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Courses & Learning Modules

“Project Starling represents LSTC’s bold step into the future of theological education – expanding our reach, honoring contextual ministry, and building lasting bridges to those answering the call.”

— Rev. Dr. James Nieman, President Emeritus, LSTC



Lutheran School of
Theology *at* Chicago

CERTIFICATES AND PROGRAMS

TEEM Certificate

The TEEM Certificate provides theological education for candidates participating in the ELCA's Theological Education for Emerging Ministries pathway. Delivered online through Project Starling, the program allows learners to complete asynchronous coursework while continuing to serve in their congregations and ministry contexts.

The curriculum includes Orientation, Genesis to Revelation, Hebrew Bible, Church History, Lutheran Confessions, Lutheran Worship, Preaching, Pastoral Care, Spiritual Formation, Christian Ethics, ELCA Structure and Polity, and Ministry Leadership. Through faculty-developed instruction, theological reflection, and ministry-based assignments, learners strengthen their knowledge of Scripture and Lutheran theology while developing the practical and vocational competencies needed for public ministry.

Synod Authorized Ministry Development Program

The Synod Authorized Ministry Development Program provides accessible theological and practical preparation for individuals serving – or preparing to serve – as Synod Authorized Ministers. Delivered online through Project Starling, the program supports learners who have been identified or authorized by their synods to provide pastoral leadership in congregations and ministry settings where a regularly called pastor may not be available.

The curriculum is organized into six competency-based units covering biblical interpretation, Lutheran theology and identity, worship and preaching, pastoral care and spiritual formation, congregational leadership, and mission in context. Each eight-week unit includes four to six asynchronous learning modules and requires approximately three to four hours of study per week. Learners may participate as part of a synod-sponsored cohort or complete the program independently, applying their learning directly within their ministry contexts.

Lutheran Diaconal Association Formation Program

Offered in partnership with the Lutheran Diaconal Association (LDA), this program combines flexible, online theological coursework through Project Starling with formation for service as an LDA deaconess or deacon. Learners study Scripture, theology, worship, spiritual formation, and diaconal ministry while participating in LDA-led vocational discernment, mentorship, and supervised ministry experiences. LDA determines each learner's coursework based on prior preparation and awards the certificate upon completion of all academic and formation requirements.

COURSES

Spiritual Formation: Spiritual Practices for Wholehearted Living

Explore what it means to live a spiritually balanced, grounded life through this experiential course for spiritual and religious leaders. Topics include prayer, discernment, healing, embodiment, and connection to the earth. Learners engage in daily practices, use tools like the Wellness Compass and Enneagram, and end the course by developing a personal Rule of Life.

Public Church I: Leadership at the Intersection of Faith and Community

This course equips learners to lead with both theological depth and community awareness. Explore the relationship between church and society, learn principles of community organizing, and build skills for responsive public ministry. Ideal for leaders seeking to make a tangible impact in their communities.

Church's Witness: A Survey of Church History

Trace Christianity's first millennium across diverse cultures – from the Roman Empire to Ethiopia and India. Topics include post-Nicene theology, early Christian communities, monasticism, interactions with Islam, and the stirrings of reform in the medieval church. This course offers a rich, global view of early Christian history.

The Sacramental Landscape: Planning and Leading Worship

A foundational worship leadership course exploring sacramental theology and liturgical practice within the ELCA. Learners gain skills in planning worship, understanding public ritual, and leading with a theological and decolonial lens, while connecting liturgy to everyday spirituality and liberation.

Pastoral Care Across the Lifecycle

This course builds pastoral care capacity by exploring human transitions across the lifecycle – grief, death, marriage, and more. Using an Action-Reflection model, learners deepen listening skills, explore cultural and theological contexts of care, and connect pastoral practice with rituals and preaching.

Lutheran Confessions

Explore the core confessional texts that shape Lutheran identity and ministry. Learners engage with the Lutheran Confessions, consider their relevance today, and reflect on how this theological heritage supports personal faith and public leadership in an ecumenical, global context.

Preaching

This course introduces the essential practices of biblical preaching through contextual interpretation, sermon preparation, proclamation, and reflection. Learners examine how context and the active participation of hearers shape the preaching task as they develop and preach two sermons within a congregation. Through lectures, readings, reflection, and congregational engagement, learners begin forming their own theology of proclamation.

WORKSHOPS

Reimagining Christian Education

Course Author: Rev. Dr. Jana L. Howson

Christian education shapes discipleship, nurtures faith across the lifespan, and forms communities grounded in God's justice, love, and grace. This workshop invites learners to expand their understanding of Christian education beyond traditional models, exploring theological foundations, educator identity, and practical strategies for designing culturally responsive learning experiences. Participants will develop tools to lead meaningful, Spirit-led education rooted in both tradition and transformation.

