

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center Academy Certified Training System (ACTS)

ACTS Handbook 2026

SVMC is a Church of the Brethren ministry partnership that includes the districts of Atlantic Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Middle PA, Southern PA, and Western PA, in addition to Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and Bethany Theological Seminary.

*Growing in Knowledge
Rooted in Christ*

SVMC'S MISSION:
To equip leaders for ministry in a regionally based, 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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(updated 9/3/2025)

This handbook is designed to describe ACTS and give guidance on expectations, requirements, timeline, Readiness for Ministry criteria, and general information about SVMC. The handbook is for both instructors and students and contains all forms needed for the program.

The Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center is a Church of the Brethren Ministry Education Partnership between Bethany Theological Seminary, Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, and five Brethren districts: Atlantic Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Middle Pennsylvania, Southern Pennsylvania, and Western Pennsylvania. We offer Church of the Brethren ministry training opportunities at the academy level. This handbook focuses on information for ACTS instructors.

ACTS courses are usually offered simultaneously at local churches or Brethren institutions in the partnering districts. A certificate will be granted by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership to non-degree students who complete all the requirements of the ACTS program.

The program is open to licensed ministers seeking to fulfill requirements for ordination, to laypersons seeking leadership training, and to credentialed ministers pursuing continuing education.

To complete the program, students need to take 12 or more academic courses and the following non-academic requirements: supervised ministry and ministry formation programs supplement the learning experience and are available through the district. In addition, students participate in Annual Conference, District Conference, and an ecumenical, interfaith, or intercultural experience.

Our Mission Statement...

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

SVMC Staff...

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ADMISSION PROCEDURES

Educational Placement

As the students are interviewed in their District setting, the District Ministry Commission will inform them of educational track possibilities and refer them to the services of SVMC. The staff of the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center will help students develop an educational plan based on education completed and their future goals.

As the staff, in consultation with District Executives and District Ministry Commissions, guides the students to an educational track, the following criteria are considered: previous educational background, future plans for ministry, context for ministry, and ability.

Possible educational tracks are: ACTS, TRIM, occasional student/graduate level, and graduate level.

Each district has a TRIM Coordinator who works with TRIM students in conjunction with the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. TRIM students may enroll in courses through SVMC.

ACTS Admission Procedure for Licensed Ministers

Licensed Ministry candidates seeking admission to the ACTS program should contact the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center office following an interview with the District Ministry Commission during the licensing process.

Students entering the program will be required to write **an essay of approximately 2-3 pages describing their calling**. This 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 calling to ministry.

Some students will receive the recommendation to take the pre-requisite course of Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry. This self-paced course will provide the students opportunities to strengthen understanding of grammar and communication skills, primarily in written form. This course will count as one of the six courses needed in Ministry Skills.

ACTS Admission Procedure for Lay Persons: Lay persons wishing to enroll in ACTS courses should contact the SVMC office to register for the course and specify the interest of enrolling as a lay person.

Admission Procedure for Continuing Education: 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.

Student Educational Records: All student educational records will be kept at the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center office until the completion of the program. Upon completion of the program, one copy of the transcript will be sent to the respective District Office. One copy of the transcript will remain at the SVMC office. During the educational process, SVMC staff and District Executives have access to the files. Students may view their personal files at any point.

Duration of Program

Students are expected to complete the program in the four-year cycle. In the event of cycle disruption, the student will wait for the courses to be offered again or work with the Director for a mutually acceptable solution such as taking the course in another district or utilizing an independent study.

OVERVIEW

Academy Certified Training System (ACTS)

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center's ACTS program is one avenue by which a licensed minister can fulfill the ordination requirements set forth in the current Ministerial Leadership paper:

Credentialed Ministers shall...

(2.) Complete one of the following approved educational programs:

- The Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree from Bethany Theological Seminary or another institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.
- The Training in Ministry (TRIM) program through the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership provides an alternative for those who find it impossible or impractical to complete a Master of Divinity degree. It also offers appropriate ministry training to supplement the education of those who may hold degrees in higher education other than those named here.
- The **Academy Certified Training Systems** (ACTS) programs, district or regional programs certified by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, provide still another alternative training track.¹

This Academy Certified Training System (ACTS) was developed in collaboration with the District Executives of Atlantic Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southern PA, Middle PA and Western PA districts, and approved by the Governing Board of the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center and the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership. The authority for establishing an Academy Certified Training System (ACTS) program is found in the Ministerial Leadership paper approved by the Annual Conference in 1999 and revised in 2014. This statement reads: "The Academy Certified Training Systems programs, district or regional programs certified by the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership provide still another alternative training track." The Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, a partnership between the Mission and Ministry Board of the Church of the Brethren, Inc. and Bethany Theological Seminary, provides both initial and continuing certification of ACTS programs such as the ACTS of SVMC.

