

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center Academy Certified Training System (ACTS)

ACTS Handbook 2026

SVMC'S MISSION:

*To equip leaders for
ministry in a Christ
centered, culturally
relevant context in ways
that bear witness to the
beliefs, heritage, and
practices of the
Church of the Brethren.*



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INTRODUCTION

The Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center (SVMC) equips leaders for ministry in a Christ-centered, culturally relevant context in ways that bear witness to the beliefs, heritage, and practices of the Church of the Brethren. One way SVMC lives into this mission is by administering the Academy Certified Training System (ACTS) program in partnership with several districts. The program is open to licensed ministers seeking to fulfill ordination requirements, to laypersons seeking leadership training, and to credentialed ministers pursuing continuing education. Completion of ACTS fulfills the ministry training requirement necessary to be ordained in the Church of the Brethren.

To complete the program, students need to take 12 academic courses (3 Biblical courses, 3 Historical/Theological courses, and 6 Ministry Skills courses) and complete several non-academic requirements, including the following experiences:

- Supervised Ministry
- Ministry Formation
- Annual Conference
- District Conference
- An Ecumenical, Interfaith, or Intercultural experience

Students can enter the program at any point. However, classes are offered one at a time, and a student who misses a class may have to wait 4 years before it is offered again.

SVMC believes in the value of in-person education. Additionally, SVMC continues to adapt to the changing needs of our students. All SVMC's courses are hybrid, utilizing a hub model format that takes the best that technology has to offer while continuing to prioritize in-person gatherings where possible.

SVMC Staff

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

ACTS Requirements

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center's ACTS program is one avenue by which a licensed minister can fulfill necessary ordination requirements and is certified by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. Ministry training in ACTS includes:

- Twelve required courses are offered in regionally based settings and online.
- Ministry Formation occurs in a setting where students share about the unique experiences, questions, uncertainties, successes, and challenges of ministry. Students participate in Ministry Formation for the entirety of the ACTS program.
- After the first year, students are eligible for the supervised ministry experience. Students are paired with ministers to explore and experience the daily needs and challenges of doing ministry.

Duration of Program

Students are expected to complete the program in a four-year cycle. Students are encouraged to move through the cycle of courses as scheduled. Missing a course will mean waiting until the course is offered in the next cycle or working with the Director for a mutually acceptable solution, such as taking the course in another district or utilizing an independent study.

Transcripts

ACTS student transcripts are updated and emailed to students after completion of each course and experience. When a student finishes the full ACTS program, SVMC will share the final transcript with the student, the appropriate District Office, and will also retain a copy in the SVMC office. Students or District Offices may request to view a transcript at any time while the student is enrolled in the ACTS program. A sample transcript appears on page 34.

ADMISSION PROCEDURES

Admission Procedure for Licensed Ministers

Licensed Ministry candidates seeking admission to the ACTS program should contact the SVMC office following an interview with the District Ministry Commission during the licensing process. Students entering the program will be required to complete an application and a written essay of approximately 2-3 pages describing their call. The application and essay will be submitted to the SVMC office. The purpose of this essay is to give a sample of writing skills and a baseline of where the student is in their call to ministry. Some students will receive the recommendation to take the Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry pre-requisite course. This self-paced course will provide the student with opportunities to strengthen grammatical and communication skills, primarily in written form. This course will count as one of the six courses needed in Ministry Skills.

Admission Procedure for Laity and Continuing Education

Laity wishing to enroll in an ACTS course should contact the SVMC office to register. Ministers seeking continuing education units should contact the SVMC office to register for the course and specify that a continuing education certificate is being requested.

LEARNING PLAN

Coursework

To successfully complete the ACTS program, students will:

- Complete the following courses: (* Required courses)
 - 3 Biblical Courses
 - Introduction to the Old Testament*
 - Introduction to the New Testament*
 - Interpreting the Bible*
 - 3 Historical/Theological Courses:
 - History of the Church*
 - Church of the Brethren History*
 - Introduction to Theology*
 - 6 Ministry Skills Courses (chosen from the eight options listed below)
 - Church Leadership & Administration*
 - Introduction to Pastoral Care
 - Teaching & Learning in the Church
 - Preaching
 - Worship
 - Church Vitality & Evangelism
 - Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry
 - An elective approved by SVMC
- Participate in Ministry Formation
- Participate in Supervised Ministry
- Attend one District Conference and one Annual Conference
- Participate in an Ecumenical, Interfaith, or Intercultural Experience

ACTS requirements are designed to meet the readiness for ministry competencies in the Ministerial Leadership paper, and completion of ACTS fulfills the ministry training requirement necessary to be ordained in the Church of the Brethren.

Student Expectations

Students should anticipate the following expectations in every ACTS course.

- Fifteen contact hours
- Total class time, reading, and project work should total 50-65 hours
- Approximately 400 pages of reading material
- One or more major assignments/projects (i.e., comparative book review, research paper, interviews, pastoral conversations, sermons, or teaching outlines)
- Participation in the course via their hub location when available.

All ACTS courses are hybrid, which means students will be in person and online. Instructors and students should make sure everyone participates and is heard. In-person students should make sure to include online students in discussion. Online students should keep cameras on and engage in the course as if they were physically in the room. All students are encouraged to minimize distractions so that they are fully present to one another and the course content.

Completion of ACTS

Upon completion of all coursework and training experiences, SVMC will send the student and their respective District Office a formal letter confirming completion of the ACTS program. The student will also receive an evaluation form to share feedback about their ACTS experience. The student will be recognized at their next District Conference and will receive an ACTS certificate.