Stewardship

Course Author: Tim Brown

What does it mean to be a faithful steward today? This workshop explores stewardship as a theological, spiritual, and practical discipline rooted in Scripture and lived experience. Participants will reflect on money, time, and space, develop a personal theology of stewardship, and gain practical tools for budget narration, year-round stewardship planning, and integrating generosity into congregational life. Emphasis is placed on sufficiency over scarcity, relationships, and stewardship as an expression of faith.

Boundaries

Course Author: Rev. Carla Christopher

In today's complex ministry landscape, healthy boundaries are essential for fostering safe, inclusive, and respectful communities. This workshop explores the theological, ethical, cultural, and legal dimensions of boundaries in ministry. Participants will reflect on identity and context, engage biblical foundations for boundary-setting, and develop practical tools for navigating real-life scenarios with integrity, care, and clarity.

Church Administration

Course Author: Dr. Teresa Cintron

This workshop equips church leaders with a comprehensive framework for effective and trustworthy administration in today's evolving ministry environment. Through case studies and practical exercises, participants explore organizational health, financial stewardship, ethical leadership, community engagement, digital ministry integration, and proactive crisis management. Learners will create an Administration Action Plan to strengthen transparency, trust, and sustainability in their congregations.

Faith and Funds: The Art, Culture, and Science of Faith-Based Fundraising

Course Author: Rahel Mwitula Williams

Cultivating a thriving culture of philanthropy requires sensitivity to both the spiritual and practical dimensions of stewardship. This workshop builds capacity in faith-based fundraising through theological reflection, case studies, and applied practice. Participants will explore donor engagement, communication strategies, and planned giving while developing a simple, actionable fundraising strategy tailored to their ministry context.

LEARNING MODULES

Wholehearted Living – Introduces the concept of living with spiritual wholeness and emotional balance.

Prayer Practices – Explores prayer as a diverse and powerful tool for spiritual connection.

Discernment and Decision-Making – Offers tools to listen for God’s voice and make faithful decisions.

Healing and Wholeness – Engages practices that promote personal and communal healing.

Liberation and Justice – Connects spiritual life with liberation theology and justice work.

Embodied Spirituality – Encourages integration of mind, body, and spirit through physical practices.

Earth-Honoring Faith – Centers ecological consciousness as a spiritual discipline.

Rhythms of Life – Helps learners identify and sustain daily spiritual rhythms.

Personality and Practice – Uses the Enneagram and other tools to align spiritual practice with personality.

The Wellness Compass – Invites learners to assess spiritual health using a holistic tool.

The Four Spiritual Paths – Explores the mystic, prophet, teacher, and healer archetypes.

Crafting a Rule of Life – Guides learners to develop a personalized spiritual framework.

What Is Public Church? – Introduces the framework and theological foundations of Public Church.

Context Mapping – Helps learners analyze their community through lenses of history, assets, and needs.

Identity and Vocation – Reflects on personal leadership identity and calling.

The Church in Society – Explores the public role of the church and historical responses to social issues.

Power Analysis – Introduces power mapping as a method of understanding local systems.

Community Organizing – Equips learners with organizing tools to effect meaningful change.

One-to-One Relational Meetings – Teaches a key organizing skill for building relationships.

Listening and Storytelling – Uses narrative as a strategy for leadership and transformation.

Spiritual Practices for the Public Leader – Offers disciplines that sustain leaders engaged in public work.



Building a Strategy – Guides learners in creating actionable plans for engagement and impact.

The Role of the Church in Change – Reflects on how congregations can lead transformation.

Capstone: The Public Church Plan – Culminates in a project connecting course insights to local ministry.

Christian Origins – Explores the formation of early Jesus movements in the first century.

The Post-Apostolic Church – Looks at church growth and persecution before Constantine.

The Nicene Era – Covers early ecumenical councils and doctrinal developments.

Christology and Trinity – Examines key theological debates about Jesus and the Godhead.

The Rise of Monasticism – Reviews monastic movements as engines of reform and spirituality.

Global Christianity in Late Antiquity – Highlights Christian communities across Africa and Asia.

Christianity and Islam – Studies interreligious contact, coexistence, and conflict.

The Crusades and Reconquista – Critically examines Christian militarism and its legacy.

Medieval Renewal Movements – Focuses on mystics, reformers, and pre-Reformation figures.

Christianity in Ethiopia and Armenia – Introduces underrepresented global Christian traditions.

Christianity in India and the East – Traces the enduring witness of Eastern Christian churches.

