

Non-credit ***Spiritual Formation*** degree requirement

MDiv, MAML, MA, and MAPL programs

United Lutheran Seminary

All first-degree students must fulfill the *Spiritual Formation* requirement. It is recommended that students enter into a spiritual practice(s) of their choice in their first semester of studies.

*According to the New Testament, spiritual formation is the process of being shaped in the likeness of Christ by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, for the transformation of the world. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, molding it into the Body of Christ. **We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain disciplines or practices that enable us to become more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch.** Classical spiritual practices include Sabbath-keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, scripture meditation, hospitality, soul friendship, contemplative silence, making a retreat, and numerous other disciplines and prayer-forms. Transformed persons are leaven for transforming the world.*

*It is critical to remember that spiritual formation is not a program of self-reformation. **Spiritual formation begins with God, is sustained by God, and ends in God.** As Dr. Luther says in his Small Catechism, "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Church on earth...(Explanation to the Third Article of the Creed, 1529).*

*Our individual spiritual practice springs from weekly **Eucharistic worship**, and always leads us back to the Table. And, **as seminarians, let us not forget that theological education is spiritual formation, and spiritual formation is theological education.***

The ULS requirement calls for 32 hours of spiritual practice. There is a variety of options for accumulating these hours and satisfying the requirement, which is overseen by the Dean's Office (jsebastian@uls.edu).

The 32 contact hours may include spiritual practices **in solitude and/or in small groups.** Students have great latitude in choosing practices, disciplines and prayer-forms that fit both their personality type and spiritual needs. **Remember, the requirement's aim is to encourage and facilitate our own deepening intimacy with God in a prayerful life.** Developing a daily "habit" of prayer is key.

There are no forms to be filled out! You are asked to maintain a simple **spiritual formation "log"** of your own design--a dated record listing your various activities and times. **Once the 32 hours have been gradually accumulated, then a copy of the log is to be submitted to Dean Sebastian.** Any questions along the way may be directed to him.

Your spiritual practices **options** include:

- + Time with a **spiritual director** in a relationship of trust and discernment. (NOTE: Students may *not* give or receive spiritual direction from fellow students for credit.)
- + **Sabbath retreats** made with groups or in solitude. Monastic retreats are especially encouraged. (NOTE: *Retreats organized for groups should be discussed beforehand with Dean Sebastian.* Even some church-sponsored “retreats” are not retreats at all! So-called “retreats” that really are tightly structured workshops, planning meetings, conferences, educational programs, and the like are evidence of the church’s loss of the classical understanding of “making a retreat” and will *not* be accepted.)
- + Completion of **an approved course** offered by ULS or a partner seminary. Some approved courses to date are listed below. (If you find another non-ULS course that you would like to have considered, then please contact the Dean.)

Fall semester 2020

SPFM 111, Spiritual Formation: The First and Greatest Commandment
TRS-650C, WTC, Catholic University, Eastern Spirituality
FDSM-213, WTC, Howard University, Spiritual Formation and Ministry Leadership

Spring semester 2021

SPFM 114 RG Fragments of the Face of God: Transformative Learning & the Lives of the Saints
PRAX 428 OL Environment, Faith, and Praxis

- + **Lectio Divina** (praying with scripture) is highly encouraged. It is the one prayer-form fostered in all traditions of Christian spirituality.
- + **Online resources** for spiritual practice, such as the eight-week discernment program of **Martha’s House** (www.marthas-house.org), which is free, self-paced and flexible.
- + Any number of **classical and/or unconventional spiritual practices** may be considered, such as Centering Prayer, spiritual journaling, Labyrinth Prayer, movement prayer, art journaling, hymn writing, praying the catechism, Examen of Consciousness, Orthodox iconography, works of mercy for people or animals, scripture memorization, the Jesus Prayer, fasting, breath prayer, praying with beads, spiritual or devotional reading, praying the Psalter, the Daily Offices, designing a personal *Rule* of Life for yourself, making a pilgrimage to an important Christian site, and more.

Finally, here are some exceptional resources that may be useful to you as you discern the spiritual discipline to which the Holy Spirit is calling you now.

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life by Marjorie J. Thompson
Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth by Richard J. Foster
Soul Types: Matching Your Personality and Spiritual Path by Sandra Hirsh and Jane Kise