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center believes strongly that our students in ministry training need to develop a spiritual rootedness as they prepare to be leaders in the church. Recognizing and embracing the fact that God is our foundation, we seek to encourage the students to deepen their spirituality using a variety of spiritual disciplines throughout their educational process. Students are provided the opportunity for spiritual formation through groups, class work, and individual instruction.

Ministry training in ACTS occurs through structured courses, ministry formation experience offered in each district, and supervised ministry experience offered in each district.

- Courses are offered in regionally-based settings and online. Twelve courses are required.
- Ministry formation occurs in a setting where students share with one another about the unique experiences, questions, uncertainties, successes, and challenges. Together, the students learn about their own abilities, strengths, and weaknesses as they place themselves in the various ministry situations shared with the group.
- The supervised ministry experience occurs when the student is paired with an experienced minister. Together, they explore and experience the daily needs and challenges of doing ministry. This occurs approximately midway through the educational program.
- ACTS will be completed in three or four years depending on the individual district's schedule of courses.

¹ 2014 Ministerial Leadership Manual, Church of the Brethren, Sect. V.D. 21.

SPIRITUAL PLAN

(Excerpt from "ACTS Plan")

The Academy Certified Training System (ACTS) of the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center (SVMC) believes strongly that our students in ministry training need to develop a spiritual rootedness as they prepare to be leaders in the church. Recognizing and embracing the fact that God is our foundation, we seek to encourage students to deepen their spirituality using a variety of spiritual disciplines throughout their educational process. Students will be provided the opportunity for spiritual formation through groups, class work, and individual instruction.

Biblical Foundation for Spiritual Discernment²–

In Christ, the believer is a new creation. (2 Cor. 5:17-18)

New life for the believer is defined as a change from old behaviors. (1 Tim. 3:2-13; Tit. 1:5-8; 2:2-8; Gal. 5:19-24)

The believer is being changed into the likeness of Christ. (2 Cor. 3:18) The believer grows toward maturity. (Eph. 4:13)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Let each of you lead the life...to which God called you. (1 Cor. 7:17) Followers of Christ live with integrity. (Matt. 5:33-37)

'Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.' (Matt. 25:40) Christians believe that all of life is sacred. (Matt. 5:21-24)

Believers are committed to high values. (Matt. 6:19-24)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly and do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Col. 3:16-17) Followers of Christ abstain from those things that harm and destroy the body. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Sisters and brothers in Christ strive for healing and reconciliation. (Matt 5:25-26, 43-48; 6:12, 14-15; 18:15-17; Rom. 12:14-21)

Sisters and brothers in Christ live in a caring community where each part of the body is valued. (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4)

We are no longer strangers, but we are members of the household of God. (Eph. 2:11-22)

Jesus said to them..."As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21)

² Scripture list from Readiness for Ministry paper in *Ministerial Leadership Notebook*, OM 230.1-2. This list has been reordered, and some additional scripture listed, to loosely represent the progression of new life, growth, commitment, community, and sending.

The scripture continues to call us to the understanding that we are created new in Jesus Christ and are being changed into the likeness of Christ. Our journey is one of on-going growth calling us to high values and integrity. We are called to live the example of Jesus Christ by being Christ's hands, feet, and body on earth. We are called to live out the teaching of Jesus Christ and embrace the values of our denomination as we minister with one another as students in ministry training, teachers equipping students, administrators of ACTS, and with those we encounter daily.

Spiritual Formation

As students preparing for ministry and as seasoned ministers, our spiritual formation is ongoing. Richard Foster, in Spiritual Classics, makes some helpful statements about spiritual formation:

Spiritual formation involves a fundamental choice. Choosing to live for Jesus Christ may mean adopting a certain style of life, or perhaps more properly, a rule of life. We take on a series of spiritual practices that will open us to God's work in our lives. At the same time we need to remember that spiritual transformation is a work of grace. It is what God does in us. ...One more thing to remember: spiritual formation is ongoing. We need not be impatient; we need take no measurements.³ Spiritual formation is not as measurable as some other ministry skills may be. ACTS aspires to provide students with opportunities and examples; we trust in the transformative power and grace of God to work in the lives of students.

Incorporating Spiritual Disciplines into ACTS

We seek God's guidance in our planning and our relationship to the students. Opportunities for spiritual disciplines are incorporated into the ACTS in the formation of the students, the modeling of the teachers, and the administration of the program.

Students

Each student is encouraged to be open to God through him/herself, congregation, counselor/mentor, District Executive, and District Ministry Commission. We should be open to discerning calls whether they come as a "bright light" or a "still small voice." The support of the student's congregation, counselor/mentor, and district can be helpful in the discernment of the call and guidance. The importance of the relationship among the student, counselor/mentor, and congregation should not be undervalued. Challenge, support, discernment, and understanding can be offered through these important relationships. The mentor will support the student, as well as challenge him or her to reach the next level of growth. Each district follows the counselor/mentor guidelines set forth by its ministry commission.

