



2026
INFORMATION PACK

Introduction

The Playground is a **year-long program for ministry leaders** seeking rest, renewal, and a deeper connection to their spiritual life and ministry. In a world marked by exhaustion, burnout, and unrelenting demands, The Playground creates counter environments—sacred spaces inspired by the theology of Jürgen Moltmann—that offer possibilities for healing, hope, and transformation. Grounded in ancient Christian practices like Sabbath, Holy Play, and the Rule of Life, participants nurture their well-being while gaining tools to lead with clarity, joy, and vitality.

Through a cohort model, small groups of ministry leaders journey together, beginning with an in-person convening in St. Augustine, Florida. Throughout the following year, participants engage in virtual learning led by esteemed theologians, embark on fully-funded pilgrimages tailored to their chosen track, and implement pre-designed courses in their ministry contexts. This holistic approach fosters spiritual renewal while addressing modern challenges, equipping leaders to reconnect with faith and inspire their communities.

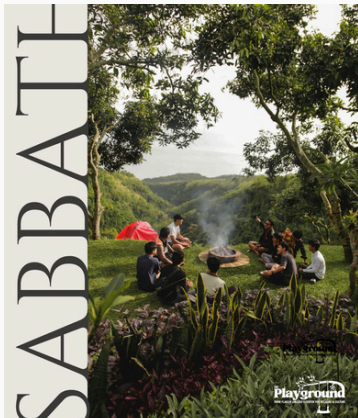
At its heart, The Playground responds to the deep need for rest and reflection among ministry leaders, particularly those serving in marginalized contexts. By creating intentional spaces for renewal and embodied thriving, **The Playground empowers leaders to rediscover their identity as beloved children of God.** Renewed and reenergized, they return to their communities as catalysts for spiritual growth, fostering thriving congregations grounded in ancient wisdom and modern relevance.

What You'll Receive as a Participant in The Playground:

- **Expert-Taught Restorative Practices:** Explore transformative practices like Sabbath, Holy Play, or the Rule of Life, each taught by a distinguished theologian offering fresh insights to renew your faith and leadership.
- **Hybrid Learning with In-Person Foundations:** Begin with an immersive in-person convening in St. Augustine, Florida, followed by 4–6 interactive virtual sessions designed to foster connection and renewal.
- **Sacred Pilgrimage Experiences:** Embark on a journey tailored to your chosen track—whether it's Princeton's Farminary, the "Womanists at the Inkwell" retreat in Oak Bluffs, or the homeland of St. Francis in Assisi, Italy.
- **Wellness Support:** Receive stipends at key milestones to support your personal and professional growth throughout the program.
- **Transformative Congregational Tools:** Return with your course's ready-to-teach package—including video lessons, a facilitator guide, and a participant guidebook—to inspire renewal in your ministry context.

Course Tracks and Pilgrimages

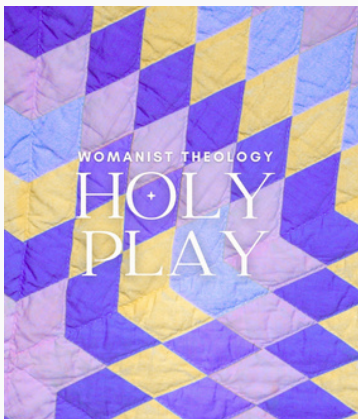
Participants will apply for one of our three tracks, each focused on a unique ancient Christian practice—Sabbath, Holy Play, or A Rule of Life—taught by an expert theologian. Your track becomes your cohort, a small group of 8 to 15 ministry leaders that fosters relational and supportive learning. Guided by your theologian, this collaborative environment allows for shared learning, meaningful connections, and a deeper exploration of these transformative practices.



Ecology & Theology: The Practice of Sabbath *Rediscover the rhythm of rest and renewal.*

“The Sabbath is the ultimate form of resistance to a world that doesn’t know how to slow down,” says theologian & farmer, Dr. Nate Stucky (Princeton Theological Seminary). Through this course, Nate invites you to dig deep—into both soil and soul—offering a fresh vision of rest and renewal. Grounded in the rhythms of creation, you’ll explore how Sabbath can restore balance to your life and ministry.

