



Grace Communion Seminary

Description of Programs

Grace Communion Seminary (GCS) offers graduate-level education in theological, biblical, historical, and pastoral studies. We teach from the perspective of Trinitarian Incarnational theology¹, and our format is designed to suit the needs of part-time students with full-time jobs. All our courses are offered online in a program that is flexible enough to suit the needs of bivocational pastors, and at a depth that is suitable for full-time pastors.

All our courses are on our website, www.gcs.ambassador.edu. Each course includes ten weeks of lectures and assignments, with an additional two weeks to complete final assignments and a 13th week for the instructor to provide feedback to the student. Enrollment in courses takes place in early January, early May, and early September.

Master's Level Courses

Although we offer a Master's degree, all students who are admitted to GCS are initially enrolled in the Master's Level Courses program. This permits you to take courses according to your own interest and need. You do not have to tell us what your ultimate goal is – many students simply want to increase their ministry skills and understanding, and this is a lifelong need of all who serve in the church. GCS wants to help in this by providing guidance, structure, training, and verification of your educational achievements. All our graduate-level courses require the same

¹ Trinitarian Incarnational theology has its roots in the apostle Paul, Athanasius of Alexandria, the Cappadocian Fathers, and more recently, Karl Barth, T.F. Torrance, and many others. Its distinctive teachings include: 1) A stress on the relational nature of the Trinity, 2) that Jesus Christ is fully divine, and 3) that Jesus Christ became fully human, thus enabling humanity to participate in the life of the Trinity. 4) Jesus Christ atoned for all sin and suffered its full consequences, and as a result, 5) God has in Christ reconciled all humanity to himself. 6) Our lives are hidden in Christ; we are united to him. 7) People are exhorted to respond to this reconciliation and participate in the life for which we were all created.

amount of reading and the same assignments, regardless of what the ultimate goal is. Credits earned in the MLC program are automatically transferred into subsequent programs.

If you begin your studies with a specific interest, such as youth ministry or one section of the Bible, you are welcome to take whatever subject interests you most. If you do not have a specific topic in mind, we suggest that you begin with an introductory course in theology, biblical studies, or Christian ministry – the courses numbered TH01, NT01, and CM01. Then take another introductory course – we have arranged our schedule so that one of these introductory courses is taught every semester.

- *TH01 Nature of God and Jesus Christ* provides an introduction to the doctrines of the Christian church. Every spring.
- *NT01 New Testament Background* surveys the historical context in which the New Testament was written, and the methods students may use to study the Bible. Every fall.
- *CM01 Ministerial Leadership* develops concepts of knowing oneself and developing plans for growth in relational skills for service in ministry. Every summer.

Certificate of Theological Studies

After a student has taken TH01 (3 units), NT01 (3 units), and two additional courses (6 units) from any discipline,² and maintained a grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.5, we then automatically mail the student a Certificate of Theological Studies. This is not a degree, but an acknowledgement that a student has achieved their first milestone in our educational programs.

In these initial courses, we seek to prepare graduate students to be conversant in the fundamentals of Trinitarian theology, and to have foundational knowledge of

² *TH05 Doctrine of the Trinity* may be substituted for TH01, but it is not recommended for students who are new to theological studies. Transfer credits and experiential learning do not count toward the CTS.

Scripture as God's word. This Certificate recognizes that students have the following skills and outcomes:

- Able to interpret the Bible, using it as a historical document and as an inspired and authoritative guide for Christian life today.
- Able to analyze issues from a theological perspective, including differences between different Christian traditions.
- Able to synthesize central themes in the nature of God and the Christian proclamation of the word of God.
- Able to evaluate themselves as unique persons made in the image of God, building relationships within the love of God the Father, the grace of the Son Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

The Certificate may be sufficient for some students' educational goals, but we encourage all students who successfully complete the CTS requirements to continue taking courses. With only three more courses, students may reach the next milestone.