Students are encouraged to journal throughout the entire educational process. In doing so, students may document personal interaction and reflection on their own personal theological and faith development as it relates to specific courses, assignments, and ministry incidents. This exercise allows students to record experiences and reflection and to monitor their personal growth throughout the training journey. Students may use this journal regularly with their supervisor for discussion and reflection. In addition, the journal will provide a valuable collection of responses that will help students evaluate their entire educational and ministry experience.

Students are encouraged to be cognizant of spiritual disciplines and have a devotional style and plan which should include prayer, Bible study, and meditation. The ACTS program recognizes that there is not a "one size fits all" devotional plan; rather, students should seek what contributes to their spiritual formation as they develop and deepen a spiritual rootedness. Exploration of the inner disciplines of study, meditation, prayer and fasting; outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration is encouraged.

³ Foster, Richard and Emilie Griffin, *Spiritual Classics* (San Francisco: Harper, 2000), xiii-xiv.

LEARNING PLAN

(Excerpt from “ACTS Plan”)

INTRODUCTION

The ACTS program requires the successful completion of 12 academic courses and supplemental ministry experiences. It will generally require four years to complete. Students may enter at any point in the training cycle.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

To successfully complete the ACTS program, students will:

- Complete the following 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)
 - 5 Ministry Skills Courses (of these six: Church Leadership and Administration is required due to polity component, Introduction to Pastoral Care, Teaching and Learning in the Church, Preaching, Worship, Church Vitality and Evangelism)
 - 1 elective—(can be the sixth ministry skill course, Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry, an online class, or another approved course.)
- Participate in **Ministry Formation**
- Participate in **Supervised Ministry**
- Attend one **District Conference** and one **Annual Conference**
- Participate in an **ecumenical, interfaith or intercultural experience**

Requirements are tracked in the ACTS Transcript, found in Appendix 4.

Courses and other components of ACTS will be designed to achieve the basic competencies for ministry established by the Ministry Advisory Council as a standard for all ministry training programs of the Church of the Brethren. The Ministry Advisory Council is a representative group of people from denominational staff, Bethany Theological Seminary, Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership, Council of District Executives, and the Higher Education Association. The Ministry Advisory Council has as one of its goals: encourage and promote appropriate educational requirements and standards for ministerial leadership for the church.

⁴Ibid.

A Zoom option will be available for one course when the course is offered in multiple districts. We encourage in-person attendance, however in cases of geographic distance or schedule conflict, a student may register for the course which has the Zoom option.

PROCESS FOR CHOOSING INSTRUCTORS

Instructors are chosen for the ACTS courses by the Director of the SVMC in consultation with the partnering district executives. Instructor criteria include:

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. 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 encourages dialogue among the students and instructor so that all views are heard and discussion remains respectful of all students and instructor even though there may not be agreement
 - c. Work within the SVMC timeline of syllabus submission and course completion.

Procedure Followed by the Director:

1. The Director of SVMC will review the upcoming courses in the course cycle.
2. The Director will consult with the District Executive in each district concerning courses to be offered, who taught them in the past, who might be available to teach in the upcoming schedule.
3. The Director will initiate the contact with the potential instructor.
4. The Director will inform the District Executive when the courses are scheduled.
5. The Director will issue an agreement of understanding to instructors within each district to be read and signed by the instructors.

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENT WORK IN AN ACTS CLASS

Established by the Ministry Advisory Council as a standard for all ministry training programs in the Church of the Brethren¹

- **Fifteen contact hours**
- **Total class time, reading, and project work should total 50-65 hours**
- **Approximately 400 pages of reading material;** each course will have reading which includes a required text(s) plus assigned supplemental reading to adequately cover the subject area.
- **One or more major assignments/projects** will be required. Assignments could be a comparative book review, research paper, interviews, pastoral conversations, sermons, or teaching outlines. Assignments integrating reading or research with the student's ministry are especially desirable. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the policy on citation style and plagiarism below.
- Use measurable ways of evaluating work done: written projects, tests, congregational feedback instruments, taped sermons, in addition to classroom discussions and conversations between student and supervisor.

¹Information excerpted from District Approved Training Program document in back pocket of *Ministerial Leadership Notebook*.

COURSE CYCLE

Atlantic Northeast, Middle PA, Southern PA, and Mid-Atlantic Districts

(Offered on a rotating cycle)

(2025-26)

Introduction to the New Testament (B)

Introduction to Theology (H/T)

Interpreting the Bible (B)

(2026-27)

Preaching (MS)

Worship (MS)

Church Vitality and Evangelism (MS)

(2027-28)

Church Leadership and Administration (MS)

History of the Church (H/T)

Introduction to Pastoral Care (MS)

(2028-29)

Introduction to the Old Testament (B)

Church of the Brethren History (H/T)

Teaching and Learning in the Church (MS)

Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry will be offered yearly.

