

Susquehanna Valley Ministry Center

SUMMARY OF ACTS REQUIREMENTS

Detailed information may be found in the
ACTS Student Handbook: <http://www.etown.edu/programs/svmc/resources.aspx>

Call to Ministry Essay

Write a brief essay (approximately 2 pages, double spaced) on your call to ministry. Describe your experience of realizing you are called to ministry. Reflect on how you are answering your call, how you'd like to serve the church, and how training in the ACTS program will help you fulfill your call to ministry.

Coursework

Complete 12 courses in three areas, as follows:

3 Biblical Courses

- Introduction to the Old Testament
- Introduction to the New Testament
- Interpreting the Bible

3 Historical/Theological Courses

- History of the Church
- Church of the Brethren History
- Introduction to Theology

6 Ministry Skills Courses

- Church Leadership and Administration* **required** due to polity component
- You may select *five* of these seven options:
- Introduction to Pastoral Care
 - Teaching and Learning in the Church
 - Preaching
 - Worship
 - Church Vitality and Evangelism
 - Communication Skills for Pastoral Ministry
 - One elective from outside of ACTS (opt.): usually a TRIM, college, or seminary course. Approval from Executive Director is required.

Students can enter the program at any point. However, please note: because the classes are offered in sequence, one at a time, a student who misses a class may have to wait 3 to 4 years for that class to be offered again. The ACTS Handbook describes ACTS courses, as well as the Course Cycle, showing when each course is offered during the next four years.

Experiential Requirements

MINISTRY FORMATION: Students participate in a Ministry Formation group with other students from their district for the full duration of ACTS coursework. Ministry Formation is organized by the district, which may appoint a Ministry Formation Coordinator or Coordinating Team. With the help of a seasoned facilitator, students in the group share the experiences and challenges they encounter in ministry. By skillful processing, the students can grow in self-awareness, spiritual maturity, and professional skill. Ministry Formation may also include some formal instruction on practical aspects of ministry.

CONFERENCE EXPERIENCES: Attend one District Conference and one Annual Conference and submit a written reflection. A 2 to 3 page written reflection for each conference experience must be submitted to SVMC. Here are some possible reflection questions:

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

Annual Conference takes place each summer for one week in July at a different city each year. Advanced planning is necessary! A list of conference locations is available on the denomination's website: <http://www.brethren.org/ac/recorded-conferences.html>. Since ACTS Certificates are awarded at District Conference, students should attend a district conference before (or, at latest, during) the final year of coursework.

ECUMENICAL, INTERFAITH, OR INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCE:

1. Find the Experience: A wide variety of experiences can be used for this; the main objective is to appreciate and better understand other expressions of Christianity, other faith traditions, or other cultures, while also gaining greater understanding of and appreciation for your own. Some typical experiences that could be used to fulfill this requirement are:

- an ecumenical gathering
- an interfaith dialogue
- a worship service of a different denomination or religion
- a Church of the Brethren gathering focused on cross-cultural ministry
- a class about another faith tradition (if this is a full-length class, it might also count as an elective. If you know of such a class, check with us about that possibility).
- a mission or work trip in a different cultural setting

Other suggestions are welcome, but please contact the SVMC office for approval before proceeding.

2. Arrange to interview a knowledgeable insider after the event (or during, if the event is something like a work camp). If you have questions about why certain things are done, ask (politely, of course)! Try to

understand what is meaningful—and why—to the person you interview and to others in the community.

Here are some possible questions for a worship service:

- How is the worship planned?
- Does worship follow a standard order, is it spontaneous, or some combination of both?
- How is the worship theme or text chosen?
- How is the worship theme or text elaborated? (in visuals? sermon? readings? song? dance? etc.)
- In what ways are lay persons involved in worship leadership or planning?
- What other questions do you, personally, have about the worship service?

3. Write a 2 to 3 page reflection on the experience. Try to avoid judgment. The point is not to agree or disagree, but to understand more deeply. Here are some **possible suggestions and questions** for your reflection paper:

- Start by describing the event through your senses: What do you see? What do you hear? Are there smells that are unusual for you (such as incense)? What goes on between the people? How do the people interact outside of worship services?
- Try to understand why the elements of ritual or belief are meaningful for *this community*.
- Even if—*especially* if—you find much to disagree with, write also about what you could appreciate about the people, culture, or form of worship.
- How does this experience make you think about something in your own tradition in a new way?
- What have you learned that you could apply to your own ministry?

SUPERVISED MINISTRY:

- Student should initiate contact with the district about one year into coursework. The ACTS Supervised Ministry Coordinator or District Executive arranges a placement for the student.
- Supervised Ministry consists of about one year (min. 200 hours) of ministry experience, mutually agreed upon by the supervisor and the student.
- The supervisor should have at least five years of ministry experience, ideally similar to that for which the student is preparing.

Forms for Supervised Ministry: copies of the forms (see below) should be submitted to the ACTS Coordinator of Supervised Ministry, who submits them to SVMC when complete. The student should also retain copies for his or her own records.

1. Supervised ministry contract: The supervisor and student agree upon a plan for the student to gain experience and receive supervisor feedback in the various ministry areas. For example:
 - Preaching
 - Worship leading
 - Pastoral care
 - Teaching and working with small groups
 - Administrative meeting setting

- The supervisor also helps the student to reflect on dynamics of spiritual life and ministry.
 - Both supervisor and student sign the contract and turn it in to the ACTS Supervised Ministry Coordinator or the district office.
 - The ACTS Supervised Ministry Coordinator should review the plan with the student and make any suggestions for additions or changes at this time.
 - The student is recommended to keep a weekly journal and to meet with the supervisor at least once each quarter. During quarterly meetings, the student should report on activities and growth in each of the areas listed above.
2. Event Forms: The student and his or her supervisor fill out an Event Form to document different kinds of ministry experiences and to evaluate the student's work. **This should be done as soon after the event as possible.** In this way, both student and supervisor can base evaluations and suggestions on concrete, detailed information. The student should have 3-4 event forms in each of the five areas of ministry (see above), or about 20 total. You do not need to have an event form for every instance of ministry.
 3. Final Evaluation (Completion of Supervised Ministry): At the conclusion of the ministry placement, the supervisor and student shall meet to discuss the student's overall experience. They should explore the student's strengths and style as a minister and how best to build upon those. They should also explore the student's challenges, what he or she has learned through the experience, and what areas of growth he or she will continue to improve.

COORDINATOR VERIFICATION:

The ACTS Supervised Ministry Coordinator (or District Executive), upon receiving all of the completed forms from the student, fills out a Completion of Supervised Ministry Experience form. Here the Coordinator offers his or her own perspective on the student's experience of supervised ministry and confirms that the work, the reflection, and the supervision meet expected standards.

COMPLETION:

Once SVMC receives all of the forms listed above (contract, event forms, final evaluation, and Coordinator certification), supervised ministry is considered complete. These forms are kept in the student's permanent file. The student's transcript ("ACTS CHECKLIST") is updated so that Supervised Ministry is marked as "received."

Have questions? Need personalized help? We're here for you!

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