Institute for Christian Studies Curriculum - Year One

ICS Courses: Descriptions and Sequence

The following courses are offered in sequence for individuals discerning a call to the diaconate or pursuing licensed lay ministry. Upon successful completion, students will earn a Foundations Certificate.

Prerequisite for courses:
Attend Conference on Ministry in August (contact discernment@cfdiocese.org to register)
Contact Archdeacon Julie Altenbach (jaltenbach@cfdiocese.org) or
Archdeacon John Motis (jmotis@cfdiocese.org)

Tuition covers Thirdmill online courses, in-person courses, and Christian Education courses offered throughout the year.

Course Y1.1 - Orientation

This course supports individuals discerning a call to ordained diaconate in the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida. It offers a thorough introduction to the theological, spiritual, and practical aspects of these vocations, including orientation on requirements and steps in the discernment process for effective ministry.

Course Y1.2 - Understanding the Call: Ministers and Their Roles in the Episcopal Church

This course explores the nature of vocation and discernment within the Episcopal tradition. Students will learn about the roles of lay people, bishops, priests, and deacons. Participants will investigate their call to ministry through engaging discussions, collaborative group activities, and reflective individual exercises.

Course Y1.3 - Theological Foundations

After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Theological Foundations, students will participate in a practicum designed to demonstrate their understanding of how theology flows from Scriptures and changes our hearts and lives. Students will learn how to analyze theological expressions, taking into account the aspects of orthodoxy and be able to articulate this understanding.

Course Y1.4 - Biblical Foundations
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Bible Foundations, students will participate in a practicum designed to demonstrate their understanding of God's purpose and the unity of the Old and New Testaments. This practicum will provide hands-on experience, allowing students to apply their knowledge and showcase their ability to connect theological concepts across both testaments. Students will also learn how to apply these teachings in their personal lives and ministry, enhancing their practical and spiritual growth.

Course Y1.5 - Old Testament Foundations
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Old Testament Foundations, students will participate in a practicum designed to demonstrate their understanding of the Pentateuch, their original audience, and how we should respond to them today. Students will learn how to apply the teaching of the Pentateuch to living a life of faith and how to help others do the same.

Course Y1.6 - Evangelism and Sharing the Gospel
Students will look at what elements need to be included in the presentation of the Gospel. They will discuss and practice sharing their own testimony as part of that presentation.
Required Reading: *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* by JI Packer and *The Great Dechurching by* Jim Davis and Michael Graham

Course Y1.7 - Understanding the Liturgical Year, Book of Common Prayer, and Sacraments
This course explores the integral role of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) within the Episcopal Church. Participants will delve into the historical development, theological foundations, and practical applications of the BCP, examining how it shapes worship, beliefs, and church structure. The course will provide a comprehensive overview of the liturgical and sacramental practices outlined in the BCP, including its influence on the daily life of the church and its members.

Special emphasis will be placed on understanding how the Book of Common Prayer informs the roles of deacons and licensed lay ministers. By examining the BCP's guidance on worship, prayer, and sacramental rites, participants will gain insights into how these liturgical resources support and empower these important ministry roles within the Episcopal Church.
Students will need to bring a copy of The Book of Common Prayer.

Course Y1.8 - New Testament Foundation
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on New Testament Foundations, students will participate in a practicum designed to demonstrate their understanding of the New Testament as

foundational texts. By the end of this course, participants will not only gain a thorough understanding of the Gospels and Acts but also be inspired to actively participate in the growth and extension of God's kingdom especially as it relates to ministry.

Courses Y1.9 and Y1.10 - Church History Part I and Part II

Students will understand the origins and organization of The Episcopal Church, and trace the history of the Church from Apostolic times to the present, including the Judaic roots of the church. Students will learn to describe the beliefs, worship, and structure of the Episcopal Church.

