

The Congregational Requirement

The purpose of Lexington Theological Seminary is to be a servant of the church preparing men and women for ministry in congregations through innovative instruction, flexible curriculum, congregational experience and compassionate engagement with the needs of society. The faculty, trustees and ministry partners of LTS understand ministry to be both a divine calling and a learned profession. For generations, the Seminary has partnered with congregations in forming students for ministry. The Seminary's curriculum recognizes the congregation as the primary context where students integrate what they have learned in courses, their growing familiarity with and competence in the skills of ministry, and the practical wisdom about ministry generated by their participation in the life of the congregation. In turn, this integration in the congregational setting contributes to their learning in courses. Therefore, all M.Div. students at LTS are required to engage in an accountable work role in a congregation through all levels of the M.Div. program when they are enrolled in courses.

The congregational requirement is designed to support the **intellectual, practical, and spiritual goals** of the M.Div. curriculum. For each course in the M.Div. curriculum, the instructor has identified goals of all three types and has included at least one assignment to be completed within the context of the student's congregation that will help meet one or more of these goals. Students also complete competency exams and a final capstone project, all of which involve projects carried out in the congregation. In short, students are called to live what they are learning in the classroom and congregations are called to serve as learning contexts for M.Div. courses. In addition, students are invited (though not required) to work with a Ministry Support Committee, a small group of congregation members that gathers regularly for support, feedback, and reflection.

For the congregational requirement, students should be exposed to the basic, various, and complex areas of ministry, including but not limited to worship, administration, education, pastoral care, mission, leadership, and public ministry. Involvement in all these areas of congregational life will ensure that they can complete congregational course assignments, competency exams, and capstone project. By staying in a congregation throughout all three levels of coursework in the M.Div. curriculum, students will be challenged to practice ministry skills that are new to them as well as to change or hone those that are familiar. During these years, students are expected to grow toward competency in response to critical feedback and self-reflection.

For Students

Your relationship with a congregation is an essential and required part of your seminary education and is designed to help you develop as a minister in several ways. Students find that their ongoing ministry work in a congregation (whether paid or volunteer) causes them to focus on their personal character, their vocation, their spiritual growth, and their ministerial skills.

Expectations of the Student

- Identify the congregation that will serve as the context for your congregational requirement. You will be best served by identifying your congregation upon application to LTS, and if not then, prior to enrolling in courses. However, if necessary you will be granted a “grace period” of three credit hours during which you may enroll in courses without a congregational context. You will be unable to complete the congregational assignments of those courses but will be given alternative assignments.
- Complete the **Congregation Information Form** and return by email to Barbara Blodgett, Coordinator (bbodgett@lextheo.edu). Copy the person to whom you are accountable at your congregation. Submit the form upon enrollment in courses and if not then, by the time you have completed three credit hours of coursework.
- Recruit a Ministry Support Committee. A MSC is a group of 3-5 congregation members. They can meet with you regularly (e.g. quarterly) for support, feedback, and reflection on your experiences and can also be useful when you have to convene a group of laypersons for a project related to a congregational course assignment. The group you recruit should reflect the diversity of the congregation and represent a cross-section of it. A MSC is strongly suggested but not required.
- Work with your Pastor and Congregation on arranging a **Liturgy of Commitment**.
- Spend a minimum of 10 hours per week at your congregation, seeking out and involving yourself in as wide a breadth of ministry experiences as appropriate and as time allows, and completing your congregational course assignments.
- Request resources necessary and sufficient for you to complete your ministry work (e.g., a job description, lines of accountability, workspace, budget).
- Meet quarterly, or often as necessary and desired, with your Ministry Support Committee if you have one. Solicit their support, feedback, and reflection.

