

Neighborhood Seminary



FAQs for Neighborhood Seminary 2022

Neighborhood Seminary is a non-traditional educational organization which offers learning and equipping experiences for persons who want deeper relationships with God and neighbors, and/or who want to explore and participate in God's work of making all things new within, beyond, or without the walls of religious institutions.

Our vision is for the liberating, forgiving, reconciling, transforming, justice-seeking, life-giving love of God to be embodied in us and experienced in the neighborhoods of our lives.

Whether folks define *neighborhood* as relationships in the family, workplace, school, church, apartment building, village, town, housing development, or some other set of meaningful relationships, *we seek to equip persons for better neighboring practices so both neighbors and neighborhoods may flourish.*

What is the focus of this educational ministry? John 1:14, paraphrased by Eugene Peterson, reads: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." We seek to follow Jesus into the neighborhoods, ably equipped (spiritually and practically) so that together we seek to pursue nurturing community, embodying good news and cultivating shalom.

Are you affiliated with a particular church, denomination or educational institution? While NS's theology, in large measure, comes from the Wesleyan tradition, we are an ecumenical and diverse educational ministry. We explore theological concepts through varied lenses, including but not limited to boundless and healing grace, unconditional love, and liberating justice. While we draw upon diverse resources for spiritual formation, both classical and contemporary, we seek to remain open to the many ways the Spirit speaks and moves among us. We are perpetually learning even as we share better and best practices for neighboring in the way of Jesus.

What is NS's position on diversity, equity and inclusion? All persons are welcome to participate in the courses and programs of NS, regardless of race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), national origin, ethnicity, age, disability or genetic information. *All* means *all* to us, and that includes persons who are active in a church, persons who've left the church and persons who have never had a relationship with a church, synagogue, mosque or temple.

Our leadership team identifies as Christian, with an understanding of Christ's love as broad enough to embrace all who want to grow in relationship with God and with neighbors.

For the fullest integration of our three components: spiritual formation, theological formation and missional formation, we understand there is much work to be done as we learn from traditions and experiences beyond the dominant American culture. Relatedly, there is much to *unlearn*, to *dismantle*, to *repair* in our racialized and multi-divided culture. We believe racial justice is an essential aspect of following Jesus. NS's growth and development toward becoming an increasingly diverse, inclusive and equitable community are ultimately dependent upon the integrity of our commitments, words and actions at every level of this organization. We name our dependency upon God's Spirit to be transformed that we might reflect God's inclusive love.

Is NS accredited? We are not accredited by state or regional bodies as more traditional seminaries may be.

What degrees does NS offer? We do not offer degree programs. We offer a Certificate of Completion in Neighboring Theology and Practice, a 2-year program which has been the center of NS's work since 2017. Other long-term certificate programs are under development.

Can I take the courses I need to be ordained in my denomination? No, we do not offer courses required for ordination.

What about continuing education units? Yes! We can provide, upon completion of some of our courses, CEUs equivalent to ten hours of class time for 1 full CEU. There is a processing fee for receiving the CEU document.

What is the focus of the curriculum? How is it organized? Short-term courses (whether 4-week, 6-week, 8-week, 10-week), and/or long-term courses (10-months, 18-months or 24-months) are characterized by three integrated components: theological formation, spiritual formation, and neighboring practices (missional formation).

All of the curriculum moves from the concepts of *imago dei*: I and my neighbors are created in the image of God; all people are of sacred worth; and *missio dei*: I and my neighbor are called to share in the mission of God, that is to participate with God and with one another in God's work of making all things new. Learning experiences, which bring together head and heart and hands, are tightly woven. NS courses emphasize the necessity of faith that is both practiced and practical, is made real (flesh and blood) in authentic relationships, and then contributes to the transformation of community. It is anticipated students are not just sitting in class (in person or virtually) to have heads filled with information. Rather, hearts are stirred through engagement with spiritual practices personally and in NS community through small groups. Minds are given new information and models of neighboring in fresh ways. Hands and feet are encouraged to go and be present with neighbors, as well as to go and do the works of justice and mercy, all the while utilizing principles of community organizing, asset-based community development, appreciative inquiry, and other strengths-based models for community transformation.