Course Y1.11a. Rule of Life/Externship

This course prepares Year One students for the externship requirement and for a sustained life of prayer and service. Students learn the purpose, expectations, and process of the externship, and they explore the Rule of Life as a framework for ordering prayer, study, rest, relationships, and service, drawing on the work of Marjorie Thompson, Adele Calhoun, and Stephen Macchia. Grounded in the Baptismal Covenant (BCP, pp. 304–305), each student begins drafting a personal Rule of Life to sustain their discernment and future ministry.

Y1.11b. Homiletics

The course will focus on the unique role of the deacon as a servant and proclaimer of the Gospel. Participants will explore the theological foundations, practical skills, and pastoral sensibilities necessary for effective preaching and homiletics within the Episcopal tradition. Emphasizing the deacon's distinctive voice and mission, the course will cover sermon preparation, delivery techniques, and the integration of liturgy and social justice in preaching. Through lectures, discussions, and practical exercises, participants will develop the confidence and competence to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and compelling

Institute for Christian Studies Curriculum - Year Two

ICS Courses: Descriptions and Sequence

The following courses are offered in sequence for individuals discerning a call to the diaconate or pursuing licensed lay ministry. Students taking these courses will earn credits towards Biblical and Theological Studies Certificates.

Prerequisite for courses:
Successful completion of Year One classes

Tuition covers Thirdmill online courses, in-person courses,
and Christian Education courses offered throughout the year..

Course Y2.1 - Theological Studies: Doctrine of God

After successfully completing the Thirdmill course, Doctrine of God, students will participate in a practicum designed to demonstrate their understanding of what theologians call theology proper or the doctrine of God. Students will explore questions such as: Who is God? What are his attributes? What is his eternal plan? What are his works in history? They will also learn to analyze systematic theology.

Course Y2.2 - Biblical Studies: Old Testament Narratives

After successfully completing the Thirdmill course, Old Testament Narratives, students will learn how to demonstrate an understanding of the instructional elements of the course such as background, purpose and content, and be able to apply these for future use as a deacon or lay minister in the church.

Course Y2.3 - Articulating Your Call to the Diaconate, Licensed Lay Ministry and Understanding Spiritual Gifts for Ministry

This course is designed to help participants articulate their call to ministry by identifying and utilizing their spiritual gifts. Through a combination of self-assessment, interactive workshops, and guided reflections, participants will gain a deeper understanding of their unique strengths and how they can be applied in various ministry contexts. This hands-on experience will empower individuals to confidently express their calling and develop a personalized plan for effective ministry.

Course Y2.4 - Biblical Studies: Old Testament Prophets
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Old Testament Prophets, students will build on that foundational knowledge and interpretive skills developed in the online course. The class will provide students with opportunities to deepen their understanding, enhance their teaching abilities, and apply the teachings of the prophetic books of the Bible. The students will be given scenarios that require applying prophetic teachings to contemporary issues.

Course Y2.5 - Conflict Resolution and Healthy Boundaries
Participants will acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate conflicts and establish healthy boundaries in their ministry. This will enable them to manage conflicts gracefully and maintain healthy boundaries, ensuring effective and sustainable ministry leadership, all grounded in a thorough understanding of scriptural principles.

Course Y2.6 - Theological Studies: Christology
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Christology, students will participate in a practicum designed as an advanced follow-up. This course will offer hands-on experience that will help students deepen their theological understanding, enhance their ability to teach crucial doctrines, and apply biblical teachings. They will discuss and clarify their understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Course Y2.7 - Biblical Studies: New Testament Epistles
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on New Testament, students will participate in a practicum designed to provide a hands-on, immersive experience unpacking the content learned. The participants will engage in practical exercises and reflective activities to deepen their understanding and application of the teachings in the New Testament.

