



PACIFIC LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Ministry in Context

Manual for Service
in a Congregation

California Lutheran
UNIVERSITY

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PACIFIC LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS), a seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is a faith and learning community dedicated to excellence in theological education for developing leaders for the church in the world.

Our location, dynamic faculty, cutting-edge curriculum, closely-knit community, and membership in the Graduate Theological Union provide a unique setting for engaging issues of Christian faith, discipleship, and the communication of the gospel to a world in need of truly good news.

PLTS is an inclusive community and offers hospitality to all who participate in our programs of study. As disciples of Christ committed to public leadership among God's people in diverse and challenging cultural contexts, we eagerly learn from and welcome one another's diversity, including, but not limited to, theological perspective, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, relationship status, age, physical ability, social and economic status, and sexual orientation.

PLTS Orientating Perspectives

- **Nurturing a life-giving relationship with God** includes embracing and sharing the life-changing power of God's love through Jesus and cultivating spiritual practices and skills for building community that strengthens people spiritually.
- **Intellectual engagement with Scripture, faith traditions, and the world** involves hearing and interacting with theological voices from the margins of power and privilege and putting Christian beliefs and practices into collaborative engagement with other religious traditions and secular disciplines.
- **Faithful social transformation** grounded in the good news of Jesus Christ endeavors to build communities of resistance and hope by integrating the spiritual and political dimensions of life through theological reflection, social analysis, and implementing strategies to work for justice and ecological healing.
- **Learning through a socio-ecological lens** that looks at race, class, gender, and earth to develop competencies for effective community engagement in diverse cultural and political contexts.

OVERVIEW OF THE MINISTRY IN CONTEXT PROGRAM IN A CONGREGATIONAL SETTING

The Ministry in Context (MIC) Program in a Congregational Setting exposes students in the Master of Divinity (MDiv) and Master of Arts in Spirituality & Social Change (MA) programs to the essential, various, and complex areas of ministry in a congregation through time-limited direct observation and hands-on practice. While most students are preparing for ordained ministry as pastors or deacons, some students are not seeking ordination. All students should be allowed to experience leadership in a variety of ministry settings within the congregation. These experiences can, and should, be tailored to each student's vocational and learning goals.

MIC is different from Internship in both time and scope. MIC is **6 hours per week**. MIC focuses on providing opportunities for exposure to the broad and complex areas of ordained ministry and congregational leadership rather than on perfection of skills in those areas. Through the exposure that MIC provides and the reflection sessions with the Supervisor and the Lay Committee, the students will have the opportunity to observe and practice, and also to reflect on their developing sense of God's call to the ordained role or as a lay leader.

The MIC program at PLTS extends over two academic years. The MDiv student is placed in a congregation for two semesters, and the third semester the student is placed in a non-profit agency. The MA student typically does one semester of congregational placement, in their 2nd semester of MIC, but may do two semesters in a congregation, depending on vocational goals.

Foci of Ministry in Context in a Congregational Setting

During the Student's time in a congregation, we hope that they will have the opportunity to delve a little more deeply into the areas where they have identified specific learning goals, while also getting a general understanding of the variety of the aspects of congregational life. Therefore, the student and Supervisor should be in conversation early in the semester to discuss the student's self-identified learning goals and how those might be accomplished in this particular congregation.

Supervision and Reflection

Throughout the student's involvement with the congregation, time for supervision and reflection are vital. To aid in this process, we ask for the following commitments from the Supervisor and Lay Committee for reflection sessions.

- Supervisor and student meeting at least **twice per month**.
- Lay Committee and student meet at least **every month**.

At the heart of MIC is the **action-reflection** model of learning. Students plan, prepare, practice, and perform some activity (e.g., leading the prayers, reading lessons, chanting, teaching a class). After the student completes the activity, there is dedicated time for self-reflection and reflective conversations about the activity and the preparation process. The discussion may include questions such as:

- What went well?
- Where were the challenges or difficulties?
- What needed more attention in the preparation?
- What additional resources were needed?
- What feelings did the student have during the activity and after?
- What theological principles did the activity intersect with, and what theological questions did the activity raise?
- How did this experience impact the student's growing diaconal, pastoral, or leadership identity?
- What was surprising? What was fun? What was uncomfortable?
- What would the student do differently next time?

The reflection sessions with the Supervisor and the Lay Committee are also times for the student to continue to discern their sense of call and integrate their academic and contextual education learnings.