Experiential Requirements

Conference Experiences

Students are required to participate in at least **one** Annual Conference and **one** District Conference while in ACTS. Following these experiences, the student completes a written reflection (2-3 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font). The reflection paper must be submitted within two months after the conference. The experience will not be considered complete until the student has turned in the reflection paper. Some possible reflection questions include:

- In what activities did you participate?
- What was particularly moving to you?
- What did you see or hear that you found challenging?
- What does the conference accomplish for the life of the Church of the Brethren?
- How do you see the Spirit moving in the work done or the fellowship among members?

Ecumenical, Interfaith, or Cross-cultural Experience

Students are required to participate in an ecumenical, interfaith, or cross-cultural event while in ACTS. The experience could be in the form of a community ecumenical gathering, a worship in a different denomination or religion, a denominational cross-cultural gathering, or a work camp/mission trip. If a student has a question about whether an experience fulfills this requirement, they should reach out to the SVMC Director before the event. Following these experiences, the student must complete a written reflection paper (2-3 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font). The reflection paper must be submitted within two months after the conference. The experience will not be considered complete until the student has turned in the reflection paper. Some possible reflection questions include:

- How did this experience engage your senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste?
- Why do you think the elements of ritual or belief are meaningful for this community?
- Even if you find much to disagree with, what did you appreciate about the people, culture, or ritual?
- How does this experience make you think more deeply about your own tradition?
- What have you learned that you could apply to your own ministry?

Ministry Formation

The Ministry Formation experience approaches leadership development from the perspective that becoming an effective minister in the Church of the Brethren requires much more than book knowledge. It requires relational skills that can only be acquired and developed in a setting where students share their unique experiences, questions, uncertainties, problems, dilemmas, successes, and failures. Together, the students learn about their own abilities, strengths, and weaknesses as they place themselves in the various ministry situations shared with the group. While in ACTS, students are required to participate in the district's Ministry Formation.

Ministry Formation Coordinator

Each partner district appoints a Ministry Formation Coordinator to lead the meetings, guide discussions, share from their ministry experience, and plan topics for conversation. Ministry Formation Coordinators are encouraged to choose discussion topics that align with the ACTS courses as they are offered. Topics can be explored through sharing of personal experience, group sharing, and guest presentations. Each district ministry formation group is encouraged to invite experienced ministers to share with the group.

Ministry Formation Meeting Expectations

Four two-hour meetings per year are suggested, although districts can choose the model that best fits them. Ministry Formation prioritizes community building and the sharing of ministry experience. Thus, participants are expected to attend in person. However, Ministry Formation Coordinators may consider exceptions as necessary. The SVMC Director will discuss the status of Ministry Formation with each coordinator annually.

While individual districts may have attendance policies, the following policy is suggested:

1. First absence—student notifies the Ministry Formation Coordinator and completes a make-up assignment on topics discussed.
2. Second absence—student notifies the Ministry Formation Coordinator and the Chair of the Ministry Commission and completes a make-up assignment on topics discussed.
3. Third absence—Ministry Formation Coordinator refers the student to the District Ministry Commission, who will discuss with the student their desire for re-licensing and/or continuation in an educational program.

Basic Objectives for Ministry Formation

Through participation in Ministry Formation, students will:

- Articulate an understanding of the call to ministry, including:
 - developing self-awareness of the call to ministry
 - pursuing servanthood for Christ
 - exploring biblical integration with practical ministry
 - naming what being a pastor in the Church of the Brethren means
 - stewarding of gifts, abilities, finances, time, creation, and life
 - understanding and practicing ethical behavior
- Develop skills in practical ministry experience, including:
 - home, hospital, and nursing home visitation
 - premarital counseling, wedding preparation, and officiating
 - funeral preparation and officiating
 - Brethren ordinances: anointing, baptism, communion, Love Feast
 - church administration, such as leading meetings, resolving conflicts, keeping records, and providing stewardship education
 - the need for self-care, including time management, spiritual renewal, life-long learning, Sabbath rest, and physical health
- Develop an ongoing plan for prayer and spiritual growth focused on:
 - understanding prayer as both personal and corporate
 - being aware of various spiritual disciplines
 - identifying community resources for counseling, health care, and social services

Supervised Ministry

An integral part of the educational plan is the supervised ministry experience. Paired with an experienced minister, students will have opportunities to explore and experience the daily needs and challenges of doing ministry. The supervised ministry experience introduces an action and reflection model of leadership that prepares the student for the ministry to which they are called. A student is eligible to begin their Supervised Ministry experience beginning in the second year of ACTS. The setting could be congregational, a chaplaincy, or another setting as negotiated within/by the district.

Basic Objectives for Supervised Ministry

Through participation in Supervised Ministry, students will:

- Discern the way their personality lends itself to and shapes relationships in ministry
- Engage in opportunities for practical application and enhancement of skills theoretically studied in courses
- Develop a personal pattern of time management for effective ministry
- Receive reflective counsel and evaluation from the mentoring pastor
- Develop and practice ministerial ethics in all relationships

Experience Expectations

The District Ministry Commission will appoint a District Supervised Ministry Coordinator, who will work with the District Executive and students to arrange the settings in which supervised ministry can take place and provide for the assignment of supervisors.