Course Y2.8 - Effective Bible Study Preparation and Leadership
Participants will develop skills and knowledge necessary to effectively prepare and lead a Bible study. The course will cover essential aspects of Bible study, leadership, including exegesis, lesson planning, group facilitation, and application of biblical principles. Participants will create an engaging and meaningful Bible study that fosters spiritual growth and community within their congregations. Participants will lead a Bible before the beginning of their third year of classes at ICS.

Course Y2.9 - Biblical Studies: Pauline Studies
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Pauline studies, participants will engage in a practicum designed to provide a practical application of the knowledge gained from the

course that focuses on the apostle Paul and his letters. Participants will deepen their knowledge and understanding of Paul's theology and teachings as they apply these insights to their future ministry.

Course Y2.10 - The Deacon and Lay Leader in Authorized Worship

This course provides comprehensive training on authorized liturgies, offices, and services other than the Eucharistic rites of the *Book of Common Prayer*, equipping future deacons and licensed lay ministers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively utilize these resources in their ministries. This course will cover various services in the *Book of Occasions Services* as well as the Daily Offices of the *Book of Common Prayer* and the use of the *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* supplement to the Calendar. It will examine the theological significance, practical application, and the leadership role of a deacon or licensed lay minister in supporting these services. Students will need to bring a copy of The Book of Occasional Services (as well as The Book of Common Prayer to class.

Course Y2.11 - Being a Deacon Today

Using Rosalind Brown's *Being a Deacon Today*, this course explores the distinctive identity of the deacon as one sent by the bishop to serve at the threshold between the Church and the world, in the liturgy and in the community.

Year Two Externship:

The Externship will take place at a nonprofit or organization of the students choosing. Students will volunteer and learn all aspects of the organization's operations to gain insight as they begin to formulate their ministry in the world. The Externship will consist of at least 15 hours and a written reflection will be the first class of Year Three.

Institute for Christian Studies Curriculum - Year Three

ICS Courses: Descriptions and Sequence

The following courses are offered in sequence for individuals discerning a call to the diaconate or pursuing licensed lay ministry. Students taking these courses will complete the remaining credits required to earn the Biblical Certificate and the Theological Studies Certificate.

Prerequisite for courses:
Successful completion of Year One and Year Two Classes and Externship

Tuition covers Thirdmill online courses, in-person courses,
and Christian Education courses offered throughout the year..

Course Y3.1 - Theological Studies: Pneumatology

After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Pneumatology, students will participate in a practicum designed to build upon the foundational knowledge from that course. The class will offer hands-on experience and application of the Holy Spirit's dynamic work in the world, the church, and individual believers, as well as the principles of biblical theology. Participants will engage in practical exercises, ministry projects, and reflective discussions designed to deepen their understanding and reliance on the Holy Spirit, and to effectively utilize biblical theology in their ministry contexts.

Course Y3.2 Theological Studies: Biblical Ethics

After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Biblical Ethics, students will participate in a practicum designed to teach participants how to apply the ethical principles and biblical foundations learned in the online course to real-life ministry scenarios. Through guided discussions, hands-on activities, and reflective assignments, participants will develop the skills necessary to navigate complex ethical situations with biblical wisdom and pastoral sensitivity.

Course Y3.3 Pastoral Listening

This course focuses on the critical skill of pastoral listening. Effective listening is fundamental to pastoral care, enabling deacons to serve their communities with empathy, understanding, and compassion. Participants will explore the theology and practice of pastoral listening, develop skills to engage deeply with those they serve, and learn to create a supportive and healing

environment. Through lectures, role-playing exercises, and reflective discussions, this course will equip future deacons with the tools needed to listen well and respond appropriately to the needs of their congregations and communities.

Course Y3.4 Theological Studies:Anthropology and Eschatology
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Biblical Interpretation, students will participate in a practicum designed to provide practical application and deeper exploration of these critical theological areas. Participants will engage in hands-on activities, ministry projects, and reflective discussions to integrate the teachings into their personal lives and ministry contexts. The practicum builds on the foundational knowledge from the Third Millennium Ministries video series "What is Man?" and "Your Kingdom Come: The Doctrine of Eschatology."