Allocation of Time

In general, the focus of the MIC in a Congregational Setting is on the Sunday morning experience. The hope is that the student will gain exposure to and experience various activities and roles – including worship leadership, Christian faith formation for all ages, fellowship, and committee meetings. The specific areas of focus for each semester should be a topic of conversation between the student and Supervisor and guided by the student's vocational and learning goals.

If the student has a significant leadership role, preparation time during the preceding week(s) should be included in the six hours per week.

Note: Travel time to and from the parish is not to be included in the hours counted toward the completion of the Ministry in Context requirement.

End of Semester Reflection

At the end of each semester, the Supervisor the Lay Committee and the Student complete reflection forms, discuss them with each other, and submit them to the Office of Contextual Education. Forms are on the PLTS Website by clicking [here](#); or at plts.edu>programs>contextual education>ministry in context>ministry in context forms (make sure to click the contextual education tab).

General Learning Goals of Ministry in Context in a Congregation

- Expose the student to the varied areas of congregationally based ministry
- Integrate academic disciplines with the practice of ministry
- Facilitate understanding of congregational and community dynamics
- Offer time for the student to utilize the Supervisor as a mentor

To accomplish these goals, the Supervisor and the Lay Committee must be available and willing to mentor and support the student. This partnership is vital for the development of the student. The student is expected to be open to the learning process and draw on these partners for feedback and support.

The Contextual Education Office is always available to supervisors, lay committees, and students to assist in implementing the Ministry in Context Program. The Contextual Education Office appreciates the opportunity to be in conversation about concerns or joys that arise.

In cases of conflict or other serious issues with students and supervisors, the Contextual Education Office should be informed as soon as possible. While we will encourage the parties involved to bring about resolution, the Director of Contextual Education is available to all parties for conversation and involvement in the discussions and resolution as may be deemed helpful.

Financial Obligations

The congregation is expected to reimburse the student for congregational business mileage and commuting mileage (including tolls) or public transportation costs to and from their home. The reimbursement rate should be the same as it is for staff members of the congregation. No other financial compensation is expected.

Seminary and the Ministry in Context experience can bring times of economic hardship. Therefore, while students are encouraged to share about their life experience and the fullness of their emotions with the congregation, they should be mindful of doing so in a manner that does not encourage, expect, or invite the congregation, or individual congregation members to step up and help them financially.

Congregations may decide to offer financial support through difficult times, but students should not solicit or seek out such help intentionally. Should the congregation desire to support the student financially, the Director of Contextual Education student should be consulted before any plans are implemented. A student should never take a loan, advance, or credit from any member of the community in which they are serving. In the event of financial hardship, students should consult with financial aid personnel at California Lutheran University. Should supervisors notice such behaviors on the student's part, they should contact the Director of Contextual Education to discuss appropriate steps for addressing the issue.

The Supervisor

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a Supervisor in the PLTS Ministry in Context program. We value you as a partner in the education and formation of leaders in the church and the world. The Office of Contextual Education is here for you as a resource – available for conversation, problem-solving, and aiding in whatever ways we can. You only need to ask.

Online orientation sessions are offered in August and January. Your attendance is highly encouraged. In addition to sharing program goals and information, there will be the opportunity for supervisors to be in conversation with one another.

Expectations of Supervisors include:

1. Attend orientation and training session.
2. Be willing to work with the students as they grow personally, theologically, and in their leadership, diaconal, or pastoral identity.
3. Provide learning and leadership opportunities in the varied aspects of worship and congregational life.
4. Meet with the student at least twice a month for reflection sessions.
5. Supervise the learning experiences and offer feedback to the student.
6. Remain focused on the student's role as a learner. The student is expected to be actively involved with the parish a maximum of 6 hours per week, excluding travel time to/from home.
7. Establish a Ministry in Context Lay Committee (3-4 members) and orient the committee to its responsibilities before the student's arrival. This manual should be shared with them, as well as the link to a short 'training' video, which can be found on the Ministry in Context page of the PLTS website.
8. Complete end-of-semester reflection forms on time as requested by the Seminary.
9. Contact the Contextual Education Office at PLTS if you have questions or concerns.

These expectations outline the commitment made by the Supervisor to PLTS and the student. Using this outline, the Supervisor will provide the student the exposure to parish life that the Ministry in Context program is designed to do.

