



TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY: LEADING CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUAL GROUPS AND RETREATS

September 2025 – July 2026

Class of 2026



SHALEM INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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"What does it mean to practice the spiritual life? When we embody practices, we live into them and they shape our habits of being. We have to practice being present to the moment, because our tendency – and the world around us conspires in this – is to be distracted. [We]...practice contemplation so that in [our] whole life [we] can become conscious of the sacred presence beating through the heart of the world."

– Christine Valters Paintner, *The Artist's Rule*



Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Spiritual Groups & Retreats is designed to equip, encourage, and support those called to create and facilitate contemplative spiritual groups and retreats. Through experiential learning, seminars, reflection, and a sacred learning community, participants will expand their contemplative awareness of the Divine and grow in their contemplative leadership and skills.

The program is grounded in the contemplative Christian tradition while welcoming and including the wisdom of other traditions. With deep respect and appreciation of the many spiritual paths, and an ever-expanding understanding of the inter-connectedness of *all creation*, we welcome participants wherever they are on the path of spiritual discovery to learn and expand with us.

Begun in 1987, the program has a compelling history of supporting individuals who wish to explore a calling to facilitate contemplative spiritual groups and/or retreats that is born from their own inward journey and listening for the movement of Spirit in community. As transformation occurs in our own being, we long for authentic spiritual community and begin to ponder, *"What is mine to do in service to the wider world?"*

Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Spiritual Groups & Retreats is for those who are committed to their inward journey, to personal transformation, and to exploring what is theirs to do in their own communities. We rarely understand or know exactly what a calling will look like when we feel those initial stirrings and start asking the tough questions. We feel compelled to respond – to wonder, explore, try, and act. The desire for justice, harmony, peace, and unity for ourselves and others deepens and calls us to loving action in the world around us.

There are many types of groups and retreats that are valuable in supporting our spiritual journeys. The *Transforming Community* program focuses specifically on *contemplative* spiritual groups and retreats. Perhaps the simplest definition of "contemplative" is *openness to what is*. The very heart of this program is about nurturing our contemplative stance, grounding us in awareness of the immediate and intimate Presence of Love with whom we live and move and have our being. This nurturing occurs by offering participants the opportunity to experience transformative spiritual community, deeply contemplative spiritual practices and prayer, meaningful personal reflection, the support and guidance of experienced Shalem staff and a small peer group, and the development and practice of contemplative leadership every step of the way.

General Program Information

The program provides spiritual deepening and leadership preparation through online class sessions, at home work, and an eight-day residency with seminars, grounding in a variety of spiritual practices, opportunities for reflection and sharing, a guided silent retreat, and leadership in a small group setting. In the spiritual laboratory of the small peer group, both in-person at the residency and on Zoom, associates participate in and facilitate contemplative spiritual practices, reflect on leadership considerations, and receive valuable feedback from their peers and Peer Group Staff Leader. Learning is further deepened through the creation and leadership of a small group program in the associate's home community and creation and submission of a final project.



The in-person residency is scheduled at Bon Secours Retreat and Conference Center, Marriottsville, MD, which is handicap accessible. Meals offer healthy options and take dietary restrictions into consideration.

PROGRAM TIMELINE: September 2025 – July 2026

Early Bird (Discounted) Application by: 5/15/2025

Final Application by: 7/1/2025

At-Home Work:

- September 2025 – July 2026

Online Opening Weekend:

- Friday, September 19, 2025 from 6:00pm – 8:30pm ET
- Saturday, September 20, 2025 from 10:00am – 4:00pm ET

In-Person Residency:

- Thursday, October 30 – Thursday, November 6, 2025

Online Class Sessions – Saturdays from 10:00am – 4:00pm ET:

- January 10, 2026
- February 21, 2026
- March 21, 2026
- April 18, 2026
- May 16, 2026

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Lorie Conway is the program director for the *Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Spiritual Groups and Retreats Class of 2025*. Lorie has a passion for deep listening and accompanying others on their spiritual journeys through spiritual companionship, contemplative small groups, and spiritual retreats. Lorie is a graduate of Shalem's *Living in God* and *Transforming Community* programs. Lorie received her certificate in spiritual direction from the Kairos School of Spiritual Formation and holds a M.A. in Religion from Lancaster Theological Seminary and a M.A.S. in Behavioral Management & Human Resources from Johns Hopkins University. Lorie's spirituality is rooted in the Christ tradition and welcoming of the many paths and unique journeys enfolded within Divine Mystery.



See www.shalem.org for a full list of staff members.

WHO SHOULD APPLY?

Shalem's *Transforming Community* Program is for people who long for an authentic spiritual community and experiential learning environment, and who:



- Desire to explore or further a sense of call to create and lead contemplative spiritual groups and/or retreats;
- Desire to deepen and expand their own contemplative spiritual practice and way of being in the world;
- Want to consider ways their contemplative stance is calling them to loving and transformative action in their communities.