While each district has its unique plan for supervised ministry experience, the program will include the following for each student:

- A supervisor with at least 5 years of positive experience in the field of ministry for which the student is preparing
- A contract between the student and supervisor outlining mutually agreed-upon ministry activities (to be submitted to the SVMC office before beginning supervised ministry)
- A record of hours (minimum of 200 hours) spent in supervised ministry (a form to record hours is provided in the ACTS Handbook)
- Four evaluation reports on different aspects of ministry, to be completed by the student and supervisor and submitted to SVMC (report forms are provided in the ACTS Handbook). Possible themes for these reports include, but are not limited to:
 - preaching
 - worship leading
 - pastoral care
 - teaching
 - leading a meeting
 - pastoral lifestyle and ministry challenges

Guidelines for Supervision

1. Supervisors should be genuinely interested in caring for new ministers. Supervisors are encouraged to:
 - Listen to what the student is saying/feeling so they feel affirmed rather than controlled
 - Help the student express their dream, clarify goals, and specify objectives
 - Help a student be realistic about time, resources, and working with a variety of people
 - Help a student identify and work through obstacles that arise
 - Help a student honestly evaluate meeting of objectives, personal performance, and future ministry
 - Find an appropriate way to celebrate the gains and mourn the losses in ministry
2. Supervisors should remember God is not finished with the minister in training yet; expect growth and maturity with future experience.
3. Supervisors should not attempt to make the student into their own image and likeness.
4. Supervisors should be sensitive and compassionate while being firm and not afraid to voice constructive criticism.
5. Supervisors should appropriately include the student in many ministry opportunities, including, but not limited to:
 - Hospital visits, nursing home visits, home visits,
 - Brethren ordinances: anointing, baptisms, communion, Love Feast,
 - Funeral preparation,
 - Wedding preparation,
 - Attending and leading meetings,
 - Teaching, preaching, and worship leading

Completion of Supervised Ministry

When the supervised ministry experience is completed, the student, the supervisor, and the district will reflect on the experience. The supervisor and the district will grant satisfactory completion or recommend additional supervised ministry experience by identifying skill areas that need additional work. A report from the supervisor and student, as well as from the district, will be submitted to SVMC upon completion of the Supervised Ministry.

SUPERVISED MINISTRY EXPERIENCE CONTRACT

Student:

Supervisor:

Ministry Experience Setting:

Time Frame:

Specifically name how the student will be involved in ministry and articulate the learning goals of the experience in writing:

Specifically name how the supervisor will be involved: frequency of meetings, availability, on-site supervision, etc.

Student Signature: _____

Date:

Supervisor Signature: _____

Date:

Please submit the completed contract to the SVMC office before beginning supervised ministry.

SUPERVISED MINISTRY EVENT FORM

Student:

Date of Event:

Type of Event (i.e., preaching, teaching, pastoral care, etc.):

Description of Event: (include topic/issue, your objectives, resources used, what occurred in the event)

Student Reflection: (describe your reaction to the event; how it was received; whether your objectives were met; what you learned, what you would do differently)

Supervisor's Response

Student Signature: _____

Date:

Supervisor Signature: _____

Date:

Please submit all four completed forms to the SVMC office. Only one form per event.

COMPLETION OF SUPERVISED MINISTRY: STUDENT AND SUPERVISOR

Supervised ministry is completed when the student has completed 200 hours of ministry and four Supervised Ministry Event Forms.

Student Evaluation of Experience

Specifically describe your Supervised Ministry experience relating to the learning goals on the contract. How was this experience helpful? Where were your challenges? In what ways have you experienced growth? In what areas do you need more experience?

Supervisor Evaluation of Experience

Describe the growth of the student in this experience. How did the student achieve the learning goals on the initial contract? Name areas of growth you observe. Also, name areas where the student should focus in future experiences. Describe how this experience was for you as a supervisor.

Student Signature: _____

Date:

Supervisor Signature: _____

Date:

Please submit the completed form to the SVMC office after supervised ministry requirements are met.

COMPLETION OF SUPERVISED MINISTRY: COORDINATOR

Coordinator of Supervised Ministry Documentation

As coordinator, you have orchestrated the placement of a student with an experienced minister. You have received various reports from the student and supervisor. Please use this form to document the official completion of the Supervised Ministry Experience.

Student:

Supervisor:

Name of site:

Time frame:

Comments:

Coordinator Signature: _____ Date:

Please submit the completed form to the SVMC office after supervised ministry requirements are met.

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend every class. However, in extenuating circumstances, exceptions may be made in communication with the instructor and SVMC Director. One absence (or no more than 20% of class time) due to illness, death in the family, or dangerous driving conditions may be excused at the instructor's discretion. Two or more absences will lead to an automatic "no- credit," unless the reasons for the absences are discussed with the SVMC Director and deemed legitimate. Students who miss class will be assigned additional work (reflection papers, summary of assigned reading, etc.) by the instructor to substitute for the missed class.

Course Evaluation from Students Policy

Following the completion of each course, ACTS students will be emailed an online course evaluation by SVMC. Students will receive course credit information and updated transcripts upon completion of this online evaluation. Student reflections on the courses assist SVMC in future course planning. SVMC will share evaluation results with instructors.

Creating a Culture of Respect Policy

Courses are designed to be settings of mutual respect in which:

- scripture, as the authoritative and inspired word of God, is the foundation of our work together.
- ministry training occurs through topic presentation and dialogue among instructors and students.
- we respect and hear each other even though our views may differ.
- we work within the framework of Annual Conference statements.

Students and instructors with concerns should contact the SVMC Director, who will communicate with the appropriate district executive as needed.

Emergency Weather and Health Conditions Policy

If county, state, or federal public health authorities, governors, or any similar authority with appropriate jurisdiction declares an emergency condition that prevents or discourages public gatherings due to a public health, safety, or other concern, classes will be taught entirely online or rescheduled. If inclement weather creates hazardous travel conditions, the instructor may cancel or reschedule a class. The instructor is responsible for notifying the students of both the cancellation and the rescheduled time. The instructor will work with SVMC staff to confirm the cancellation and reschedule at the course location.

Payment Policy

Invoices for ACTS classes will be sent to students by SVMC approximately one month before the first course meeting. Payments are due within 30 days of receipt. If payment is not received within 45 days, a \$25 late fee will be assessed. If the student needs additional financial assistance from the congregation or district, the student is responsible for making appropriate arrangements. Course evaluations and transcripts will be held until the invoice is paid in full.

Plagiarism Policy

Integrity is central to life in community. In the academic community, integrity means giving proper credit to people for the ideas and information we receive from them. It also means that the work we submit and represent as our own is really work we ourselves have done.