Professors at the seminary may give assignments to the students to complete at the Ministry in Context site. If this occurs, the student will coordinate with the Supervisor to complete the required project.

The Lay Committee

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a member of the Ministry in Context Lay Committee. Your partnership in the education and formation of leaders is appreciated and vital. You are essential participants in the reflection process for the student serving at your congregation. Please review the information on the action-reflection model of learning on page 2.

The tenor and demeanor of the meetings are just as essential as the content of the discussion. You are vital partners in the student learning how to ask for and receive feedback and engage in meaningful reflection about their experiences. While constructive criticism is key to the process, focusing the conversation on the student's learning goals will help the conversation stay on helpful terms. Conversely, providing only 'cheerleading' and focusing solely on strengths will not facilitate the student's growth. The ideal conversation is a balance between strengths and areas of development.

A key goal of the MIC program is the development of the student's diaconal, pastoral, or leadership identity. Therefore, in addition to specific skills, conversation can include how the experiences the student is having in your community are affecting their sense of call and their understanding of their future vocation.

Gifts and Skills of Lay Committee Members

Ideally, the lay committee members would be:

- faithful in worship attendance
- willing to pray for the student regularly and to show their care and support
- capable of giving articulate, honest, constructive feedback regarding the student's skills
- eager to share experiences and insights about their own ministry in daily life
- willing to set aside the necessary time for committee meetings (monthly)
- involved in and knowledgeable about ministries with which the congregation is involved or can develop

Expectations of the Lay Committee

1. Support the student as a learner, not a staff member.
2. Meet with the student monthly for feedback, reflection, and support.
3. Help the student to work on their boundaries, so they do not become entangled in congregational conflicts.
4. Support the learning experiences of the student through encouragement, support, and attendance.
5. Arrange for (or facilitate) the payment of travel expenses to the student. These would include mileage and tolls or public transportation fees.
6. Complete the end-of-semester reflection forms on time, in conversation with the Supervisor and student.

Possible topics for discussion during Lay Committee meetings

- Share stories about your faith life
- Discuss what opportunities for learning you feel this congregation can give
- Talk about the congregation's history and how that influences the congregation today
- How does the congregation express its denominational identity?
- Review the student's stated learning goals for the semester
- Review the student's learning and performance in the congregation's ministry
- Discuss classroom learning and how the student applies that to congregational ministry
- Discuss ministry beyond the congregation
- Review, discuss and sign the Ministry in Context Reflection forms

The Student

Welcome to Ministry in Context in a Congregational Setting. Please review the entire manual to understand the program's entirety and what is being asked of the Supervisor and Lay Committee.

If you have any concerns or if conflicts arise, please contact the Director of Contextual Education as soon as possible. The sooner issues can be addressed, the better.

Expectations of the Student

1. Spend six hours per week on Ministry in Context commitments. These hours include preparation time and time spent at the site (worship, education, and fellowship time included) or off-site in ministry related to the congregation. They exclude travel time to and from home.
2. Identify learning goals with the Supervisor within the first month
3. Remain focused on the role of learner
4. Refuse involvement with internal conflicts of the congregation
5. Meet with the Lay Committee chair to set agendas for meetings
6. Meet monthly with the Lay Committee
7. Meet at least twice monthly with the Supervisor
8. Submit mileage reimbursement requests to the Lay Committee or the appropriate person identified by the congregation
9. Complete the Student reflection forms on time, and facilitate the completion and submission of the Supervisor and Lay Committee forms

Installation Services for Ministry in Context Students

The following services are offered as suggestions only. The congregation is welcome to design its own service for introducing and welcoming the Ministry in Context student.

Service #1

Chair of Lay Committee: I present (NAME), who will be serving as a Ministry in Context Student from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary at (NAME OF CHURCH).

Pastor: Jesus, who came among us as a servant, calls us to faith and a life of loving service to our neighbor. You come to us as one who has been called to be among this community of the faithful as a student, as one who will test and examine *her/him/themself* in relation to this body of Christ, to study and risk *her/him/themself* in developing an openness to the leading of the Spirit, to receive and welcome the wisdom and faithfulness of members of this congregation, so that as you grow in your life's work, the Spirit will shape you according to God's will.