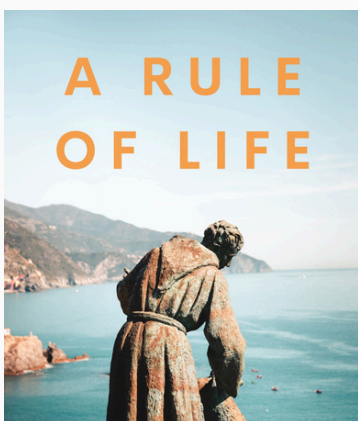
Pilgrimage: The Farminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, NJ Approx. 5 Days, Summer/Fall, 2026



Womanist Theology: The Practice of Holy Play *Reclaim the sacred art of play.*

Dr. Lakisha Lockhart (Union Presbyterian Seminary), a vibrant voice in Womanist theology, dares you to embrace joy, creativity, and laughter as profound expressions of faith. Through this course, you’ll celebrate the wisdom and lived experiences of Black women, exploring how play can heal and transform communities.

Pilgrimage: Oakbluffs, MA Approx. 5 days, July 2026



Franciscan Spirituality: Creating a Rule of Life *Craft a life of intentionality and spiritual depth.*

Step into the world of St. Francis with Dr. Timothy Johnson (Flagler College), a renowned scholar of medieval history and Franciscan theology. Tim reveals how the Franciscan way—centered on simplicity, humility, and spiritual discipline—offers timeless wisdom for creating a contemporary rule of life. This course equips you to find balance, purpose, and spiritual depth in today’s world.

Pilgrimage: Rome & Assisi, Italy Approx. 14 days, May/June 2026

Program Timeline

The Playground's three-phase structure is designed to balance immersive experiences, hybrid learning, and practical application. With a combination of in-person gatherings, virtual sessions, and hands-on teaching, participants engage deeply with ancient practices while maintaining their commitments at home. Each phase is thoughtfully planned to ensure meaningful growth and seamless integration into ministry contexts.

1

Learn *February–May 2026*

Begin your journey with an in-person kickoff gathering, where your cohort's theologian will lead you through foundational classes on practices like Sabbath, Play, and Rule of Life. Afterward, continue learning through live Zoom sessions, diving deeper into these practices from the comfort of your home.

Important Dates:

- February 12 by 2:00 PM EST- February 15 after 5:00 PM EST (Kickoff Gathering, St. Augustine, FL)

Time Commitment:

- Kickoff Gathering: 4 Days, 3 Nights
- Virtual Sessions: 4 Live class Zoom sessions Spring, 2026 (~4-5 hours total)

2

Experience *Summer-Fall 2026*

Embark on a pilgrimage crafted by your theologian, bringing theology and practice to life in transformative sacred spaces.

Important Dates: Pilgrimage timelines based on tracks:

- Ecology & Theology: Sabbath: 5 days, Summer/Fall 2026 (Princeton Farminary, NJ).
- Womanist Theology: Play: 5 days, July 2026 (Oak Bluffs, MA).
- Franciscan Spirituality: Rule of Life: 14 days, May/June 2026 (Rome & Assisi, Italy).

Time Commitment:

- 4-14 Days, Depending on Track
- Briefing & Debriefing virtual calls: ~2 Hours

3

Teach *Fall-Winter 2026*

Take what you've learned and teach the same course in your congregation or ministry context. With support from The Playground team and your theologian, you'll lead 4–6 sessions, sharing the practices and theology you've studied to inspire renewal and transformation within your community.

Time Commitment:

- Teaching: 4-6 sessions (each 1–1.5 hours), 4-9 hours total.
- Monthly 1-hour support calls with The Playground team and theologians (~4 hours total).

Year-Long Time Commitment

1-2 Hrs/Month

4 Day Kickoff

5-14 Day Pilgrimage

4-9 Hrs Teaching

Ready-to-Teach Course

As part of The Playground, participants will teach the same 4–6 session course they completed during the program, sharing the transformative practices of Sabbath, Holy Play, or the Rule of Life with their congregation or community. Using pre-designed materials, this teaching component allows participants to apply their learning while fostering spiritual renewal and growth beyond themselves.

What's Included?

Each ready-to-teach class package includes:

- Facilitator Guide
- Participant Guidebook
- Video Lessons

2026 Courses:



Meet Your Theologians

The creative minds behind The Playground, these experts have designed every detail—from inspiring curriculum to transformative pilgrimages—and will walk alongside you as guides and companions, sharing their passion, wisdom, and support throughout your journey.



Dr. Nate Stucky

The Rev. Dr. Nathan Stucky serves as the Director of the Farminary at Princeton Theological Seminary. Raised on a Kansas cattle and wheat farm, his work intertwines theology, agriculture, and justice. He leads initiatives that integrate regenerative agriculture with theological education, emphasizing Sabbath and ecological attunement. Through his leadership, Dr. Stucky fosters rhythms of creation that promote healing and sustainability while challenging the relentless pace of contemporary life.