Plagiarism is using the work of other people without giving them credit, whether in written assignments or formal oral presentations. A glaring example of plagiarism would be submitting an entire essay written by someone else and claiming it was your own. It is also plagiarism to use, without giving credit, someone else's ideas or phrases.

This definition applies to words and images, to manuscripts, and to ideas gleaned from spoken communication. For further examples and appropriate ways to cite, please see the most recent edition of Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), especially sections 4.2.3, 7.9, and 25.1.

Plagiarism is a matter of ethical misconduct for licensed and credentialed clergy. The consequences for plagiarism will vary according to the extent of the offense, but even minor instances are considered serious enough to incur penalties. These may range from rewriting the assignment, non-crediting the assignment, or non-crediting the course, up to dismissal from the program.

Any instances of plagiarism will be reported by the instructor to the student and the Director of SVMC. The Director will discuss the instance with the appropriate District Executive.

(Adapted from Bethany Theological Seminary Student Handbook. See also the Church of the Brethren 2008 Annual Conference Ethics in Ministry Relations Paper, Part III. The Code of Ethics for Ministerial Leaders states: "I will give credit for all sources quoted or extensively paraphrased in sermons and prepared papers. I will honor all copyrights" (p. 8, letter M).

Recording Course Lectures Policy

Anyone wishing to record course lectures must receive permission from the instructor and students before recording any portion of the course lectures and discussions. Asking permission is both a courtesy and a matter of ethical consideration. Any instances of recording without permission will be communicated to the appropriate district executive.

Refund Policy

No tuition refund will be granted once the first class has been attended, unless approved by the SVMC Director.

Zoom Policy

Students should join Zoom at least two minutes before class to ensure a prompt start. Microphones should remain muted unless speaking, and cameras should stay on to foster engagement unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. To stay focused, minimize background noise, avoid multitasking, and remain stationary during class.

Background Check Policy for Instructors and Students

All instructors and students in the ACTS program must provide a background check.

Instructors:

Your work with the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center is contingent upon the successful completion of a background check, updated at least every 5 years.

- For those instructors living or teaching in Pennsylvania, SVMC needs to have one clearance on file: FBI Criminal History Clearance. You may find access to the FBI clearance at: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Pages/FBI-Fingerprinting.aspx>. (Please note that PA pastors working with children under the age of 18 are required to have three clearances on file in the district and the congregation: 1) FBI Criminal History Clearance, 2) PA Child Abuse History Clearance, and 3) PA State Police Criminal History Clearance. SVMC is only asking for one of these three, FBI Criminal History Clearance).
- For those instructors not living or teaching in Pennsylvania, SVMC needs to have a clearance on file: Mid-Atlantic District conducts background checks through National Background Investigations. If you are living in Mid-Atlantic and need a clearance, please contact the Mid-Atlantic District Office.

If you have already completed this process for your ministry placement, please send copies to the SVMC office. If your background check information is filed in your district office, you may contact the district office and ask them to send copies to SVMC.

Individuals who do not provide an appropriate (valid) background check clearance will not be able to teach for SVMC.

Cost Coverage for Instructor Clearances

- If you are a retired minister no longer serving in a ministry placement, and you are required to have a current clearance to teach for SVMC, SVMC will reimburse the cost of the clearance. Please submit your receipt for the clearances to SVMC for reimbursement.
- If you are a minister currently serving in a ministry placement, the responsibility for the cost of clearance remains with you and/or your congregation.

Students:

Students will do the background checks in their districts as part of the licensing process. Please arrange for a copy to be sent to the SVMC office.

Student Presence at Hub Locations Policy

A critical aspect of SVMC's ACTS program is the collegiality that is best facilitated by in-person courses. As we meet the changing needs of our students, SVMC has adopted a "hub model" which utilizes technology when necessary and in-person gatherings when possible.

When a hub is available in a district, students are expected to participate in the course via their district's hub. However, students may request an exception. Potential reasons for an exception include:

- schedule restrictions due to work or family obligations that make traveling to a hub impractical/impossible
- ongoing accessibility concerns due to physical or mental limitations
- a hub location in another district is physically closer to the student's location

In these and other circumstances, an exception may be requested using the Hub Presence Exception Form (below). This form must be submitted at the time of registration for a course, which takes place no later than one month before the course begins. Any changes or requests made during the month before class begins may not be able to be accommodated. An exception form must be completed for each course, unless there is an ongoing reason for an exception, then a permanent exception may be requested. The reason for requesting a one-time or permanent exception must be explained on the form.

If a student at a hub location needs to participate virtually for one meeting of the class due to special circumstances (weather, family emergencies, unexpected work schedules, etc.), a one-time exception may be requested from the instructor. The hub facilitator will also be informed of any changes to student attendance, as necessary.

Hub Presence Exception Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Course Title: _____

Exception Request: (check one)

- I would like to participate in this course virtually, instead of at my hub location.
- I would like to participate in all ACTS courses virtually, instead of at my hub location.
- I would like to participate in this course via another district's hub location.

Reason for exception request:

For SVMC Office Use Only

Date Received _____ Approved (Y/N): _____

Reason for Approval/Denial:

Exception Form may be emailed to karenhodes@svmccob.org or mailed to:
Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center, One Alpha Drive, Elizabethtown, PA 17022

Independent Study Policy and Procedures

An Independent Study is an option to fulfill a requirement when extenuating circumstances prevent participation in the regular course cycle. However, attending the courses in their regular schedule is strongly preferred! The rationale for an independent study must be demonstrated to the SVMC Director by submitting a proposal before the student begins the work. An Independent Study will typically include reading, a written project or other product that demonstrates the student's learning, and meetings with the instructor/supervisor.