COURSE CYCLE

Western PA District

(Offered on a rotating cycle)

Because Western PA meets for intensive Saturday classes, their schedule will be:

(2025-26)

Introduction to the Old Testament (B)

Teaching and Learning in the Church (MS)

Church Vitality and Evangelism (MS)

Interpreting the Bible (B)

(2026-27)

Introduction to New Testament (B)

Introduction to Theology (H/T)

Preaching (MS)

Worship (MS)

(2027-28)

Church Leadership and Administration (MS)

History of the Church (H/T)

Introduction to Pastoral Care (MS)

Church of the Brethren History (H/T)

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 the books of the Old Testament and describe their literary type, as well as, the basic issues or themes
- Describe an overview of Hebrew history and identify 25 key figures or events in the timeline of the history
- 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 the books of the New Testament and describe their literary type, as well as, the basic issues or themes
- Identify the different themes and “personalities” 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

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 and 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 the understanding of the importance of referral in counseling
- Describe critical points in life for which the ministries of care and counseling are often needed
- Distinguish between situations appropriately dealt with by pastoral counselors and those which 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 a particular biblical passage and use the exegesis as the basis of 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, hymns 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 an understanding of 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

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 the classes. Below is a timeline and 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.</p> <p>For those living or teaching in Pennsylvania, <u>SVMC needs to have one clearance</u> on file:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FBI Criminal History Clearance. You may find access to the FBI clearance at: https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Pages/FBI-Fingerprinting.aspx <p>For those not living or teaching in Pennsylvania, <u>SVMC needs to have a clearance</u> on file:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-Atlantic District conducts background checks through National Background Investigations. If you are living in Mid-Atlantic and need a clearance, please contact the district office. <p>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 instead contact the district office and ask them to send copies to SVMC. Individuals who do not provide appropriate (valid) background check clearances will not be able to teach for SVMC, in accordance with PA state law.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>LETTER OF AGREEMENT</u> Sign Letter of Agreement and return 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 sample syllabus in 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>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 it is 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 instructors all final course evaluation forms at least two weeks prior to last class. SVMC will send students an online form to evaluate their course experience. Results will be shared with instructor.</p>
AFTER COURSE ENDS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>COMPLETED EVALUATION FORMS</u> <i>Do no more than one month after last class.</i> Instructors are to complete and send SVMC (preferably scan and email) the completed evaluation forms.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p><u>HONORARIUM AND CEU CERTIFICATE</u> Once all evaluations are received from instructor, SVMC will send honorarium to instructor with a compilation of students' evaluations of course, and a CEU certificate if this is instructor's first time teaching this course.</p>

EXPERIENTIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR ACTS

Conference Experiences

Participation in at least one Annual Conference and one District Conference during the student's enrollment in the ACTS is expected. Written reflection on the experience must be provided to the district appointed counselor/mentor and to SVMC for the student's file. Reflection paper must be submitted within two months after the conference. Paper should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced, and 12pt font.

Ecumenical, Interfaith, or Cross-cultural Experience

Participation in an ecumenical, interfaith or cross-cultural event is expected during the student's involvement in ACTS. The experience could be in the form of a community ecumenical gathering, attend worship in a different denomination or religion, attend the denomination's cross-cultural annual gathering, or participate in a work camp or mission trip. Many opportunities can fulfill this experience. Students are welcome to suggest additional ideas for approval by SVMC staff. Reflection paper must be submitted within two months after the experience. Paper should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced, and 12pt font.

Ministry Formation

Participation in a Ministry Formation group was established by Annual Conference several years ago as an important component in the training and development of Church of the Brethren ministers.

The Ministry Formation experience approaches the training and development of leadership in the Church of the Brethren from the perspective that an integral part of ministry is relationship and people oriented. Required course work provides the academic portion of a student's training. Yet becoming an effective minister in the Church of the Brethren requires much more than book knowledge. It requires people and relational skills that can only be acquired and developed in a setting where students share with one another about 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. Ministry is formed in an ongoing process where the individual learns from others. True to the Brethren understanding of community discernment in dealing with issues, ministry formation is, by nature, group oriented.

The actual content of District Ministry Formation meetings is designed to be flexible. The agenda often includes a presentation on some specific ministry topic or issue or a review of an Annual Conference Statement. Individual sharing always takes place and receives high priority, as it is the most fruitful basis for ministerial skill development in specific situations.²

Students are required to participate in ministry formation events that vary according to their district; the participating districts have policies unique to their plan for ministers in training.

