



Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center
Academy Certified Training System (ACTS)

Student Handbook

2018-2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome and Contact Information.....	1
Mission Statement.....	1
ADMISSION PROCEDURES & RECORDS	2
OVERVIEW	3
SPIRITUAL PLAN	4
LEARNING PLAN	7
Program Requirements	7
Brethren Bible Institute Classes	7
Course Cycle	8
Instructors.....	9
Expectations of Student Work in an ACTS Class.....	9
Weather Cancellation Policy.....	9
Policy on Citation Style and Plagiarism	10
Guidelines for Writing Research Papers	10
Policy for Creating a Culture of Respect in the Classroom	11
Policy for Recording Course Lecture	11
Evaluation of Academic Work	12
Readiness for Ministry Competencies	13
Objectives for Specific ACTS Courses.....	14
Biblical Classes	14
Historical/Theological Classes	14
Ministry Skills Classes	15
Experiential Requirements for ACTS.....	16
Conference Experiences	16
Ecumenical, Interfaith, or Cross-Cultural Experience	16
Ministry Formation.....	16
Leadership	16
Objectives	16
Meeting Schedule	18
Attendance Policy	18
Supervised Ministry Experience.....	19
Objectives	19
Experience Design	19
Guidelines for Supervision	20
Contract	21
Event Form	22
Final Evaluation (“Completion of Supervised Ministry”)	23
APPENDICES:	
Appendix 1: Program evaluation	24
Appendix 2: Comparison of Courses and Readiness for Ministry Competencies.....	26
Appendix 3: ACTS Grading Rubric.....	27
Appendix 4: ACTS Checkoff (Transcript)	28

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center Academy Certified Training System (ACTS) Student Handbook

(Updated January 2018)

Welcome to the Academy Certified Training System (ACTS) offered through the Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center. You may be exploring ministry, answering a call to ministry, and/or seeking further education. We will prayerfully support you on this journey. This handbook will be a reference guide for you as you complete ACTS requirements

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 both the graduate and academy levels. 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 ordained 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...

Donna Rhodes, Executive Director
Karen Hodges, Program Coordinator
Ray Flagg, Treasurer

For questions or guidance, please contact us:

Karen Hodges
One Alpha Drive, Elizabethtown PA 17022
Phone: 717-361-1450
Email: SVMC@etown.edu
Website: www.etown.edu/svmc

Donna Rhodes (her home office)
1830 Mifflin St., Huntingdon, PA 16652
Phone: 814-599-3680
Email: dmrhodes.svmc@verizon.net

ADMISSION PROCEDURES AND RECORDS

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. A file copy will be sent to the respective District Executive.

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.

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.

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 2014 Ministerial Leadership paper:

Ordained 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.

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.

The Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center staff, the SVMC Governing Board, and the District Executives will evaluate the program on a regular basis to monitor the educational and administrative progress.

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)

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.

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

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

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

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.⁴

⁴Ibid.

LEARNING PLAN

(Excerpt from “ACTS Plan”)

INTRODUCTION

The ACTS program requires 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 [**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 CHECKOFF, found in Appendix D.

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.

BRETHREN BIBLE INSTITUTE CLASSES

Persons in self-supporting ministry may be granted credit for courses taken at the annual Brethren Bible Institute at Elizabethtown College. The Brethren Bible Institute is supported by the Brethren Revival Fellowship. SVMC will accept up to six courses taken through BBI at fifteen contact hours per course. The students must provide documentation of completed course to the Executive Director of SVMC. The syllabus or course outline from BBI courses will be filed at the SVMC office.

COURSE CYCLE

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

(Offered on a rotating cycle)

(2018-19)

Preaching (MS)

Worship (MS)

Church Vitality and Evangelism (MS)

(2019-20)

Church Leadership and Administration (MS)

History of the Church (H/T)

Introduction to Pastoral Care (MS)

(2020-21)

Introduction to the Old Testament (B)

Church of the Brethren History (H/T)

Teaching and Learning in the Church (MS)

(2021-22)

Introduction to the New Testament (B)

Introduction to Theology (H/T)

Interpreting the Bible (B)

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:

(2018-19)

Church Leadership and Administration (MS)

History of the Church (H/T)

Introduction to Pastoral Care (MS)

Church of the Brethren History (H/T)

(2019-20)

Introduction to the Old Testament (B)

Teaching and Learning in the Church (MS)

Church Vitality and Evangelism (MS)

Interpreting the Bible (B)

(2020-21)

Introduction to New Testament (B)

Introduction to Theology (H/T)

Preaching (MS)

Worship (MS)

INSTRUCTORS

Instructors are chosen for the ACTS courses by the Executive 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 2014 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 course topic
5. MDiv or MA in a related field is preferred, although an undergraduate degree is acceptable if the instructor has completed a ministry training program and has adequate experience in the course topic.
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
7. Work within the SVMC timeline of syllabus submission and course completion.

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 Brethren⁵

- **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.

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.

⁵Information excerpted from District Approved Training Program document in back pocket of *Ministerial Leadership Notebook*.