Are all of your classes online? How are the courses "delivered?" When NS began in 2017, all classes were on the ground, and the cohort met in a local church for monthly class days. In 2020, with COVID, everything became virtual, and our reach expanded to a multi-state cohort with some local "regional" groups in TX and FL. Instruction and discussion were in real time, not pre-recorded. We have developed some hybrid experiences with some folks in the same gathering space, while instructors and spiritual formation leaders join the class virtually.

We do not have pre-recorded instruction or asynchronous learning for self-directed course work. We seek to build a community of learners, even when the community is virtual, by sharing the same virtual or hybrid space at the same time.

The relationship between the virtual world and in-person learning is a continually evolving area for NS as our teams seek to respond to both the needs of learners and life situations, like the pandemic. We strive for optimum learning experiences, all the while striving to nurture community among learners, faculty and local leadership teams,

What do people do with what they learn through NS? Across the last 5 years persons who've completed NS programs report they've started non-profits in their communities, made decisions to go to traditional seminary, completed further denominational credentialing to serve small churches as lay-persons, developed medical equipment ministries in their rural community, deepened involvement in various racial justice ministries in their towns. One physician shared he changed the way he practiced rural family medicine with deeper listening skills. Another person came to know his neighborhood, where he'd lived for more than 20 years, in new ways. Now he cultivates neighborhood-wide celebrations of birthdays and other life events.

The possibilities are endless!

NS's goal is to help persons develop spiritual, relational and practical tools for discerning God's unique and particular call in the context of community. Because spiritual formation is the integrating practice which brings together theological concepts and missional formation (neighboring practices), we often use the language of **the contemplative stance** to describe what we do:

We teach people how to **show up** (to God and neighbor),
to **pay attention** (to what God is doing and to neighbors),
to **cooperate** (with God and neighbors),
and to **release the outcomes** (to God!).
Then they go change the world! (in the power of the Spirit!)

What courses are offered? And, when are they scheduled?

+ **Current and upcoming courses** and programs are found on our website: www.neighborhoodseminary.org. Registration for courses and programs can be made online there.

+ **Short term courses** are an excellent way to "test the waters," and to learn what a NS experience might mean for you. A short-term course can be very helpful for discerning ways God is inviting you to participate in God's good work in the neighborhood.

+ **Certificate Programs** (1-year and 2-year programs) offer robust and deeper explorations in the intersectionality of theological formation, spiritual formation and missional engagement (neighboring practices). New cohorts for Neighboring Theology and Practice Certificate (2-year program) typically launch in the Fall. While sustaining NS's unique integrated curriculum design, **one-year certificate programs** give focused attention to equipping persons for collaborative and cooperative neighborhood development. Previous topics have been anti-racism and development of new faith communities. Several new topics and tracks are under prayerful consideration, and/or are already being developed. Cohorts may launch Fall or Winter.

How much do the courses/programs cost? The cost per course varies depending on the length of the course. Best information for each course will be found on the website, as well as links for registration and payment for individual courses.

Do you offer scholarships? We are not able to offer scholarships at this time. We do seek to keep course costs affordable and acceptable. From time to time we are able to offer "early bird" specials.

We recommend individuals with religious affiliations consider using continuing education funds, if those are available for pastors and church leaders. You may also consider contacting local church education committee, mission/ministry team. Further options may include district, association, conference, or other denominational judicatory offices for possible financial assistance.

For persons for whom none of those options are applicable, please contact us at office.manager@neighborhoodseminary.org for discussion of payment options.

How do I apply or register? At the present time persons may simply register directly for a **short-term course** on the website. Traditional applications are not required for short-term courses.

Registration process for certificate programs (1-year or 2-year programs) will be provided on website with certificate program details.

Go to www.neighborhoodseminary.org and check out the current offerings of short-term courses under EVENTS, or by scrolling down the home page. Click on the offerings in which you're most interested, and **sign up today for a course!**

Further questions? Please feel free to contact us at office.manager@neighborhoodseminary.org. We encourage you to visit our website often to see current and upcoming courses and programs.