Leadership

The **coordinator of the ministry formation group** should be a credentialed minister appointed by the District Ministry Commission. The coordinator is responsible for being present with the participants at the meetings, guiding discussions on ministry topics, being willing to share from experience in ministry, and planning meetings/topics so that the list of basic objectives for ministry formation are met.

² Material excerpted from David Banaszak's writing on ministry formation, 1998 District Conference book, Middle Pennsylvania District.

Another person who holds a crucial role for the minister in training is the **district-appointed counselor/mentor**. The counselor/mentor is encouraged to develop a warm, open and friendly relationship with the student so that the student feels the freedom to share concerns, problems, or the joys of exploring and adjusting to ministry. The counselor/mentor will provide encouragement, guidance, and prayer support for the student's education and ministry exploration.

Students are encouraged to realize that the **District Executives** and **District Ministry Commissions** are resources for them.

Basic Objectives for Ministry Formation

Through participation in a Ministry Formation group, 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
 - stewardship of gifts, abilities, finances, time, creation and life
 - understanding and practicing ethical behavior
- Develop skills in practical ministry experience, including:
 - hospital/nursing home visitation
 - home visits
 - premarital counseling
 - wedding preparation and officiating
 - funeral preparation and officiating
 - anointing
 - baptism
 - communion
 - Love Feast
- Develop skills in church administration, such as:
 - leading meetings
 - resolving conflict
 - keeping records
 - developing a stewardship campaign
- Articulate an understanding of the need for self-care, including:
 - time management
 - spiritual renewal
 - life-long learning
 - Sabbath rest
 - 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
 - developing the habit of keeping a spiritual journal
 - being aware of important source books on prayer

- Become aware of community resources for:
 - counseling
 - health care
 - social service assistance
 - youth services

These objectives will be achieved through personal experience, group sharing, and guest presenters on the topic. Each district ministry formation group is encouraged to invite experienced ministers to share with the group. Experienced ministers will bring a richness of practical advice from which students may learn.

Communication Among Student, Coordinator and District Ministry Commission

When the discernor/student is licensed, they are required to meet with the Ministry Formation and Supervised Ministry Coordinator(s). During the meeting, the student and coordinator(s) review MF and SM and expectations and set a date and time for next check in.

Coordinator(s) of SM and MF is/are encouraged to meet at least twice per year with the District Ministry Commission. During the meetings, the coordinator would give an update on students in these two components of the ACTS program. They will also receive update on any new students entering the ACTS program.

Meeting Schedule

Four two-hour meetings per year are suggested although districts can design the model which best fits the district. The Director of SVMC will have a yearly conversation with the District Executives and the Coordinators of Ministry Formation regarding the status and process of ministry formation within each district. Additional conversations will be held as needed.

Attendance Policy for Ministry Formation

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

First absence—student notifies the Ministry Formation Coordinator and completes make-up assignment on topics discussed.

Second absence—student notifies the Ministry Formation Coordinator and the Chair of Ministry Commission and completes make-up assignment on topics discussed.

Third absence—Ministry Formation Coordinator refers to District Ministry Commission and discussion on student's desire for re-licensing and/or continuation in educational program.

Ministry Formation attendance expectations

Because of the community building and the sharing of ministry experience which occur in ministry formation sessions, we expect that participants will attend **in person**. We recognize that some exceptional circumstances may occur such as illness, quarantine, or substantial geographic distances. In these circumstances, arrangements for virtual attendance **may** be mutually decided upon by the Ministry Formation leader and the participant.

Supervised Ministry Experience

An integral part of the educational plan is the supervised ministry training experience. Paired with an experienced minister, students will have opportunities to explore and experience the daily needs and challenges of doing ministry. Ideally, the supervised ministry experience will be an action and reflection model supplementing the learning occurring through the study units. The Supervised Ministry experience will commence at some point during the second year of the educational program. 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 and district staff
- Develop and practice ministerial ethics in all relationships

Experience Design

Leadership:

- The District Ministry Commission, in consultation with the staff of SVMC, will appoint a District Coordinator of ACTS Level Supervised Ministry. This Coordinator will be responsible for administration, teaming of students with supervisors, and act as a liaison between district and SVMC staff.
- The Coordinator, in consultation with the District Executive, will arrange for 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 for each student:

- Teaming with a supervisor with at least 5 years positive experience in the field of ministry for which the student is preparing
- One year (minimum of 200 hours) of opportunities mutually agreed upon by the supervisor and the student
- Weekly journal keeping and evaluative reporting to the supervisor each quarter. Each quarter will include a report on the following areas:
 - Preaching
 - Worship leading
 - Pastoral care situation
 - Teaching and working with small groups
 - Administrative meeting setting
 - On-going discussion of spiritual dynamics of spiritual life and ministry

The experienced minister will demonstrate a willingness to include the student in many ministry opportunities throughout the year. Hospital visits, nursing home visits, home visits, anointing, communion, Love Feast preparation, funeral preparation, wedding preparation, meeting leadership, teaching, preaching, and worship leading are all areas the student will experience throughout the year.