Course Y3.5 Biblical Studies: Interpretation
After successfully completing the Thirdmill course on Biblical Interpretation, students will participate in a practicum designed to offer hands-on experience in applying biblical interpretation principles to real-world ministry contexts. Participants will engage in practical exercises, collaborative projects, and reflective discussions designed to deepen their understanding of hermeneutics and enhance their ability to interpret Scripture responsibly and effectively.

Course Y3.6 The Catechism and Outline of Our Faith
This course offers an in-depth exploration of *An Outline of the Faith*, commonly known as the Catechism, found in the Book of Common Prayer. This course deepens theological understanding and equips participants to articulate the core teachings of the Christian faith with clarity and pastoral sensitivity.

Students will engage with the structure, content, and purpose of the Catechism, examining its role as a teaching tool, a summary of doctrine, and a means of spiritual formation. Emphasis will be placed on how the Catechism informs the Church’s life, worship, and mission—particularly through the lens of the diaconal vocation.

Through reading, discussion, and theological reflection, participants will explore key topics such as the nature of God, the sacraments, the moral life, prayer, and the Church's mission. By the end of the course, students will be prepared to use the Catechism not only as a resource for teaching, but also as a foundation for lifelong discipleship and faithful service.

Course Y3.7 - Faithful Presence: Spiritual Care for Those in Ministry
This course provides essential formation in spiritual and emotional sustainability. Designed to equip future deacons and licensed lay ministers with the tools to navigate the challenges of pastoral service, the course focuses on the practices of soul care, the development of healthy boundaries, and the cultivation of spiritual and emotional resilience.

Through theological reflection, personal assessment, group discussion, and spiritual practice, students will explore how to tend to their own well-being while faithfully serving others. Topics include boundary-setting, navigating role expectations, managing stress, preventing burnout, and embracing rhythms of rest and renewal grounded in the life of Christ.

This course invites participants to reflect deeply on their personal spiritual lives, vocational identities, and the habits that will sustain them in the long-term work of diaconal ministry.

Course Y3.8- Parish Leadership and Ministry Planning for Episcopal Deacons
This course is designed for individuals in the formation process for ordination as Episcopal deacons, focusing on developing leadership skills for parish ministry and formulating an initial plan for outside ministry. Through a combination of theological reflection, practical training, and strategic planning, participants will learn how to define their ministry roles, lead effectively within their parishes under the direction of a priest, and create impactful ministry plans for service beyond the church walls.

Course Y3.9 Opening the Doors: The Deacon as Host and Bridge to the Community
At ordination, the deacon is charged "to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world" (BCP, p. 543). The deacon stands at the threshold between the congregation and the community it serves. This course equips students to design and lead gatherings that welcome newcomers, neighbors, and those with no church connection. It also prepares them to follow up in ways that lead to lasting relationships. Students leave with a repertoire of event ideas, a planning method, and a complete event plan.

Course Y3.10 - The Canons
Students will view the canonically required video training on the canons. This course will further explore the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church and the canons of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida as the framework that governs the Church's common life and ordained ministry. Each student receives a copy of the Canons and learns how to navigate them, why they matter for faithful ministry, and how they are amended by General Convention and Diocesan Convention. The session includes a question-and-answer period.

Course Y3.9 - Retreat

Diaconate Candidates who have successfully completed all requirements for ordination, will meet at DaySpring Retreat Center in the Southwest Diocese. The candidates will participate in activities to reflect on formation as well as help them prepare for their ordination.

Year Three Internship:

Students seeking ordination to the diaconate, will be placed at a parish and under the supervision of the priest for an internship. The internship will begin on Advent I and end on Pentecost. The internship will provide hands-on experience setting the table, leading Morning, Noonday, and Evening Prayer, preaching and other duties unique to the role of a deacon.