Each class comprises 15 to 20 carefully selected associates who share a sense of call to create and lead contemplative spiritual groups or retreats and are committed to journeying together in exploration of that call. Associates come from a wide variety of occupations, vocations, and spiritual traditions.

"At Shalem, the leaders revealed their personal passion to us through each teaching. Their words and presence were alive, resonating and bouncing off of all of our hearts. Together we laughed, we walked, we played with art, we talked a lot over meals. They truly entered into the community with us."

-Susan Rowland, San Jose, CA

Program Components



At-Home and Online work

At-Home and Online work include reading and engagement with selected texts and resources, participation in online Class and Peer Group sessions, creation and facilitation of a six-week contemplative spiritual group with a short opening retreat in one's home community, participation in a two-night organized silent retreat of the associate's choice, and preparation of two spiritual practice sessions to be led with one's Peer Group at the residency and at an online Peer Group session. Regular staff communication, consultations, and responses will be provided.

Residency

The in-person residency includes a time of spiritual deepening and leadership preparation with topical seminars, grounding in a variety of spiritual practices through seminars and experiential learning and reflection, and exploration of leadership considerations. Associates will participate in peer-led spiritual practice sessions, as well as lead a session for their peer group that has been prepared prior to arrival at the residency. The process includes supportive responses from peers and the group staff leader. A two-night guided, silent retreat will be held during the seminar to offer spacious time for contemplation and reflection.



Seminars and Contemplative Spiritual Practices

Seminars include an introduction of the content, dialogue, individual and small group reflection, contemplative practice, and leadership considerations. An informal atmosphere of mutual learning is cultivated, together with respect for the experience brought by associates.

Examples of seminar themes included in the program include:

- Grounding and Intention of Contemplative Spiritual Practices
- Radical Presence and Identity
- Contemplative Leadership
- Creating and Facilitating Contemplative Groups and Retreats
- Contemplation and Sacred Activism
- Unity in Diversity
- Discernment in Leadership
- Dynamics and Challenges in Groups

Examples of spiritual practice genres included in the program include:

- Sound & Silence
- Embodiment
- Creativity
- Sacred Text
- External Images
- Interfaith Practices
- Earth Awareness

Written Reflections

Written reflections include Soul Care Reflections (short responses to simple soul care reflection questions pertinent to the program journey), a two-page reflection regarding the leadership of a guided silent or contemplative retreat chosen by the associate, completion of a self-reflection following the at-home contemplative spiritual group, feedback regarding the residency and Zoom sessions, and a final integrative paper focused on the design of a contemplative spiritual group or retreat. Specific guidelines will be provided for all papers.



Personal Spiritual Practice

Personal Spiritual Practice is the foundation of personal and community transformation and a contemplative way of being in the world. Associates are encouraged to develop their own rhythm of personal spiritual practice and reflection, as well as regular meetings with a Spiritual Director/Guide/Companion.

Cost of the Program

Early Bird price (by May 15, 2025): \$4,680

Regular price (after May 15, 2025): \$5,200

The price of the program includes program staff, administrative costs, and room & board for the residency. About 75-80% of the costs are covered by this fee. The balance is funded by gifts from donors, and as a result, their prayers as well as their financial support accompany you in this program.

Additional costs include travel to the residency, books, the guided silent retreat of your choice, and any fees for personal spiritual direction. We encourage the purchase of used books to minimize cost and impact on the environment.

Tuition Assistance: In some cases of financial need, Shalem is able to offer limited tuition reduction depending on your need and the number of other requests. We ask that you prayerfully consider the amount you are able to pay and the amount you are requesting. We also encourage you to look for sources of funding from your spiritual communities. If you wish to be considered for reduced tuition, please submit a completed Tuition Assistance Form at the time of your application.

Please contact the Finance Office with any questions.

Certificate of Completion

A Certificate of Completion will be awarded to those who satisfactorily complete the measurable objectives of the *Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Spiritual Groups & Retreats Program*. This is not intended as an objective certification of the associate as a leader of contemplative prayer groups and retreats, since we believe that the final confirmation of this gift and call is known in the fruits of the ministry and is clarified through the Spirit of Truth alive in the leader and a group. However, the Certificate does represent a significant exposure and commitment of the participant to a program of study, personal discipline, reflection, and evaluation from others concerning his/her spiritual understanding and leadership.



“What I experienced was a call into the greater spiritual depth with the Presence, and the shallow waters where I had been wading were just no longer satisfying for my soul. Experiencing what Shalem offers was less about me accomplishing or developing or learning as much as being encouraged to be guided by God to live the life I am supposed to lead as a spiritual being.”

-Ian White Maher