From St. Paul's letter to Timothy:

As one dedicated to God, strive to be a person of integrity and piety, filled with faith and love, patience and gentleness. Run the great race of faith. Take firm hold of the everlasting life to which you were called when, in the presence of many witnesses, you made your good profession of faith. (1 Timothy 6:11-12, *The Inclusive Bible*)

Will you assume this position in the confidence that God has led you to a place here among us?

Student: I will, and I ask God to help me.

Pastor: Will you carry out the responsibilities of this position in accordance with the teachings and practice of the Lutheran Church?

Student: I will, and I ask God to help me.

Pastor: Will you be diligent in your study of the Holy Scripture and faithful in your use of the means of grace and prayer?

Student: I will, and I ask God to help me.

Pastor: Will you trust in God's care, seek to grow in love for those among whom you learn, strive for excellence in your skills, and adorn the Gospel of God with a godly life?

Student: I will, and I ask God to help me.

Pastor: (NAME), I install you as the Ministry in Context Student of (NAME OF CHURCH), in the name of the Father and of the Son **z** and of the Holy Spirit.

Student: Amen.

Pastor: Almighty God, who has given you the will to do these things, graciously give you the strength and compassion to do them. Amen.

The candidate may kneel.

Pastor: Gracious God, you called disciples through the compelling Word of your Beloved Child, Jesus, and provided for them abundant opportunity to learn and develop and deepen in the new life of the Realm which your Son embodied. So now grant to (NAME) wisdom to learn, courage to risk, strength to act, humility to grow, and mercy to lay hold of your grace; through your Beloved Child, Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

May almighty God, our heavenly Father, guide, bless and keep you faithful in the way to which you have been called. **Amen**

The liturgy continues with the prayers

Service #2

Pastor: Dear Christian friends: Baptized into the priesthood of Christ, we all are called to offer ourselves in thanksgiving for what God has done for us. It is our privilege to recognize and support those who are engaged in this congregation's work, especially today (NAME), who will serve with us and among us as a Ministry in Context student. The Ministry in Context experience, whereby a student devotes six hours per week to learning and service in a congregation, is a required element in the Master of Divinity program at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

(NAME), having declared your desire to learn and serve within this congregation, will you follow Christ's example of humble service?

Student: Yes, with God's help.

Pastor: Let us pray...Gracious God, source of all wisdom, whose Spirit empowers our service, accompany and bless (NAME) in *her/his/their* listening, learning, questioning, and serving. May *she/he/they* grow in your love and *her/his/their* understanding of the role of *Pastor/Deacon/Congregational Leader*. Give *her/him/them* health and strength to do faithfully all that you ask of *her/him/them*; through Jesus the Christ.

Congregation: Amen.

Pastor: And you, people of God, will you support (NAME)? Will you pray for *her/him/them*, encourage and speak well of *her/him/them*? Will you offer *her/him/them* your gifts and your guidance so that *she/he/they* might be and become a full member of this community of faith and be strengthened for *her/his/their* work?

Congregation: We will.

Pastor: Let us pray...For all who offer themselves in your name, we give thanks, O God. Grant the joy of service and the promise of your constant care and guidance. Help us all to be willing servants and thankful recipients of ministry, that your name be glorified, your people live in peace, and your will be done; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Congregation: Amen.

Prayers for Ministry in Context Students

As student begins serving:

Pastor: Look with love, O God, upon your servant (NAME), as *she/he/they* begin(s) this term of learning in our ministry. Let it be for *her/him/them* a time of learning even as it is for us an opportunity to partner with Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in the preparation of leaders.

As *she/he/they* share(s) *her/his/their* time and skill and faith with us, move us to prayers of blessing for *her/his/their* work. Lead us to graciously receive *her/his/their* ministry so that together we might grow in your grace and in our servant calling. This we pray through Jesus the Christ.

Congregation: Amen.

As the student completes service:

Pastor: Gracious Shepherd, we bless you for the ministry of your servant, (NAME), and for all that *she/he/they* has/have learned and accomplished in our congregation. We bless you for what we have learned and experienced together. Your Word has been fruitful, your mercy abundant, and so we offer you our thanks and our praise.

Continue to strengthen (NAME) by your Holy Spirit for faithful living and future ministry and leadership. May what *she/he/they* has/have learned and experienced here make *her/him/them* confident and eager for service in your church. Bless *her/him/them* and give *her/him/them* joy in what is past and hope for what is yet to be. All this, we pray through our Savior Jesus Christ.

Congregation: Amen.