At the completion of the year of supervised experience, through review of the experiences and reflections, the supervisor and the district will grant satisfactory completion or recommend the need for additional supervised experience by flagging some skill areas which need more work. A report from the supervisor and a reflection paper from the student will be included in the student's records.

Guidelines for Supervision

Supervisors should:

1. Exhibit attitudes of genuine caring and vocation to the nurturing of new ministers
 - Listen to what a student is saying and feeling so that the student feels affirmed rather than controlled
 - Help a student express dreams, clarify goals, and specify objectives for a ministering activity
 - Help a student analyze conditions and find procedures that are appropriate to the specified objectives
 - Help a student be reality-oriented about people, time, places, resources and other arrangements
 - Help a student identify and work through obstacles that arise in practice
 - Help a student honestly evaluate what has been done in terms of objectives, personal performance, and larger significance
 - Find an appropriate way of celebrating the gains and mourning the losses with the student
2. Remember God is not finished with the minister in training yet; expect growth and maturity with future experience
3. Not attempt to make the student into his or her own image and likeness
4. Be sensitive and compassionate while being firm and not afraid to voice constructive criticism.³

³ Adapted from Middle Pennsylvania District's Supervised Ministry document.

POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

PAYMENT POLICY

Invoices for ACTS classes will be mailed to students by SVMC approximately one month before the first class. Payments are due within 30 days of invoice 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 must take responsibility for arrangement. Course evaluations and transcripts will be held until invoice is paid in full.

REFUND POLICY

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

ATTENDANCE POLICY

With courses taught as intensives, students are expected to attend every class if at all possible. We recognize, however, that some absences are unavoidable. One absence – or not 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. Please communicate with the SVMC Program Coordinator or Director if students request more than one absence, or absence on a different basis. Two or more absences generally lead to an automatic "no- credit," but exceptions can be made by petition to the Director. Students that miss class must turn in additional written work (assigned by the instructor) to substitute for the missed class. This could be an exercise that asks the student to reflect on issues covered by class discussion, a summary of assigned readings, or some combination thereof.

WEATHER CANCELLATION POLICY

An instructor may determine that inclement weather will create hazardous travel. He/she may cancel and reschedule a class. The instructor has the responsibility of notifying the students of both the cancellation and the reschedule time. The instructor will work with SVMC staff to confirm the cancellation and reschedule at the course location. Please contact the SVMC staff with questions.

EMERGENCY CONDITIONS POLICY

In the event that 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; any or all classes will need to be taught via an internet communications platform (as defined by the Director), or the classes will be rescheduled.

BACKGROUND CHECK POLICY FOR INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS

All instructors and students in the ACTS program need to 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 instead 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.

CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPECT IN THE CLASSROOM 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.
- Training for ministry occurs through topic presentation and dialogue among instructors and students.
- We respect and hear one another even though our views may differ.
- We work within the framework of Annual Conference statements.
- Students and instructors who have concern should contact the Director who will communicate with the appropriate district executive.

RECORDING COURSE LECTURES POLICY

Students must ask for and receive permission of the instructor and fellow students prior to recording any portion of 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.

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.

COURSE EVALUATION FROM STUDENTS POLICY

Following the completion of each course, ACTS students are requested to complete an online evaluation of the course. A link to this evaluation will be emailed to each student 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.

(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).

Updated June 2022

GUIDELINES FOR TRANSFER OF COURSEWORK INTO ACTS

Previous training will be evaluated on a case by case basis by the Director of SVMC upon request 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 gradereports.
- For ACTS credit, a grade of “C” or better is required in accredited coursework.⁵
- Coursework from other structured academic settings that are not accredited must be negotiated with the Director of SVMC. The Director of SVMC will consult with the Executive Director of Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership as needed. This negotiation is based on fair assessment of the level of difficulty, the quality of work completed, and the actual hours invested in the courses.⁶
- Courses taken outside of ACTS will, generally, transfer for one unit of credit.⁷
- Courses over 10 years old are not eligible for transfer.⁸
- Courses in Church of the Brethren (history, polity, practice), preaching, worship, and pastoral care are recommended to be taken within the ACTS program, Brethren Academy, or Bethany Theological Seminary.⁹
- 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.¹⁰

Requests for acceptance of previously completed work will be evaluated on a case by case basis by the Director of SVMC. The Executive Director of Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership and the student’s District Executive will be consulted as needed.

⁵ Adapted from the 2018 Training in Ministry Manual, p.42

⁶ Adapted from the 2018 Training in Ministry Manual, p.35

⁷ Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership transfer guidelines

⁸ Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership transfer guidelines

⁹ Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership transfer guidelines

¹⁰ Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership transfer guidelines

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 COURSES TAKEN FOR TRIM CREDIT

Students enrolled in the TRIM program may take ACTS courses for TRIM credit if the following additional components are addressed. The negotiation for additional work rests primarily between the student and the instructor of the course.