Toward the Reformation – Prepares for the Reformation by reviewing medieval church critiques.

Foundations of Pastoral Care – Explore the historical and theological roots of pastoral care and begin developing your own professional care framework.

Introduction to Pastoral Theology – Examine various caregiving models and reflect on your identity and role as a pastoral caregiver.

Lifecycle Care and Developmental Theories – Understand spiritual and emotional development across the human lifespan through psychological and theological lenses.

Worship Parts: Gathering – Learn to practice active listening and presence in sacred conversations as a core pastoral care competency.

The Assessment of Listening – Refine your listening skills by identifying emotional cues and assessing interpersonal dynamics in care settings.

Genograms – Use family systems theory and personal reflection to analyze how family structures impact pastoral care.

Care for Beginnings – Discover how to provide sensitive care during life's beginnings, from birth to transitional milestones.

Care for The Daily Round – Address pastoral concerns that emerge in midlife, including meaning-making, purpose, and daily stressors.

Premarital, Marital, and Relationship Care – Support individuals and couples through relational transitions with compassionate and practical guidance.

Grief and Loss – Explore the many faces of grief and develop skills to accompany people through complex experiences of loss.

Care for Endings – Prepare to offer presence and empathy at life's end, supporting individuals and families during dying and bereavement.

Care for the Caregiver and Ritual as Pastoral Care – Learn to sustain your own well-being while offering healing through ritual and reflective pastoral practices.

Luther and Lutheranism – Discover how the life and theology of Martin Luther gave rise to a global reform movement shaped by history, theology, and culture.

Creeds and Confessions – Explore how the Lutheran confessional writings relate to other Christian creeds and continue to shape Lutheran identity worldwide.

The Godhead: God, Christ, Spirit – Examine how Lutheran theology understands the Trinity and the person and work of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Human Person and Sin – Investigate Lutheran views of human nature, moral agency, and the impact of sin on relationships with God and others.

Justification and the Law-Gospel Framework – Learn how the doctrines of justification and the distinction between Law and Gospel structure Lutheran beliefs about salvation and grace.

Human Responses to God: Free Will, Good Works, Faith & Election – Consider Lutheran perspectives on how humans respond to God's grace through faith, sanctification, and vocation.

Humans in Relation to God and the World: Two Kingdoms & Three Estates – Study Lutheran teachings on social order and public life through the frameworks of the Two Kingdoms and Three Estates.

The Means of Grace: Ecclesiology & Sacraments – Understand how the Church and sacraments function as means of grace in Lutheran theology and worship.

Vocation, Universal Priesthood & Ministry – Explore how Lutheran theology empowers all people to live out their callings through the doctrine of vocation.

Addressing Harms: Lutheran Ecumenical & Interreligious Relations – Reflect on Lutheranism’s complex history with other traditions and the theological work of reconciliation today.

Adiaphora – Unpack the concept of adiaphora – ‘things indifferent’ – and its relevance to decision-making and flexibility in theology and practice.

Global Lutheranism Today – Trace the worldwide development of Lutheranism and explore how it is lived and expressed in diverse global contexts.

Worship as a Practice of Radical Welcome – Explore how worship rooted in radical hospitality reshapes leadership, space, and liturgy through embodied and inclusive practices.

Worship as a ‘Little Easter’ – Discover the centrality of the Great Three Days and how each Sunday celebration echoes Easter in the Christian liturgical year.

Worship as Daily Prayer – Trace the history and rhythm of daily prayer and practice leading services like Midday Prayer with chant and liturgical structure.

Worship Parts: Gathering – Examine how the Gathering initiates sacred space through liturgical elements such as greeting, confession, and prayer.

Worship Parts: Word – Engage with Scripture through the lectionary and liturgical seasons, while learning to lead with expansive and inclusive language.

Worship Parts: Sacrament – Reflect on the theological and sensory richness of sacramental worship and its connections to creation, incarnation, and space.

Worship Parts: Baptism – Delve into the rite of baptism, its history, and contemporary practice, including designing and leading a baptismal service.

Eucharist – A focused look at the theology, history, and practice of the Eucharist as central to Christian worship.

Worship Parts: Sending – Explore how the Sending concludes worship and propels the community into mission and daily life.

Worship and Pastoral Care – Investigate the intersection of liturgy and pastoral care, especially around life transitions and crisis.

Worship and Life Passages – Learn how worship marks major milestones – birth, marriage, death – and how to plan meaningful rituals for each.

Worship and the Heart of It All: The Great Three Days – A deeper theological and practical reflection on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil as the core of Christian identity and worship.

What Is Preaching and Why Do We Do It? – Develop a working definition of preaching and examine its biblical, theological, and ecclesial foundations.



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