A student may not do more than 2 Independent Studies during their coursework in ACTS unless otherwise approved by the Director. If the Independent Study is not completed within the agreed-upon time frame, the student/instructor must negotiate an extension with the Director. Failure to complete within the required time frame or negotiated extension will result in cancellation of the agreement.

Procedural Steps for an Independent Study:

- The student must first talk to the Director, indicating the need for an independent study.
- The student must complete the proposal form, submit attachments, secure the signature of the instructor, and submit them to SVMC.
- Upon approval of the proposal, the student will pay the Independent Study fee (\$100 more than the current ACTS fee), and the student may begin the independent study.
- The independent study must be completed in three months unless other approval has been given.
- SVMC will provide the instructor with evaluation forms and instructions, which must be submitted within two weeks of the independent study's completion. The instructor will receive the honorarium when all forms have been received.
- The evaluation will be sent to the student, and the student's transcript will be updated upon completion.

Independent Study Proposal

All requests for an Independent Study must be approved by the Director of the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center. Please complete this form and the required attachments. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.

Student Name _____ Date _____

Proposed Independent Study Title _____

Instructor Name _____

Beginning Date _____ Ending Date _____
(Time frame for the course may not exceed three months.)

Rationale for requesting Independent Study:

___ Missed the required ACTS course
Reason for missing the course: _____

___ Needs the course for ordination in the Church of the Brethren

Please attach the following:

___ A list of goals and objectives for the Independent Study

___ A detailed outline of the work involved: a reading list, papers/projects, number and frequency of meetings with the instructor/supervisor

___ Description of how the student will be assessed

Support for this Independent Study:

- I support this Independent Study proposal and am willing to serve as the instructor/supervisor.

Instructor Signature: _____ Date: _____

- I commit to completing the course within the 3-month time frame.
- I understand the cost for Independent Study courses is the current cost of ACTS classes plus \$100.00.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

- I support the proposal for the Independent Study.

Director Signature: _____ Date: _____

TRANSFERRING COURSEWORK INTO ACTS

Previous training will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the SVMC Director using these guidelines:

- Students participating in the Brethren Bible Institute may transfer up to six courses into the ACTS program from BBI. BBI courses must successfully meet the additional coursework and instruction time to be compliant with ACTS certification.
- Credit may be considered for coursework completed prior to participation in ACTS if the student can provide acceptable certification for this work through transcripts or grade reports.
- For ACTS credit, a grade of “C” or better is required in accredited coursework.
- Coursework from other structured academic settings that are not accredited must be negotiated with the SVMC Director, who will consult with the Director of Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership as needed. This negotiation is based on a fair assessment of the level of difficulty, the quality of work completed, and the actual hours invested in the courses.
- Courses taken outside of ACTS will, generally, transfer for one unit of credit.
- Courses over 10 years old are not eligible for transfer.
- Courses in Church of the Brethren history/polity/theology, preaching, worship, and pastoral care are recommended to be taken within the ACTS program, Brethren Academy, or Bethany Theological Seminary.
- Courses in Theology, Church Leadership and Administration, Teaching and Learning in the Church, Biblical Interpretation, and Church Vitality and Evangelism should be considered carefully. Depending on the academic institution in which the course was completed, the student may be required to do additional work—reading, research and/or conversations with a Church of the Brethren pastor or instructor.

ACTS COURSES TAKEN FOR TRIM CREDIT

Students enrolled in the TRIM program may take ACTS courses for TRIM credit using the following expectations:

1. Student’s participation in the class for TRIM credit must be approved by the Coordinator of English Language Ministry Training Programs (Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership).
2. The instructor of the ACTS course must agree to the additional reading and be willing to evaluate additional work. In addition to the ACTS compensation, SVMC will provide the instructor with an additional \$50 compensation for working with the TRIM student.
3. The student will pay the full fee for a TRIM course, payable to SVMC.
4. The student will complete a minimum of 500 pages of reading. If the reading assignments do not meet this minimum, the instructor will assign additional readings.
5. The student will have a minimum of 20 contact hours. Most ACTS courses are 15 contact hours. Instead of additional face-to-face time, students will complete an additional paper/project that engages them with the subject matter. The instructor will identify the paper/project topic and evaluate it.
6. Student evaluations will be forwarded to the Brethren Academy from the SVMC office.

ACTS COURSES TAKEN FOR CEUs

An ACTS course can be taken for 1.5 continuing education units (0.1 CEU for every contact hour). To attain this CEU, the student should attend class, participate in discussions, and do the reading. The student is not expected to do the extra papers or projects, although they may do so if they choose. The students will pay the audit fee plus an additional \$10 CEU fee.

ACTS COURSES TAKEN FOR ORDINATION

Individuals may enroll in Church of the Brethren History and Church Leadership and Administration to complete requirements for ordination. (Church Leadership and Administration fulfills the Church of the Brethren polity requirement.) This applies to ministers who have transferred their ordination from other denominations. Individuals must do all the assignments successfully to fulfill the requirements.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS

(Information from the TRIM manual)

Much time has passed since many students were required to write research papers. These guidelines will provide help in knowing how to format a paper and how to structure its content. Of course, each instructor will have requirements for papers you must follow, but some rules are general in nature and apply in most cases.

Format

Most research papers are typed in a 12-point font, double-spaced, with standard 1-inch margins. All quotations are to be footnoted, and quotations longer than three lines should be placed in a block quote, indented from both the right and left margin and single-spaced. A bibliography of sources cited should appear at the end of the paper. For footnotes and endnotes, refer to a style guide, such as Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*, as the authority on form.

Sample Footnote:

Carl Desportes Bowman, *Portrait of a People: The Church of the Brethren at 300* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2008), 83.

Sample Bibliography Entry:

Bowman, Carl Desportes. *Portrait of a People: The Church of Brethren at 300*. Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2008.