1. Student's participation in the class for TRIM credit must be approved by the Coordinator of English Language Ministry Training Programs. The student will initiate a conversation with the Coordinator.
2. The student will pay the full fee for a TRIM course, payable to SVMC.
3. The student will complete a minimum of 500 pages of reading. If the reading assignments assigned to the class do not reach this minimum, the instructor will assign additional reading in order to meet this minimum.
4. The student will have a minimum of 20 contact hours. Most ACTS courses are 15 or 16 contact hours. We don't expect the instructor to have more face-to-face time with the student, therefore, students will complete an additional paper/ project that engages them with the subject matter. The topic of the paper/project will be made with approval of the instructor, who will also evaluate the paper/project.
5. Instructor of the ACTS course must agree to these additional components as well, including assigning additional reading and evaluating additional work.
6. Student evaluations will be forwarded to the Brethren Academy from the SVMC office.

An added note from SVMC:

In addition to the ACTS compensation, SVMC will provide the instructor with \$50 compensation for working with the TRIM student on the additional components.

ACTS COURSES TAKEN FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS (CEUs)

An ACTS course can count for 1.5 CEUs. We are able to offer 0.1 CEU for every contact hour. Therefore, because certificate classes have 15 contact hours, each course can count for 1.5 CEUs. 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 as cost for the course and an additional \$10 CEU documentation fee.

ACTS COURSES TAKEN FOR ORDINATION REQUIREMENTS

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 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.

TEAM TEACHING

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.

SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER

Independent Study Policy and Procedures

- An Independent Study is an option to fulfill a course requirement when extenuating circumstances prevent participation in the regular cycle of courses. Attending the courses in the regular schedule is strongly preferred! The rationale for an independent study must be demonstrated to 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.
- The request for an Independent Study must be made on the form found on the back of this sheet, including all required information, attachments and signatures.
- The proposal must be approved prior to the student beginning the work outlined in the proposal.
- An Independent Study will typically include reading, a written project or other product that demonstrates the student's learning, and schedule meetings with the instructor/supervisor.
- A student may not do more than 2 Independent Studies during their course work through SVMC unless otherwise approved by the Director.
- The fee for the Independent Study will be \$100 more than the current ACTS fee. The instructor will be compensated when the evaluation is received in the SVMC office.
- Procedural Steps for an Independent Study:
 - The student must talk with the Director indicating the need for an IS.
 - The student must complete the form, submit attachments, and secure the signature of the instructor.
 - Upon approval of the IS request, the student may begin the work which needs to be completed in three months unless other approval has been given.
 - SVMC will provide the instructor with evaluation forms and instructions.
 - Upon completion of the IS, within 2 weeks the instructor will complete the evaluation and submit all forms to the SVMC office. 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.

Adapted from a Bethany Theological Seminary document
March 2021

SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER

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 (see below).

Student Name _____ Date _____

Proposed Independent Study Title _____

ACTS credit: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Instructor Name _____

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

Rationale for requesting Independent Study:

___ Missed the course in the regular cycle
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/Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

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

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

- I support the proposal for the Independent Study.

Director Signature: _____ Date: _____

Syllabus Template for ACTS courses

(Instructors, please use this template when creating 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: use measurable wording

For example:

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) in order to receive credit for the class.

Statements and Policies Regarding Classes and Coursework (page 19) will be added by SVMC.

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 Learning Plan. These basic objectives help to meet the Readiness for Ministry criteria. Students will keep the instructor apprised of the theme of their project/paper/plan that will be a major determinant in measuring performance.

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 the completed projects:

- Were the projects completed on time?
- Does the student provide quality work with requirements met?
- 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 the instructors in grading is included on next page of this handbook.

Students should be in frequent contact with the mentor assigned by their district. Mentors can help students evaluate personal progress and consider challenges in the process. Students are encouraged to work to their fullest potential and their work will be monitored on an on-going basis by the Director.

Students are encouraged to move through the cycle of courses as scheduled. Missing a course will create the need to wait until the course is offered in the next cycle. Moving through the program at a steady pace will allow for completion in four years. If a course is missed due to illness or a family emergency, the student, Director, and the District Executive will consult on a possible make-up plan.