Dr. Lakisha Lockhart

Dr. Lakisha R. Lockhart, Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary, specializes in Womanist theology, liberation theology, and embodied pedagogies that integrate play, movement, and creativity into theological education. She emphasizes the body as central to theological reflection and encourages students to engage their communities as part of their learning. Recognized as a “Millennial Womanist to Watch,” her work inspires renewal through the transformative power of play.



Dr. Timothy Johnson

Dr. Timothy J. Johnson, known as “Dr. J,” is the Craig and Audrey Thorn Distinguished Professor of Religion at Flagler College. With a Doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University and fellowships at Cambridge and Dresden, he blends academic rigor with a passion for uncovering the spiritual insights of St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscans. An intellectual adventurer, Dr. J connects the wisdom of ancient traditions to today’s challenges, bringing history to life in ways that inspire joy, curiosity, and transformation.

Program Cost & Registration

~~\$12,000~~ **\$1,000**

The Playground is valued at more than \$12,000 per participant; however, thanks to generous grant funding, participation fees for The Playground have been greatly subsidized. This reduced fee of \$1,000 covers all program expenses per participant, including courses, cohort support, and the pilgrimage experience.

\$1,000 Participation Fee Covers:

- 🎉 Attendance at the Kickoff Gathering (**flights not included**)
- 📖 Coursework, materials and mentoring
- ✈️ Immersive pilgrimage (including travel costs)
- 💰 Wellbeing stipends awarded at key milestones
- 🤝 Cohort meetings and mentoring
- 📱 Access to digital resources

Requirements:

- Be a ministry leader in a congregational setting.
- Attend The Playground Kickoff Gathering.
- Participate in monthly virtual classes over the year.
- Attend their course's pilgrimage experience.
- Facilitate and teach the course (4-6 sessions) in their own context during the final phase of the program.

Wellbeing Stipend Details:

Participants will receive wellbeing stipends at key program milestones to support their renewal. These can be used for personal retreats, spiritual direction, self-care needs (e.g., childcare, spa services, fitness), or ministry resources like books or teaching tools. Our hope is that participants would not only learn about rest and renewal, but make active strides towards implementing these restorative rhythms in their daily life by utilizing this stipend.

Apply Online: [Flagler.edu/playground](https://flagler.edu/playground)

Application Deadline: July 1, 2025

Spaces are limited, and applying does not guarantee acceptance.
Preference will be given to leaders serving in marginalized and under-resourced contexts.

Reference Instructions

Thank you for supporting an applicant to The Playground, a year-long program designed to help ministry leaders rediscover joy, rest, and renewal through ancient Christian practices.

Applicants are required to submit two reference letters:

1. One from a congregational leader (e.g., pastor or elder).
2. One from a personal or professional reference.

The goal of these letters is to provide a brief, thoughtful statement about the applicant's suitability for The Playground.

Each letter should briefly describe your relationship with the applicant, their ministry or leadership experience, and how this program could benefit them.

Letters should be 1-2 paragraphs, non-confidential, and submitted to the applicant as a Word document or PDF by July 1, 2025.

How to Submit Your Letter

Please give your reference letter directly to the applicant, who will upload it as part of their application.

- **Deadline for Application Submission:** July 1, 2025
- **Submission Format:** Letters should be provided as a Word document or PDF.

If you have any questions about The Playground or the reference process, please reach out to us at theplayground@flagler.edu

Thank you for taking the time to support this applicant and their journey of renewal and growth. Your words play a vital role in helping us select participants who are ready to embark on this transformative experience.

FAQs

Is The Playground an accredited course?

No, The Playground is not a formally accredited course, but it offers deep, transformative learning.

Will I take all three courses?

No, participants select one course. Applicants must specify which course they are applying for: Ecology & Theology: Sabbath; Womanist Theology: Play; or Franciscan Spirituality: Rule of Life.

What is required to participate?

Participants must be ministry leaders, attend the in-person kickoff, complete all online sessions, join the pilgrimage, and teach the course in their community.

What is the well-being stipend?

The well-being stipend can be used for self-care services, such as personal training, meal preparation, childcare, or counseling. It is awarded in phases as participants complete the program.

How long are the pilgrimages?

Pilgrimage durations range from 4 to 16 days, depending on the course. Contact The Playground for specific details about your chosen track.

What are the church/organization deliverables of The Playground?

Every participant will 1) receive in-depth education to facilitate their provided Ready-to-Teach course and 2) digital access to the additional 2 Ready-to-Teach courses for later use within their church or organization.

Can I participate if I'm not a ministry leader?

The Playground 2026 Cohorts are designed specifically for congregational leaders, however, we encourage interested parties to nominate a ministry leader from their church to participate and later bring the course to their congregation.

**I want more information for my church or network.
Who can I talk to?**

Contact The Playground staff at theplayground@flagler.edu