Content

Each paper needs a clear thesis statement around which the paper is organized. After choosing a broad topic, do some introductory reading. Start by looking at the bibliography in a textbook that addresses your subject. Where did the author get his or her information? In addition, check reference works such as Bible dictionaries and commentaries. Get a feel for the issues that scholars are debating in relation to the topic and see their suggestions for further reading. Then begin to narrow and fine tune the issue you would like to write about. How many ways could you break down the topic? Perhaps just one of these finer points is a more manageable

topic. Remember that depth is usually more valuable than breadth in a research project. Above all, a research paper should clearly indicate what you have learned as a result of your research.

Academic research papers should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The **introduction** should set up the problem or issue you're writing about and conclude with a single sentence that states clearly what the focus of the paper will be. This is called your thesis statement. Get right to the point in the introduction. No need to beat around the bush.

Sample introductory paragraph and thesis statement: In John 13:13-15, Jesus commands his disciples, who were all men, to wash one another's feet. Would the story have been different if the disciples were women? In this paper, I will investigate the role of gender in shaping one's perspective on footwashing, gathering information from historical, biblical, and theological sources.

The **body** of the paper makes the full-blown case for the statement the student has made in the thesis; that is, the body presents the reasons for thinking the thesis is true. It is also in the body of the paper where the writer uses quotations and references to support or demonstrate the points he or she is making.

The **conclusion** moves from the arguments themselves to the result. Given everything you've learned, what do you conclude? Or, what do you conclude from the evidence and arguments? Even after a research project is underway, you may need to adjust your topic in light of your studies. Keep the instructor informed of any major changes. Don't hesitate to consult with an instructor if you have questions. Such questions will be welcome and a sign that you're serious about your research, especially if they come in a timely manner rather than at 5:30 the day before the research paper is due.

Resources for Writing and Citations

Core, Deborah. *The Seminary Student Writes*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000.

This very easy to read book outlines practical guidance for beginning students. Core offers helpful information on choosing and researching a topic; outlining, writing and editing a paper; and proper formats for citation.

Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.

This book explores in more depth research (definition, planning, thinking), finding sources, choosing a topic, bibliographies, papers (organizing, writing, formatting), and research (biblical exegesis, descriptive, program development, case study).

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

This is the definitive resource for advanced research papers and projects. Turabian Style: Quick Reference Guide for Students is available online as a downloadable pdf at the Bethany Theological Seminary website.

ACTS INSTRUCTORS

Instructors are chosen for ACTS courses by the SVMC Director in consultation with the partnering district executives. SVMC initiates contact with the potential instructor and issues an agreement of understanding to all instructors. Instructors will be considered who:

1. Identify with the scriptural qualifications for ministerial leadership as noted in the current Ministerial Leadership Paper of the Church of the Brethren
2. Maintain that scripture, as the authoritative and inspired work of God, is the foundation of our work together
3. Represent the Church of the Brethren and work within the framework of Annual Conference statements
4. Exhibit skills and expertise in the course topic
5. Completion of an MDiv or MA in a related field, as well as five years working in their field, is preferred. An undergraduate degree may be considered if the instructor has completed a ministry training program and has adequate experience in the course topic. Exceptions for instructors without an MDiv or MA will be reviewed by the Director, in conversation with the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership.
6. Hold an educational philosophy that exhibits good educational qualities:
 - a. Encourage people to explore and deepen knowledge with the educational process
 - b. Present the course material and cultivate conversation in ways that encourage dialogue so that all views are heard, and discussion remains respectful even though there may not be agreement
 - c. Work within the SVMC timeline of syllabus submission and course completion.
 - d. Provide consistent, timely, and meaningful feedback to students

Team Teaching Guidelines

When there is a team teaching arrangement for a course, the following steps will be observed:

- The honorarium will be split in half between the instructors unless otherwise determined by the Director in consultation with the instructors.
- SVMC will reimburse the cost of one planning meeting, which may include mileage and the cost of one meal (limit \$20/person).
- Mileage will be covered for travel to and from the class site for both instructors.

TIMELINE AND CHECKLIST FOR INSTRUCTORS

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center will work closely with instructors to get information to the students prior to, during, and at the close of courses. Below is a timeline and a checklist we hope instructors will find helpful.

BEFORE COURSE BEGINS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>CLEARANCES</u> Your work with the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center is contingent upon the successful completion of a background check, updated at least every 5 years. See the Background Check Policy in the ACTS Handbook for more information.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>LETTER OF AGREEMENT</u> Sign the Letter of Agreement and return it to SVMC immediately upon receipt from SVMC.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>COURSE SYLLABUS AND LETTER OF GREETING</u> <i>(at least two months prior to first class)</i> Please use the sample syllabus in the ACTS handbook. Email SVMC 1) Syllabus and 2) Letter of greeting to students. SVMC will send both to registered students. Students are expected to acquire the textbooks and begin any pre-class assignment/reading.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>DISCUSSION WITH COURSE FACILITATOR</u> <i>(at least one month prior to first class)</i> The instructor should be in touch with any course facilitators who will be present at hub locations to introduce themselves and to discuss how the facilitators might help the instructor throughout the course.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>CONTACTING HOST CHURCH/OFFICE</u> SVMC will contact the host (church or office) two weeks prior to the first class to verify class times and arrangements. The instructor is not to change the location unless approved by the Director.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>STUDENT ROSTER AND CONTACT INFORMATION</u> SVMC will send the instructor a roster and student contact information at least two weeks prior to the first class.</p>
DURING COURSE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>EVALUATION FORMS FROM SVMC</u> SVMC will send the instructor course evaluation forms at least two weeks prior to the last class. SVMC will send students an online form to evaluate their course experience. Results will be shared with the instructor.</p>
AFTER COURSE ENDS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>COMPLETED EVALUATION FORMS</u> <i>Complete no more than one month after the last class.</i> Instructors are to complete and send SVMC (preferably via email) the completed evaluation forms.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>HONORARIUM AND CEU CERTIFICATE</u> Once all evaluations are received from the instructor, SVMC will send honorarium to the instructor with a compilation of students' evaluations of the course, and a CEU certificate if this is the instructor's first time teaching this course.</p>

Syllabus Template for ACTS courses

(Instructors, please use this template when creating a syllabus)

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center Academy Certified Training System (ACTS)

Course title

Meeting times and location

Instructor name and contact information

Course Purpose: 2-4 sentence description of course intent

Course objectives: Please use the objectives listed for your course in the ACTS Handbook. You may also add additional objectives with measurable wording, like:

The student will be able to articulate....

