowing Water.

Rev. Cara Stultz-Costello
COS 224: Administration & Polity

Rev. Cara Stultz-Costello received her M.Div. from Wesley Theological Seminary. An Elder in the East Ohio conference, she serves as District Superintendent of the Central Valley District.



Rev. Dr. Walter Taylor
COS 321: Bible III: Gospels
Rev. Dr. Taylor received his M.Div. from Lutheran Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. from Claremont University. A Lutheran pastor, he is emeritus professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary.

Dr. Glen Messer
COS 422: Theological Heritage IV: Wesleyan Movement

Dr. Glen Messer received his M.Div. and Th.D. from Boston University. From 2012-2016 he served as associate ecumenical staff officer for theology and dialogue with the UMC Council of Bishops Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships.



Rev. Dr. Chuck Gutenson
COS 523: Evangelism
Dr. Chuck Gutenson received an M.Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in Philosophical Theology from Southern Methodist University. He is a church consultant, and previously served 10 years at Asbury Seminary, most recently as professor of Theology and Philosophy.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

DESERT SPIRITUALITY FOR MINISTRY IN CHAOS

This year keeps breaking our hearts: divisive politics, anger and resentment spewed from national leaders, violence and hatred in public spaces, and natural disasters from ever-increasing climate changes. The pressures of ministry are enormous, the demands are increasing, and satisfaction is diminishing. This is the reality we are living in, so how can we remain hopeful in all this chaos, and keep our love for God and the church alive in us, so that we can inspire and nurture others who are looking to us for hope and reassurance? What can we do? Where can we go?

The 3rd century, desert Ammas and Abbas (or as my internet searches insist, the Mammass and Pappas) went into the desert to follow the example of Jesus' life of poverty, service, and self-denial. But living in the desert is a difficult journey and it's not for everyone. For us it is a metaphorical journey, in spaces where we can experience renewal and transformation. Desert spirituality is a way of seeking God, and desert wisdom from the early monks has much to teach in our never-ending struggle to pray and set time aside just to "be" with God.

Even though we know the importance of taking time away from the busyness, we need reminders, because, well, it is part of our job as spiritual leaders and it will, in the end, save our lives and our ministry. One bit of wisdom from Henri J.M. Nouwen, contemplative Jesuit priest (1932-1996), "the more we struggle with prayer the more we prevent the world from shaping us in its image."

I spent the month of August retreating and visiting in the high desert area of southern California, and there I continued my struggle in prayer. To answer some of my questions, I turned to Nouwen's book* on desert spirituality and contemporary ministry, published in 1981 it reads as though it was written for us in 2025. He served as my spiritual guide through the intense dry hot days, the parched desert ground, and the constant wind that eases the heat and makes things even drier. I understand a little more each time I am there, why the desert monks fled to the desert, not to get away from the world but to help save the world and themselves. In the desert, they were free from many outside distractions, so they could listen inside, to the still small voice of God.

Nouwen tells the story of Abba Arsenius, a well-educated Roman who lived in a high court and struggled with his spiritual life. He prayed to God to show him the way of salvation and heard a voice saying, "Arsenius flee, be silent, and pray always." He fled to the desert and there he struggled listening and praying for many years. Henri Nouwen summarizes desert spirituality in three words from Abba Arsenius: Solitude, Silence, and Prayer. His advice to pastors today is to find your metaphorical desert place for solitude, be silent there and just listen, then pray, use words only if necessary. It is probably the most difficult thing for busy pastors to do, but lucky for us, it is a lifelong process. We will try, get distracted and try again, and somehow in all that trying we will one day find ourselves in the heart of the One who called us to this holy calling.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION *continued*

Jesus said to his disciples when things became so chaotic and so many people were clamoring for their attention, "come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). In these busy and troubling times, I pray that you will take some time to step away for a day, an hour, even a moment, and find your own ways to silence your heart and mind, and slowly pray your way into God's heart.

*Nouwen, Henri J.M., *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry*, NY: HarperCollins Pub., 1981.

Rev. Dr. Rebeka Maples
Spiritual Formation Director



2025 SUMMER GRADUATES— CONGRATULATIONS!



Jason Weirich, Susquehanna; Monica Calvert, Western PA;
Larry French, Michigan; Sam Gordy, Michigan;
Bryan Moore, West Ohio; and Mary Barrett, Michigan