

The diakonia™ Program

Course Descriptions

Series A

A1. Practical Ministry I: The Meaning and Context of the Christian Life in the Lutheran Tradition. The Christian life of faith begins in Holy Baptism. Using the lens of baptism, this course will explore aspects of the Christian life. What happens in baptism? And how does the Holy Spirit shape our lives as Christians through our baptism? In this course we will examine the practical ways in which the Holy Spirit is at work through our baptism, including an examination of key New Testament images of the Holy Spirit's work in the Church. We will study and discuss the role of God's Word and Sacraments in the life of the Christian, we will understand how God's work in baptism is the source of our Christian freedom and of our life in community with other people, and we will discern how to view and read Scripture from this baptismal perspective.

A2. Introduction to the New Testament. The goals of this course are to understand the gospel message as revealed in the New Testament, to explore the life and faith of the Christian church in the first century, to understand how the Bible came down to us in its present form, and to understand and use a variety of tools for interpreting the Bible. Throughout the course students will reflect on how the New Testament Gospel has shaped our lives as Christian.

A3. Church History: The First 400 Years. This course helps students understand the doctrinal, liturgical, and organizational development of the Christian tradition in its first four centuries. The internal and external political, cultural, and religious forces which shaped our church and our statements of faith are covered. The course concludes with the unification of Christian thought in the Creeds.

A4. Lutheran Creeds and Confessions. The history and content of the Book of Concord are at the heart of this course. Special emphasis is placed on the Augsburg Confession and Apology, the Catechisms, and the Smalcald Articles, as well as the New Testament books of Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. Topics include God and Sin, Justification by Grace Alone, Church and Ministry, Sacraments, and others. Parish constitutions may be studied to show the relation of confessional documents to modern Lutheranism.

A5. Practical Ministry II: Visitation (the sick, the homebound, the grieving). This course has two components. First, students will be provided the opportunity to make at least one supervised visit in an institution and/or to the homebound. Class sessions will deal with understanding the needs of patients and loved ones, as well as issues such as grieving and patients' rights. Second, besides a sharing of practical issues relating to this ministry, this course also will provide opportunities to relate visitation ministry to the theology and worship life of the Church. The role of the Eucharistic Minister may also be explored. During this course students may discern whether or not they have a gift for visitation.

A6. The Daily Life of a Christian. This practical theology course will explore the meaning of Christian discipleship in daily life. The course will help the students to balance their baptismal vocation and calling in Christian life with family and personal life, church-related service, and the world of work. Special attention will be given to the theology of sanctification, the Reformation and Luther's understanding of baptismal vocation, the relation of the justified life of faith to good works, financial stewardship, and the spiritual disciplines, such as daily prayer, which support discipleship.

Series B

B1. Introduction to the Old Testament. The aims of this course are to give the students an overview of the structure and theology of the Hebrew Scriptures and present the varieties of forms used to communicate the truth of God's Word contained in them. Special attention will be given to covenant theology and to relating Old Testament theology and history to our understanding of the New Testament.

B2. Christian Doctrine. This course has several main objectives: to introduce students to Systematic Theology, present a vision of the coherence of Christian beliefs to each other, help identify foundational doctrines, give an understanding of orthodoxy and heresy, gain an understanding of the communal and historic nature of doctrines and their spiritual foundations, and help students understand and express why disciplined thought and faithful confession are crucial for church leaders.

B3. Lutheran Faith in the American Context. This course provides an overview of the almost 400-year history of the Lutheran church in America, comparing past struggles and themes with issues in our church today, paying special attention to themes of immigration and assimilation (inclusion/exclusion/language), mission and outreach, authority, and identity.

B4. Practical Ministry III: To Communicate the Gospel. This class will explore the role of the parish community of Word and Sacraments as the context for ministry, the source from which the Christian witness flows. Attention will also be given to identifying 21st century situations where communication of the Gospel is essential and how this communication may occur. The focus of this course is to look at opportunities within the parish for communicating the gospel (Bible studies, teaching, youth ministries, etc), as well as in the community (various forms of evangelism, welcoming visitors and new members, etc). Underlying the course is the perspective of each student in developing diaconal self-understanding. We will explore together the particular gifts and strengths that each student possesses and the ways in which these gifts are communicated in today's world. Students will share personal ministry experiences of how they uniquely communicate the gospel in their lives and reflect on them both Biblically and theologically. In short, the course will help students explore a Christian way of doing functional theology and ministry "at that exciting point where Word, world, and baptized servant converge."

B5. Christian Worship. This course surveys major aspects of the Sacraments, Lutheran liturgical worship, and the seasons of the church year, with special emphasis on the cultural settings in which worship occurs. The course provides a practical understanding of the words, actions, and items involved in the services by giving a close examination to what is in our service books. It also ties the contents of the services to their Biblical roots. Further, this course looks at the wide diversity of Christian worship practices within the ELCA from traditional to contemporary, multi-cultural differences, etc.

B6. Themes and Issues in Christian Ethics. Students will reflect on the implications of the Ten Commandments for contemporary life. They will be introduced to such concepts and systems by which the Christian tradition has taught personal and public morality as, for example, the “Deadly Sins” and “Cardinal Virtues,” the “Just War” theory vs. Christian Pacifism, human nature and human sinfulness, and Luther’s “Two Kingdoms” theology. The course also provides opportunity for disciplined reflection on such vexing ethical issues as sexual ethics, sanctity of life, political witness, and economic justice and presents the opportunity to review and study some of the ELCA’s Social and Teaching Statements.

For more information:

- ❖ Go to <<http://www.nisynod.org/diakonia/>> and/or <<http://www.diakoniausa.org/diakonia-program-overview/>>.
- ❖ Watch for online information sessions that will be scheduled for July and August.
- ❖ Contact Dr. Trenton Ferro, Location Manager—trferro@yahoo.com or (724) 762-0305—if you have any questions, want to learn more, and or wish to enroll in the **diakonia** program.