The student will become familiar with...

The student will demonstrate...

Required text(s): List the text(s) you require. Please include the ISBN number. Also, while many of us assume the Bible will be regularly used in class, some students prefer to have the Bible listed as a required text.

Additional resources: (if this is a lengthy list, please include it as an additional sheet rather than including it in the body of the syllabus.)

Preparation: list any pre-meeting work or reading that you expect the students to do.

Expectations/Assignments: List your expectations (participation, deadlines, etc.) as well as assignments to be completed (pages read, written work, etc. for each class date) to receive credit for the class.

Statements and Policies Regarding Classes and Coursework (page 15) will be added by SVMC.

OBJECTIVES FOR ACTS COURSES

Biblical

Introduction to the Old Testament

- Read significant portions of the Old Testament text
- Define the canon and describe differences between Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish canons
- Identify Old Testament books and describe their literary type and basic issues or themes
- Describe an overview of Hebrew history and identify key figures/events
- Relate major themes of the Old Testament with present-day life

Introduction to the New Testament

- Read significant portions of the New Testament text
- Identify New Testament books and describe their literary type and basic issues or themes
- Identify the different themes and authors of the gospels
- Identify the features of Jesus' ministry and message
- Relate major themes of the New Testament with present-day life

Interpreting the Bible

- Use basic Bible study tools in biblical interpretation
- Demonstrate skills in exegeting a biblical passage and in using that exegesis as the basis for a sermon or teaching outline
- Articulate the role of the faith community in the process of biblical interpretation as understood in the Anabaptist tradition

Historical/Theological

History of the Church

- Gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the heritage of the Christian church from the early church through the Reformation
- Develop a sense of the rich diversity in beliefs, worship, and church practice within the Christian tradition
- Articulate where the Brethren heritage of Anabaptism and Pietism occur within the larger context of Christian history

Church of the Brethren History

- Describe the basic beliefs, values, and ministries which characterize the faith and life of the Church of the Brethren
- Articulate the value and meaning of the ordinances of the Church of the Brethren
- Engage in conversation about Brethren heritage and what the heritage means to the role of the church today

Introduction to Theology

- Challenge students to think theologically about their life and the world around them
- Develop an understanding of Believer Church tradition, theology, and vision
- Enable students to articulate a statement of faith that expresses personal beliefs about the Christian message
- Understand basic theological principles of the Christian church

Ministry Skills

Church Leadership and Administration

- Demonstrate the ability to work collegially
- Be familiar with Brethren polity and the organizational plan for the present congregation
- Compare different leadership styles and identify strengths/weaknesses in his/her style
- Define the issue of conflict and describe ways of dealing with conflict in the church
- Demonstrate skills in leading a meeting and/or leading a church group in planning and carrying out a particular task

Introduction to Pastoral Care

- Articulate the meaning of and differences in pastoral care and pastoral counseling
- Demonstrate skills needed for pastoral care
- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of referral in counseling
- Describe critical points in life when the ministries of care and counseling are often needed
- Distinguish between situations appropriately dealt with by pastoral counselors and those that need referral for other help

Teaching and Learning in the Church

- Articulate the varied ways teaching and learning take place in a faith community
- Demonstrate skills in preparing and leading a learning session
- Articulate an understanding of the stages of faith
- Name the qualities that Jesus demonstrated in teaching

Preaching

- Articulate the biblical basis of preaching
- Demonstrate skills in exegeting scripture and use the exegesis to write a sermon
- Demonstrate skills in preaching

Worship

- Articulate the biblical basis of worship
- Define the basic components of a service of worship
- Develop an integrated worship service clearly demonstrating the theme through scripture, sermon topic, hymn selection, and other pieces of the worship service

Church Vitality and Evangelism

- Reflect on evangelism related to the person and ministry of Jesus and the experience of the early church, early Anabaptist movement, and the Church of the Brethren
- Articulate understandings of evangelism and church growth when considering issues of congregational life such as church size, dynamics, traditions and vision
- Assess your current congregation in terms of hospitality and vision for growth

Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry

- Demonstrate effective writing and speaking skills
- Articulate the importance of good communication skills for church leaders
- Demonstrate the ability to produce quality newsletter items, correspondence, and other pieces needed in pastoral ministry

Evaluation of Student Work

The Director will read all instructor and class evaluations at the end of each course. If problems arise in the class, instructors will report these to the Director, upon which remedial action will be taken.

Instructors will evaluate students' performance in their class. Instructors will clearly define expectations and projects as the course begins. Each course should include the basic objectives included in the ACTS Handbook. These basic objectives help to meet the Readiness for Ministry criteria.

ACTS classes are graded as credit or no credit. The instructor will use the following questions as a guide for evaluation of student participation and projects:

Evaluate how the student participated in class:

- How was the student's class attendance? (Refer to the Attendance Policy included in this handbook)
- Did the student participate thoughtfully and constructively in class discussions?
- Did the student complete assignments on time and in a quality manner?

