WHAT DISTINGUISHES THE FOREST DWELLING PROGRAM FROM OTHER SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROGRAMS?

The Forest Dwelling Program is designed for mature seekers who desire to mindfully embrace the challenges and opportunities of aging, by accessing the deep wisdom embedded in the world’s great mystical and contemplative traditions. The goal of the Forest Dwelling program is to prepare participants to live wisely and well during their remaining years so that, in the words of Henry Nouwen, “they might be able to give both their life and death away” for the sake of the world.

TUITION:

Tuition for this two-year program is $4,000. Tuition cost does not include travel, lodging, meals, books and other course materials. Tuition will be paid each semester. For an exact schedule of tuition payments for the upcoming/current cycle, please refer to our webpage: https://ost.edu/forestdwelling/

SCHOLARSHIPS:

We offer scholarship assistance. Below is our scholarship information, which is included in the Forest Dwelling Program application. (The application will be open on our webpage in early Spring 2020.)

“A limited number of scholarships are available for tuition. The cost of tuition for two years is $4,000. Up to $3,000 can be requested by each applicant for the two-year program. Please note, the scholarships are only for tuition. Travel, lodging, books, meals, etc. are not covered by the scholarship and are the responsibility of the student. The information you provide relative to this request will be kept confidential.”

COSTS IN ADDITION TO TUITION:

Travel to and from the four Gatherings on campus (January and June of both years), lodging and meals for five nights at each Gathering, and books will be the most expensive additional costs that are not included with tuition.

Transportation expenses will depend upon your mode of travel, and the distance between your home town and San Antonio.

Lodging and meals will be needed for Sunday evening through Friday morning. Lodging is available at two sites, on-campus and at a nearby hotel. Costs at both sites include breakfast and supper. Lodging and meal costs for either location will cost approximately $100 per day. Lunches (Monday through Thursday) are included in the
Forest Dwelling Program tuition and will be provided to all Dwellers regardless of where they are spending the nights. Lunches will serve to build community and offer opportunities for networking.

Of course, you are welcome to reserve a room at other nearby hotels or stay with friends or family. Although the Gathering schedule is quite full, it can allow time for socialization off campus. Dwellers who live in San Antonio are welcome to stay at home and commute, or stay at the hotel nearby. On-campus rooms are limited, and therefore preference is given to Dwellers travelling from further away. Both breakfast and dinner, at either lodging facility, can be purchased by local commuters for about $10 each. As noted above, lunches on campus for all students are included in the tuition.

Books will be recommended for the Gatherings and for each module. Generally, the number of books per Gathering and semester may range from one to five. It is anticipated that there will be one module during each semester between Gatherings. Book purchases are the responsibility of each student, and generally range from $12 to $25. Most of the program’s reading materials are available in paperback or Kindle. You are also welcome to borrow books from your local library, if available, and limited copies available at the OST campus library.

PREREQUISITES:

The Forest Dwelling Program does not ask for any academic or faith-based prerequisites, although preference will be given to applicants who are already active spiritual seekers. While the program will draw deeply from the Christian spiritual and mystical tradition, we encourage people of all backgrounds to apply – all faiths, religions, and non-religious. There will be opportunities for inter-spiritual practice throughout the program as well. The most important consideration is that one is already a “mature” spiritual seeker who is open and willing to stretch oneself in the spiritual realm, and who is open to the wisdom teachings of the world’s great religious and spiritual traditions.

By “mature”, we generally refer to individuals who are well into the second half of life and, if the applicant has children, approaching or already in the empty-nest phase. This is a ripe period in one’s life when spiritual transformation may be nurtured in new ways. It is also important that applicants have the time to complete all coursework (approximately 30-40 hours per month) and are willing to meet on a regular basis (online or in person) with their Elder Circle throughout the two-year program. An Elder Circle consists of 6-10 students plus an assigned leader. It is expected that Forest Dwelling participants will also participate in spiritual direction on a regular basis during the duration of the program.

Some of the course material will be delivered via distance learning technology, therefore adequate hardware and basic technology skills are required. This includes regular access to a computer with internet and audio/visual capabilities – including a microphone and webcam for students who meet online (rather than in-person) with their Elder Circle.

