



# ACLS Graduate Internships on the Spiritual Infrastructure of the Future 2026

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>Project Organization</b> | Discerning Our Way Forward: A Spiritual Toolkit for Justice Leaders<br>Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership |
| <b>Location</b>             | Chicago, IL  |
| <b>Stipend</b>              | \$15,400   |
| <b>Duration</b>             | 9 weeks, Summer 2026   |

## ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION

The [Coalition for Spiritual & Public Leadership](#) is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-generational, spiritually-rooted organization that labors to transform racial, economic, social and environmental systemic structures through grassroots coalition building, community organizing, and liberative formation. As a Catholic and Christian-rooted community organizing coalition, we focus on two primary components within our work. The first is to train, form, and equip grassroots Catholic leaders with the tools of community organizing to create change in their communities. We do this by merging liberation theology, Catholic Social Teaching, and the historical Jesus into a formation program that is spiritually grounded. Within training and formation, we also equip leaders with spiritual tools and practices that can help elevate and sustain their interior lives for justice work. We believe that when we are spiritually grounded and disciplined, our work for justice is sharper. The second part of our work is the action - running campaigns, conducting power analysis, conducting listening sessions, meeting with elected officials.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The intern will report to the Director of Training and Formation and will lead a participatory research project in collaboration with grassroots Catholic community members to explore how spiritual discernment can better support justice-oriented leaders in decision-making, collective action, and resilience. Rooted in the belief that sustainable justice leadership must be spiritually grounded, this project seeks to understand how discernment is currently practiced by Catholic organizers and community leaders and how it can be deepened and reimaged in community.

The intern will combine theological research with qualitative data collection to develop a practical Spiritual Discernment Toolkit for leaders and organizers. Drawing from a range of Christian traditions, including Ignatian, Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan, Dominican, women religious, and early Christian sources, the fellow will examine how historical models of discernment can speak to the lived realities of today's movement leaders. The research process will involve conducting interviews and story circles with grassroots Catholic leaders, including organizers, pastoral ministers, and lay leaders. These conversations will explore key questions such as:

- How do leaders currently practice discernment in their justice work?
- What spiritual tools, questions, and traditions help or hinder clarity and courage in moments of risk, tension, or transition?
- What does collective discernment look like in community organizing settings?
- How can Christian discernment traditions be adapted to meet the emotional, political, and spiritual complexity of grassroots leadership?
- What supports are most needed to counter burnout and cultivate resilience?

The intern will synthesize these insights into a practical toolkit that includes frameworks for discernment, reflection prompts, prayer practices, and strategies for group decision-making. This resource will be designed in collaboration with community partners to ensure accessibility and cultural relevance. The internship appointment is for 9 consecutive weeks, with an expected time commitment of approximately 37.5 hours per week.

This position is *only* available through the ACLS Graduate Internships on the Spiritual Infrastructure of the Future program. You may *not* contact the host institution to inquire about this position.



# ACLS Graduate Internships on the Spiritual Infrastructure of the Future 2025

## Key Responsibilities:

- Conduct an overview on Christian discernment traditions (e.g., Ignatian discernment of spirits, Benedictine practices, communal decision-making, Carmelite interior silence, Franciscan embodiment of mission, Dominican theological reflection, the early Christian monastic practice of silence, women religious models, and other cultural models of discernment).
- Design and facilitate listening sessions or interviews with 20-40 grassroots Catholic leaders, parishioners, students, and organizers. Fellow will travel to member parishes, organizations, and universities throughout Chicago, which has a robust public transportation system.
- Attend organizing meetings and workshops across the organization to gain a broader understanding of CSPL's work.
- Synthesize findings into themes that integrate lived experiences of discernment with theological traditions.
- Collaboratively design and test a draft Spiritual Discernment Toolkit with community partners, tailored to justice work, staff burnout, and collective decision-making.
- Deliver a final report summarizing findings and offering actionable recommendations for strengthening discernment amongst grassroots leaders.
- Present the toolkit in a community session or mini-workshop to leaders and staff.

## Qualifications:

- PhD student in any field of the humanities or humanistic social sciences, with a dissertation/research focus on the study of religion. Read more about eligible fields [here](#).
- Deep knowledge of Christian theology and spirituality, particularly Catholic traditions.
- Experience in culturally sensitive qualitative research (e.g., interviews, focus groups, oral histories).
- Ability to clearly translate complex theological or historical concepts for diverse audiences.
- Commitment to social justice and solidarity with marginalized communities.
- Strong written and oral communication skills, with sensitivity to intergenerational and intercultural dynamics, and timely, professional follow-up with stakeholders.
- Skilled in collaborative work with community members, organizers, and staff; able to facilitate group conversations with humility and respect.
- Flexibility to meet community members at their convenience (including evenings/weekends).
- Access to a car or comfort with public transit for travel in the Chicagoland area.
- Highly self-motivated, professional, and solution-oriented; able to work under pressure, meet deadlines, and prioritize tasks effectively.

## APPLICATIONS

- Information on the Graduate Internships on the Spiritual Infrastructure of the Future Program: <https://www.acls.org/competitions/acls-graduate-internships-on-the-spiritual-infrastructure-of-the-future/>
- All applications must be submitted through the ACLS Online Fellowship Application System ([ofa.acls.org](https://ofa.acls.org)).
- Application deadline: **Wednesday, January 14, 2026, 9 PM EST.**