Advanced Diploma of Christian Ministry

A student is awarded an Advanced Diploma of Christian Ministry once the required seven courses have been completed. This is not a degree, but a recognition that the student has achieved another noteworthy milestone in ministry training. The requirements for this diploma are: *TH01 Nature of God and Jesus Christ*,³ *NT01 New Testament Background*, one course in church history, *CM01 Ministerial Leadership*, another course in Christian ministry, and two electives – a total of 21 units, with a GPA of at least 2.5. Six units may come from credit transferred in from another institution, or through documented experiential learning.

In these courses, we seek to prepare graduate students for service and leadership in various areas of knowledge, with skills appropriate for their ministry responsibilities. The Diploma is acknowledgement that the student has demonstrated competence in a range of ministry skills:

³ *TH05 Doctrine of the Trinity* may be substituted.

- Interpreting the Bible, using it as a historical document and as an inspired and authoritative guide for Christian life today.
- Analyzing issues from a theological perspective, including differences between different Christian traditions.
- Synthesizing central themes in the nature of God and the Christian proclamation of the word of God.
- Describing the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the history of the church.
- Evaluating one's own spiritual formation, ethics, and leadership skills.
- Evaluating themselves as unique persons made in the image of God, building relationships within the love of God the Father, the grace of the Son Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Completion of the ADCM may be sufficient for some students' educational goals, but we encourage all students who successfully complete the Diploma to continue taking courses. With 21 more units, students may be awarded a Master's degree.

Master of Pastoral Studies

After students have completed the ADCM, they may continue to take courses as they choose. A student will be automatically enrolled in the Master's degree program if the student has met the prerequisites and enrolls in *TM01 Theology of Ministry*.

The Master's degree requires a total of 14 courses (42 units). Courses completed for the CTS and ADCM will be automatically counted toward the Master's degree. Up to six units may come from transfer credit, and an additional six units may come from documented experiential learning.⁴ The requirements are:

- At least three courses (9 units) in theology.
- At least three courses (9 units) in biblical studies.
- At least one course in church history.

⁴ Credit must come from courses relevant to the GCS curriculum, from accredited institutions, and must not be older than eight years prior to enrollment at GCS. See the *Academic Catalog* for details on transfer credits and experiential learning.

- At least four courses in Christian Ministry, including *CM01 Ministerial Leadership* and *CM02 Pastoral Leadership*.
- The capstone course, *TM01 Theology of Ministry*, which requires a summative exam and a thesis.
- Six units of electives.
- A cumulative GPA of 2.7.

Students must be within six units of meeting all MPS requirements in order to register for TM01. All courses must be completed within ten years.⁵ A full-time student, taking nine units each semester, can complete the MPS in only two years.

In the breadth and depth of the courses in the Master's program, we seek to prepare students for the spiritual responsibilities of church leadership.⁶ Our Master's degree recognizes that students have demonstrated the ability to perform the following tasks:

- Interpret the Bible, using it as a historical document and as an inspired and authoritative guide for Christian life today.
- Analyze issues from a theological perspective, including differences between different Christian traditions.
- Synthesize central themes in the nature of God and the Christian proclamation of the word of God.
- Describe the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the history of the church.
- Evaluate one's own spiritual formation, ethics, and leadership skills.
- Develop pastoral skills – improvements in preaching, counseling, teaching, training, mentoring, and leading in service – so that leaders in the church might be better equipped for works of service.

⁵ For most students, it is not possible to complete the MPS with only one course per year. Some bivocational pastors cannot reasonably accommodate more than one course per year into their schedules. We are happy to provide continuing education for such pastors, but we are unable to extend the length of our program beyond ten years.

⁶ We do not ordain, nor do we have any job-placement services. Our program is not designed to get anyone a job, but to do a better job in the roles in which they are already serving.

- Evaluate themselves as unique persons made in the image of God, building relationships within the love of God the Father, the grace of the Son Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Education is a life-long need. Those who serve in the church of Jesus Christ learn and grow not only from their own experiences and studies, but also by continuing to learn from others, often through formal education. Even after a student has been awarded a Master's degree, we believe that GCS can continue to help people grow in their ability to help others. We plan to add additional courses in coming years, and we invite you to grow with us.