- Each year that you are enrolled in the M.Div. program, update and submit the **Congregation Information Form** by July 15 to Barbara Blodgett, Coordinator. You must continue to meet the congregational requirement as long as you are enrolled in the M.Div. program; therefore, if you fail to submit the Congregation Information Form annually by July 15, you will not be allowed to take further courses at LTS until the form has been submitted.
- Remain focused on your role as a learner and student minister in training. Solicit constructive feedback on your work from the pastor who supervises you, your MSC, and others in your congregation.
- Take care not to create unnecessary problems within your congregation and to handle conflicts appropriately. If a problem arises such that your congregation is unable or unwilling to partner effectively with the Seminary in your education, do not hesitate to contact Barbara Blodgett, the Coordinator.
- Should your accountable work role in your congregation come to an end (for any reason), you will inform the Coordinator and any professors whose courses you are taking. You will establish a relationship with a new congregation. You must continue to meet the congregational requirement as long as you are enrolled in the M.Div. program and therefore should be in a new congregation as soon as possible. If necessary, you will be granted a “grace period” of three credit hours during which you may continue to enroll in courses without a congregation. You will be unable to complete the congregational assignments of those courses but will be given alternative assignments. If you still do not have an accountable work role in a congregation by the end of the grace period, you will not be allowed to take further courses at LTS until you have one. You will be allowed only one grace period, beyond any initial grace period, during the course of your M.Div. program.

Congregations

A congregation's relationship with a student is an invitation to participate in the growth and development of a person called to ministry. At the same time, congregations that nurture and teach students often discover themselves reflecting not just on their students but also on their own identity and growth as a congregation, on the vocation of ministry more broadly, and on the challenges facing ministers who would lead congregations into a new era.

Becoming a member of a Ministry Support Committee is an invitation to journey with a student as he or she learns the many facets of congregational life; to offer constructive feedback as she or he tests out new skills and concepts; to help the student complete congregational course assignments, competencies, and capstones; and to provide care and support for a student during several years of education. Committee members often discover that working with a student gives them an opportunity to learn about themselves, their own congregation, and about theological studies and ministry today.

Expectations of a Congregation

- Provide a minimum of 10 hours a week of ministry experience for your student. Identify someone to whom the student is accountable.

- Provide opportunities for your student to complete his or her congregational course assignments. These might include, e.g., preaching a sermon, teaching a lesson, designing a program, conducting a congregational analysis, or interviewing members about a course topic or project.

- Make a formal decision to enter a partnership with the Seminary.

- Approve the **Congregation Information Form**. (It is your student's responsibility to submit it to the Coordinator annually by July 15.)

- Arrange for a **Liturgy of Commitment** to welcome and/or install your student.

- (if applicable) Help your student who is already a member or staff in your congregation transition into his or her new role as a student minister in training.

- Consider ways to connect your student to a breadth of ministry experience so as to undergird his or her study in the M.Div. program.

- Provide resources necessary and sufficient for your student to complete his or her work (e.g., a job description, lines of accountability, workspace, budget).

- (strongly suggested but not required) Provide a Ministry Support Committee (MSC). A MSC is a group of 3-5 congregation members who meet with the student regularly for support, feedback, and reflection and who become point persons when the student is completing congregational course assignments. Members of the MSC may, e.g., gather folks to a presentation being given by the student, offer practical assistance in designing and implementing projects, participate in the projects, and complete evaluation forms of the student's work for professors at the Seminary. Ideally, the

MSC should reflect the diversity of the congregation and represent a cross-section of it.

- Facilitate your student's understanding of your congregation and its dynamics.
- Expose the student to ministries beyond the congregation (e.g. ecumenical and interfaith partnerships, prison ministries, community organizing, etc.), as needed for congregational course assignments and as time allows.
- If a problem arises such that your congregation is unable or unwilling to partner effectively with the Seminary in your student's education, do not hesitate to contact Barbara Blodgett, the Coordinator. Should your student's accountable work role in your congregation come to an end (for any reason), please notify the Coordinator as soon as possible. Your student will have to find a new congregation to fulfill the requirement so long as he or she is enrolled in the M.Div. program. A grace period of only three credit hours is allowed during which the student may enroll in courses without having a congregation.

Expectations of the Pastor who will supervise the student (when the student does not serve as the solo pastor)

- Assist your congregation in arranging for a **Liturgy of Commitment** to welcome and/or install your student.
- Help select a Ministry Support Committee, if the student will have one (see above).
- Guide and support your student as he or she grows intellectually, practically, and spiritually.
- Provide constructive feedback on your student's work and help him or her learn to solicit it from you.
- Assist the congregation in providing opportunities for the student to complete congregational course assignments throughout the breadth of congregational life.