TIME COMMITMENT:

In addition to the 5-day Gatherings on campus twice per year in January and June, students can expect to spend approximately 30-40 hours per month for this program, or about 1 hour per day. 15 hours per month (about 30 minutes per day) should be spent on contemplative practices such as prayer, meditation, and mindful journaling. Many Forest Dwelling students will already have this practice in their daily lives. The remaining 15-25 hours per month will be divided among formal online classes/webinars, small group processing sessions, and reading. Small groups (Elder Circles) will meet for approximately 1.5 hours per month.
SPIRITUAL DIRECTION:

We ask that all Forest Dwelling students remain in spiritual direction for the duration of the 2-year program. If new Forest Dwelling students are not already in spiritual direction upon acceptance to the program, we ask that they be in spiritual direction by the beginning of their program cycle. Each student is responsible for beginning their own spiritual director, although we are glad to assist with this process if needed.

Suggested resources for finding a spiritual director:

- Begin here: http://www.sdiworld.org/find-a-spiritual-director
  - Use this search tool: http://www.sdiworld.org/find-a-spiritual-director/seek-and-find-guide
- Contact retreat centers in your area, since they usually have spiritual directors.
- If you are Christian, call the diocese in your area and request a list of formed spiritual directors.
- If you are Catholic, you may prefer this list of spiritual directors: https://ost.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Spiritual-Directors-SA-Area-2018.pdf

ATTENDING GATHERINGS:

It is expected that participants will attend all four Gatherings unless prohibited by unexpected illness or another emergency. Not being able to commit to all Gatherings when applying will not disqualify an applicant, although priority may be given to those who can commit to all Gatherings.

USE OF FOREST DWELLING MATERIALS OUTSIDE OF PROGRAM:

All program materials will be copyrighted by the author/creator and Oblate School of Theology. Participants may use written program materials as a resource in their personal teaching, with proper attribution. Participants are not allowed to sell these materials or charge for them in any way. Participants are not allowed to record live program sessions. Teaching sessions during Gatherings are recorded, and available online for viewing by enrolled participants only.

WILL THE ONLINE STUDY BE DESIGNATED FOR CERTAIN TIMES OF THE DAY, OR CAN PARTICIPANTS COMPLETE THE MATERIAL ON THEIR OWN SCHEDULE WITHIN THE OVERALL TIME FRAME OF THE PARTICULAR MODULE?

Most of the day-to-day study is designed to be flexible to fit your schedule. A couple of things to consider about your studying schedule: In addition to the individual work, we will also be coordinating monthly small-group meetings (Elder Circles), which you will stay with for the entire program (transfer exceptions may be made). These groups will normally include 6-10 people. Depending on participants’ locations, a group may meet in person or online. Meetings online are hosted on Zoom, a software similar to Skype. Details on this topic will be provided to the students who are accepted into the program. We expect students to commit approximately 30-40 hours per month during the semesters.

IS THE FOREST DWELLING PROGRAM APPROPRIATE FOR HOSPICE WORKERS/TRAINERS?

The Forest Dwelling Program is not designed to provide specialized training for hospice workers or trainers. Rather, it is a path of personal transformation that participants can integrate and apply to all areas of their life.
Hospice work is an ideal vocation in which to express this transformation, and be of service to both co-workers and patients.

**DOES THE PROGRAM REQUIRE A FINAL PROJECT?**

All participants will be expected to complete a final project. The purpose of the project is to help the participants integrate what they have learned over the duration of the program as well as take what they have learned to their own life and work contexts. The core faculty of the Forest Dwelling Program will provide guidelines for the final project in the second year. Generally, it will be a creative project using media of the students’ choosing. Examples might include artwork, essay, poem, an interactive media, or a community engagement project.

**OPTION TO AUDIT THE FOREST DWELLING PROGRAM?**

We do not offer an audit option for this program, particularly because it is not an academic program/course, nor do we provide any kind of grade. At the end of the two years, we present students with a certificate, but it is **not** an academic/accredited certificate.

**SCHEDULE FOR THE 5-DAY GATHERINGS IN JANUARY AND JUNE:**

The Gatherings at Oblate School of Theology will begin late afternoon Sunday, and will end Friday at 11:00am. Students are required to plan their travel around this schedule, and are highly discouraged from arriving late or leaving early, since each part of these Gatherings will be vitally important to their personal success in the program. Activities during the five days will broadly include content, process, and practice. We will provide a more-detailed schedule leading up to each Gathering.

**AGE RESTRICTIONS / REQUIREMENTS:**

While this program is geared towards folks of retirement-age, there is no age limit or restricted range of ages we will accept. If you feel called to this program, we encourage you to apply!