BRETHREN ACADEMY AND SVMC POLICY ON CITATION STYLE AND PLAGIARISM

Integrity is central to life in community. In the Christian 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. The Church of the Brethren 2008 Annual Conference Ethics in Ministry Paper (2008) Part III 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).

Plagiarism is using the work of other people without giving them credit, whether in written assignments, oral reports and sermons. A glaring example of plagiarism would be submitting an entire essay or preaching a sermon 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.

The consequences for plagiarism will vary according to the extent of the offense. These may range from rewriting the assignment, non-crediting the assignment, or non-crediting the course. The instructor will report any instance of plagiarism to the student and to those supervising the instructional programs. Students who wish to challenge the charge of plagiarism could contact their district executive and/or the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS

The Training in Ministry (TRIM) Notebook – handed out at orientation and available online at the Brethren Academy for Ministerial Leadership website – contains a section on *Guidelines for Writing TRIM Research Papers* (pp. 48- 49). These guidelines were written by Marilyn Lerch in consultation with Dr. Daniel Ulrich, a Bethany Theological Seminary professor, and Craig Gandy, a Brethren Academy instructor.

Additional resources for writing, further examples and appropriate ways to cite, include:

- **Core, Deborah. *The Seminary Student Writes*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.**
This very easy to read book outlines practical guidance for beginning students. Choosing and researching a topic; outlining, writing and editing a paper; and proper formats for citation are addressed.
- **Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Quality Research Papers: for Students of Religion and Theology*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids: 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, Eighth Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.**
This is the definitive resource for advanced research papers and projects. A *Turabian Style: Quick Reference Guide for Students* is available online as a downloadable pdf at the Bethany Theological Seminary website.

This policy statement was adapted from the Policy on Citation Style and Plagiarism for Earlham School of religion and Bethany Theological Seminary and is a joint policy between The Brethren Academy and SVMC. (Affirmed by the Ministry Advisory Council, May 11, 2010; resources for writing updated March 26, 2015)

POLICY FOR CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPECT IN THE CLASSROOM

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 Executive Director who will communicate with the appropriate district executive.

(Approved by SVMC Governing Board, Nov. 9, 2017)

POLICY FOR RECORDING COURSE LECTURES

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.

(Approved by SVMC Governing Board, Nov. 9, 2017)

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC WORK

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 this 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 non-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?*

Because each class represents 20-33% of total contact time, students are expected to attend all classes. The instructor may excuse one absence for unavoidable circumstances. Credit can be given to a student with two absences only on appeal to the Executive Director.

When a student does miss a class, he or she should turn in some form of written work that helps them to digest the material. This could be written reflection on or summary of the readings, answering specific questions posed by the instructors, or another assignment of the instructor's choosing. Instructors are not required to give feedback or closely evaluate work turned in for missed class time.

- *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 for grading is included in Appendix C.

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

Students should be in frequent contact with counselor/mentor assigned by their district. Counselor/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 yearly by the Executive Director.

READINESS FOR MINISTRY COMPETENCIES⁶

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

Please see Appendix B for a chart indicating how our courses meet the Readiness for Ministry competencies.

⁶ Excerpted from Readiness for Ministry paper in *Ministerial Leadership Notebook*. OM 230.6-230.9

OBJECTIVES FOR SPECIFIC 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
- Gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the heritage of the Christian church
- 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 express 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 important of good communication skills for church leaders
- Demonstrate the ability to produce quality newsletter items, correspondence, and other pieces needed in pastoral ministry

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.

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.

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.⁷

⁷ Material excerpted from David Banaszak's writing on ministry formation, 1998 District Conference book, Middle Pennsylvania District.

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 an ordained 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.

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.

Meeting Schedule

Six two-hour meetings per year are suggested although districts can design the model which best fits the district. The Executive 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

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.

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 to 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.⁸

⁸ Adapted from Middle Pennsylvania District's Supervised Ministry document.

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:

Appendix 1

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			

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?

Comparison of Courses and Readiness for Ministry Competencies

Readiness for Ministry Criteria → Course Listings ↓	Familiarity with biblical sources	Ability to reflect theo- logically	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, communi- cation	Effective leadership skills in ministry	Integrate Bible / theology understand ministry
Intro 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		✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

Appendix 3

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

Appendix 4

ACTS Checkoff Sheet (Transcript)

Name:

District:

Congregation:

Call to Ministry Essay:

District Conference Report:

Annual Conference Report:

Ecumenical, Interfaith or Intercultural Experience:

Supervised Ministry:

Ministry Formation:

Biblical (3)

COURSE	DATE	CREDIT	INSTRUCTOR
Old Testament			
New Testament			
Interpreting the Bible			

Historical/Theological (3)

COURSE	DATE	CREDIT	INSTRUCTOR
History of the Church			
Church of the Brethren History			
Theology			

Ministry Skills (6: Church Leadership & Administration required)

COURSE	DATE	CREDIT	INSTRUCTOR
Church Leadership & Administration			
Pastoral Care			
Teaching & Learning in the Church			
Preaching			
Worship			
Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry			
Church Vitality and Evangelism			
Elective (if applicable):			

