

Alternative Ministerial Education Program

Great Rivers Region

Background

The recommended ABCUSA standards for ordination include three “tracks” for ministerial education and preparation. Track I is the “typical” pattern of BA plus Master of Divinity. Track II (“experience”) is a very atypical, and rarely used, pattern of experiential equivalence (GRR has never found this workable and has eliminated it). Track III allows for a regionally-recognized educational program.

The Regional Licensure and Ordination Program (RLO) was already 10 years old when it became the vehicle for Track III. RLO grew out of older certified lay ministry (CLM) programs. In that program, the Region maintained and distributed ten (10) video-tape based self-instructional courses. Some took advantage of this alternative, but generally it did not meet the needs of most – in over 15 years of use only two completed the course of study. It was time to reevaluate and design a new program for Track III. The Committee on Ministerial Standing and Ordination reviewed the options, shared information and solicited responses from staff, and proposed revisions to the Regional Ministry Board. The new program was adopted by the Regional Ministry Board in 2004

Purpose

The purpose of the Alternative Ministerial Education (AME) program is to provide an alternative, non-traditional education for ministers. It is anticipated that these will be primarily pastors serving “family” or “pastoral” size churches and/or bivocational pastors. This avenue of preparation is referred to as “Track III” in the Standards. However, the completion of the courses does not guarantee ordination or placement as a pastor.

Content (Curriculum)

A total of ten (10) courses are required. The following five (5) core courses are expected to be equivalent to at least 2 college credit hours:

1. New Testament Survey
2. Old Testament Survey
3. Introduction to Christian Theology
4. Preaching
5. Principles of Pastoral Leadership

These courses may be taken at accredited community colleges, Bible colleges, or seminaries either by traditional classes or on-line self-study courses. *This is the major innovation of this program.*

GRR Courses—GRR maintains only three (3) courses:

6. Practice of Congregational Ministry. *This course consists of directed readings and coached practice by an experienced pastor. An experienced mentor will be assigned by the Dean of the AME. This very practical course will cover such topics as: planning and leading worship, baptism, Lord's Supper, weddings, funerals, hospital visitation, etc.*
7. ABC History and Polity. *This is at several ABC seminaries and colleges (both live and online) and is offered occasionally as a classroom experience by the Region.*
8. Professional Boundaries. *This is available at ABC seminaries. In addition, the Region occasionally offers a one-day course using the Sacred Trust curriculum from Faith Institute.*

Electives—Two (2) courses relating to preparation for your specific ministry. These could be on such topics as Worship, Evangelism, Discipleship Training, Biblical Studies or Church Growth. These may be accredited courses from colleges or seminaries, or may be “customized” courses tied in with conferences at Green Lake or other approved training. These should be pre-approved by the AME Dean.

The Process

1. Enrollment in the AME begins with a conversation between the church, the candidate and the Area Minister.
2. The church must endorse the candidate for admission to the program. The church will consider evidence for a call to ministry, the journey of faith, Christian character, leadership experience, and understand why ministerial training is being sought.
3. Send in Application Form to the AME Dean. Upon approval, the candidate is free to pursue courses in any order which they choose. Normal progress is expected to be two or three courses per year with completion of the program in four years. Candidates may apply to the Dean for a one-time extension if necessary.
4. While licensing is entirely up to the church, we recommend that candidates should not be considered for licensure until the completion of ABC History and Polity, Professional Boundaries, and the Practice of Congregational Ministries courses.
5. When all course work has been completed, the Dean will issue a certificate of completion.
6. The church may take action to recommend the candidate for a recognized ordination. If so, the candidate enters the usual process for ordination which is outlined in the standards and procedures adopted by the Regional Ministry Board.