Evaluate student projects:

- Were the projects completed on time?
- Did the student provide quality work, and did they meet stated requirements?
- Does the student demonstrate an understanding of the material and its application in ministry?
- In your opinion, has the student demonstrated progress on the Readiness for Ministry criteria listed for your course?
- How does the student demonstrate a quality understanding of the writing process? (e.g. spelling, grammar, punctuation, footnoting, bibliography.)

A rubric to guide instructors in grading is included on the next page. This is for instructor use only and does not need to be given to students or SVMC.

The instructor's evaluation of a student is on page 31. Instructors should type their responses.

ACTS Grading Rubric

	Above Average (6 pts)	Average (4 pts)	Needs Improvement (2 pts.)	Unsatisfactory/ Failed to Complete (0 pts.)
Class Attendance				
Class Participation				
Timely Project Completion				
Quality of Projects				
Understanding of Class Application to Ministry				
Progress in Readiness for Ministry Criteria				
Understanding of the Writing Process				

Exemplary Course Credit: 29 - 42 points
 Satisfactory Course Credit: 19 - 28 points
 Course Credit with Reservations: 11 - 18 points
 No Course Credit: 0 - 10 points

SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER
Academy Certified Training Level Course (ACTS)
Instructor Evaluation of Student

Student: _____

Course Title: _____

Instructor: _____ **Course Dates:** _____

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

STUDENT EVALUATION:

Credit _____ **No credit** _____ **TRIM credit** _____

Instructor's Signature _____

(This form will be sent to instructors prior to last class. Please TYPE your responses.)

SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER
Academy Certified Training Level Course (ACTS)
Instructor Evaluation of Student

Student: _____

Course Title: _____

Instructor: _____ Course Dates: _____

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To study the origin and development of the Brethren from 1708 to the present.
- To review the Anabaptist and Pietist influences on the early Brethren.
- To be able to describe the basic beliefs, values and ministries which have characterized the faith and life of the Church of the Brethren.
- To understand the value and meaning of the ordinances of the Church of the Brethren.
- To reflect on our Brethren heritage and how that impacts the role and contribution of the church today.

STUDENT EVALUATION:

I appreciated the work you did for the Church of the Brethren History class. You were involved in the class in a positive way and your homework was completed on time. It appeared you put yourself into the work and because of that gained a deeper understanding of Church of the Brethren history and heritage. Your written homework assignment was interesting and well done. The material presented in the oral report was fine, but could have been a bit more organized in your sharing. Your final paper was interesting and informative. It was well written and documented in a helpful way. I appreciated your positive attitude and willingness to be involved in the class in a significant way.

Thanks again for your participation in the class. Keep up the good work!

Credit _____ **No credit** _____ **TRIM credit** _____

Instructor's Signature _____

READINESS FOR MINISTRY COMPETENCIES

Excerpted from Readiness for Ministry paper in *Ministerial Leadership Notebook*.

The following list is from the *Readiness for Ministry Competencies* and is suggested as important to integrate as ACTS are designed and taught.

- Familiarity with the biblical sources of the Christian community and competency in interpreting those sources
- Familiarity with and ability to reflect theologically on the history and social context of Christianity
- Awareness of the contextual character of particular Christian traditions, especially found in the North American setting and in global settings of developing Christianity
- Familiarity with and ability to reflect theologically on the heritage of the believers' church tradition
- Ability to articulate faith in language that is theologically informed and culturally persuasive
- An understanding of the congregation informed by both theological heritage and learnings from the human sciences
- Ability to articulate a vision of ministry congruent with one's sense of vocation and appropriate to the ministry context in which that vocation will be practiced
- Ability to nurture and reflect critically on the spiritual formation of self and others, including ethics for ministry and life in community
- Skills in interpersonal relationships, in mediating conflict, and in building community
- Ability to provide effective leadership in congregational and other church-related arenas of ministry
- Ability to integrate biblical and theological understandings with the practice of ministry

Chart: Comparison of Courses and Readiness for Ministry Competencies

Readiness for Ministry Criteria →	Familiarity with biblical sources	Ability to reflect theologically	Aware of context of Christian traditions	Aware of heritage of believers' church	Articulate faith in informed way	Understand the congregation	Articulate vision of ministry in context	Reflect on spiritual development Self and others	Skills in relations, conflict, communication	Effective leadership skills in ministry	Integrate Bible / theology understand ministry
Course Listings ↓											
Into to Old Testament	✓	✓			✓			✓			✓
Intro to New Testament	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Interpreting the Bible	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓
History of the Church			✓	✓	✓						✓
Intro to Theology		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Church of the Brethren History				✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Introduction to Pastoral Care					✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Teaching and Learning in the Church	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Preaching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Worship	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Church Leadership and Administration	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Church Vitality and Evangelism	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Communication Skills		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

ACTS STUDENT TRANSCRIPT
Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center

Sample

Name:
District:
Congregation:

Requirements	
Call to Ministry Essay	
Annual Conference Report	
District Conference Report	
Ecumenical, Interfaith or Intercultural Experience	
Supervised Ministry	
Ministry Formation	Ongoing until Ordination

Biblical Courses (3)			
COURSE	DATE OFFERED/TAKEN	CREDIT	INSTRUCTOR
Introduction to Old Testament			
Introduction to New Testament			
Interpreting the Bible			

Historical/Theological Courses (3)			
COURSE	DATE OFFERED/TAKEN	CREDIT	INSTRUCTOR
History of the Church			
Church of the Brethren History			
Introduction to Theology			

Ministry Skills Courses (6) (Take six of these courses. * One must be Church Leadership & Administration)			
COURSE	DATE OFFERED/TAKEN	CREDIT	INSTRUCTOR
Church Leadership and Administration			
Introduction to Pastoral Care			
Teaching and Learning in the Church			
Introduction to Preaching			
Worship			
Church Vitality and Evangelism			
Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry			
Elective (if applicable):			