

A DEFINITION OF PUBLIC CHURCH AND THE PUBLICS OF THE ELCA

The mission of LSTC is to form visionary leaders to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. Our vision is to build up the Body of Christ and work for a world of peace and justice that cares for the whole creation. LSTC is Christ-centered, responsive to its context, attentive to diversity, and is committed to excellence.

“Preparing Leaders for a Public Church” is the educational mission of the M.Div., MAM and MA degree programs at LSTC. With Public Church as its programs’ organizing principle, the school aims to equip students to address as their initial “publics” the worshipping communities and congregations of the ELCA and other denominations and ecumenical communities represented. Through these and beyond these, students are trained to engage other publics such as urban and rural communities, incarcerated communities, Black communities, Latinx communities, and LGBTQIA+ communities, among others. In preparing leaders for a public church, we seek to work in partnership with secular non-governmental organizations, community not-for-profits, and other religious traditions and networks, bringing our distinct gifts towards a shared desire for the flourishing of humanity and creation. Lutheran approaches consider gathering around Word and Sacrament to be a profoundly public act, rigorously engaged with multiple other publics.

The notion of Public Church has historical roots in Jesus’ public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing as well as the organizing of the ekklesia in the tradition of the New Testament. It further builds upon the traditions, sources, and experience of the ecumenical councils of the early church. LSTC draws from this history and in addition brings the theological commitments of reforming and confessional Lutheranism. Public Church, therefore, is grounded in the convictions of the Protestant Reformation and continues Luther’s legacy of challenging corruption, naming sin, living out of a theology of grace, sharing the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and moving beyond the public of the church into multiple, intersecting publics. Consonant with the seminary’s heritage in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, LSTC sees its vision aligning with the third strategic goal from the ELCA Church Council and Conference of Bishops: to give priority to the action area of being an “outwardly focused church” while continuing to be actively engaged in contemporary theological concerns and emerging challenges.

Moving within and beyond the sacramental public of the church, LSTC aims to equip its students to identify, analyze, and respond to the particular confluence of publics in which they live in their context. LSTC seeks to form attentive and

contextually engaged ministerial leaders for a Public Church by creatively employing the skills of community building (including conflict resolution, community organizing, ethnography, contextually informed biblical exegesis, historical understanding, interfaith competency, and the arts of ministry) in ways that best serve the particular communities to which they are called. As LSTC continues to develop its curriculum and navigate its life together, the school recognizes that training leaders for a Public Church is necessarily dynamic and is ever mindful of particular congregations and communities formed out of particular histories.

The educational mission of training leaders for a Public Church connects directly to the competencies of Spiritual Formation, Religious Heritage (Scripture and History/Theology), Ministerial Arts, and Cultural Context (competencies outlined in Appendix 1). Knowledge, skills, and capacity in these competency areas are essential for ordained, rostered, and lay leaders charged with gathering and building up the Body of Christ. In rewriting the rubrics for these competencies for the new Public Church curriculum, there was an intentional focus on the formation of pastoral leaders with the spiritual, interpersonal, and intercultural capacity to empower their congregations to be bold witnesses of Christ's good news and to face outward toward the broader publics in which they are located. (Self-study, p. 91; Appendix 2, Table A.)

To see the entire ATS Assessment Report:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/16su6SxKamdtjFxeKbH5iPs-dRwhIRSBDO4QIYSLDorA/edit>