ACTS Grading Rubric

	Above Average	Average	Needs	Unsatisfactory/
	(6 pts)	(4 pts)	Improvement	Failed to
			(2 pts.)	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

(This form will be sent to instructors prior to last class. Please TYPE or clearly print information)

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

Student _____

Course Title _____

Instructor _____ Month(s) & Year of Course _____

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 or clearly print information)

SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER

Academy Certified Training Level Course (ACTS)

Instructor Evaluation of Student

(For Instructors to Complete)

Student _____

Course Title _____

Instructor _____ Month(s) & Year of Course _____

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

(This form will be sent to students prior to last class)

SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER

Academy Certified Training Level Course (ACTS)

Student Evaluation of Course

COURSE EVALUATION FROM STUDENTS

Following the completion of each course, ACTS students are requested to complete an online evaluation of the course. A link to this evaluation will be emailed to each student 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.

Was the location suitable for the course?

Did you receive pre-course information in order to be prepared?

What is your evaluation of the instructor? (Teaching ability, connection w/ students, etc.)

What is your evaluation of the material? (content, difficulty, important to your goals)

Did the experience meet your expectations?

What is your opinion as to whether the amount of contact time in this course was sufficient to meet the learning objectives?

What future course suggestions do you have?

Did SVMC provide the necessary resources and support? If not, what do you suggest could be provided?

Other Comments?

(This form will be sent to instructors prior to last class)

SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY MINISTRY CENTER

Academy Certified Training Level Course (ACTS)

Instructor Evaluation of the Course

(For Instructors to Complete)

Course:

Instructor:

Location:

Dates/Times:

Instructor evaluation of courses provides valuable input for the Academy's ongoing process of self-evaluation. It lets us know how well we are fulfilling our educational objectives, the degree to which we are helping students meet the criteria for Readiness for Ministry, and monitors our support of instructors. Your feedback will help us as we plan for this course in the future. Please take a few minutes to complete the form. Please use back side of this sheet if needed.

Were the facilities, time, and location of the class satisfactory? If not, please state why.

Rate the helpfulness of the course objectives in preparing students for ministry. Are the objectives helping the students meet the Readiness for Ministry Criteria?

In reflection of your course, name what worked and what you would do differently if you taught it again.

Did Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center provide the necessary resources and support? If not, what do you suggest could be provided?

Other Comments?

READINESS FOR MINISTRY COMPETENCIES ¹¹

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		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

¹¹ Excerpted from Readiness for Ministry paper in *Ministerial Leadership Notebook*. OM 230.6-230.9

ACTS Student Transcript
Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center

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):			

Supervised Ministry Experience Contract Academy Certified Training System (ACTS)

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:

(Can be typed on another sheet of paper and attached)

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

(Can be typed on another sheet of paper and attached)

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Supervised Ministry Event Form
ACTS
(One event per form)

Student _____

Date of Event _____

Type of Event:

Preaching _____ Worship Leading _____ Pastoral Care _____ Administrative meeting _____

Teaching/Small Group _____

(Description, reflection and response can be typed on another paper and attached to this form)

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

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

Supervisor's Response

Date completed _____

Student Signature _____ Supervisor Signature _____

Completion of Supervised Ministry ACTS

Student Evaluation of Experience

Specifically describe your experience of Supervised Ministry 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? You may type your response on another paper and attach.

Supervisor Evaluation of Experience

As supervisor, specifically describe how you view 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 in which the student should focus for more experience. Describe how this experience was for you as a supervisor. You may type your response on another paper and attach.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

**Completion of Supervised Ministry Experience
ACTS**

Coordinator of Supervised Ministry

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:

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center
Academy Certified Training System
Program Completion Evaluation by Student

Name: _____

District: _____ Years in ACTS: _____

Your assessment of our program provides valuable input on the quality of our training of ministry students and how it can be improved. You may either use this page for your answers to type them on another sheet.

The Ministry Advisory Council of the Church of the Brethren has identified *Readiness for Ministry Competencies* as goals in ministry training. Rate how well you feel your ACTS training addressed the area of competencies.

Readiness for Ministry Competencies	Did not Improve	Improved somewhat	Improved greatly
Familiarity with biblical sources; competency to interpret sources			
Ability to reflect theologically on the history & social context of Christianity			
Awareness of contextual character of particular Christian traditions in North American setting & in global settings of developing Christianity			
Familiarity with & ability to reflect theologically on the heritage of the believers' church tradition			
Ability to articulate faith in language that is theologically informed & culturally persuasive			
Understanding of the congregation informed by theological heritage and learnings from human sciences			
Ability to articulate a vision of ministry congruent with one's sense of vocation; appropriate to context in which vocation will be practiced			
Ability to nurture & reflect critically on spiritual formation of self and others; including ethics for ministry & life in community			
Skills in interpersonal relationships, mediating conflict & building community			
Ability to provide effective leadership in congregational & other church-related ministries			
Ability to integrate biblical & theological understandings with the practice of ministry			

Program Completion Evaluation by Student (continued)

Which courses or experiences were most useful or meaningful to you? Why?

Which were least useful or meaningful? Why?

Please describe how you have grown personally and professionally as a result of your training.

How would you summarize your experience in the ACTS program?