



Penn West Academy for Ministry Annual Catalogue 2025-2026



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Welcome Message



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Penn West Academy for Ministry Catalogue! The Academy is a spiritual and educational program of the Penn West Conference of the United Church of Christ that aims to prepare women and men for service in local churches. Run under the authority of the Conference Committee on Ministry, the Academy provides courses in Biblical Studies, Theology, Worship and Preaching, Church History and United Church of Christ Covenant and Polity. This catalogue outlines educational opportunities for clergy and lay persons in the Academic Year of 2025-2026. If God is calling you to a deeper walk of faith or “to make this faith [your] own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God,” [from the UCC Constitution] you might discern that the Penn West Academy is for you.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Joseph Hedden, Dean
Hills.church.3618@gmail.com
412-956-5252



***The vision of the Penn
West Academy is: To know
God and to be known by
God in Christ Jesus.***





TUITION & COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY

Tuition

The tuition for a student of the Penn West Academy is \$400 per year. Payments should be made to the Penn West Conference by December 31st of each academic year. Payment should be addressed as follows:

Penn West Conference
Attn: Diane Fox
Suite PWC
312 South Maple Avenue,
Greensburg, PA 15601.

Students will be expected to purchase books or instructional materials. Students may wish to seek funding assistance from their home church or association. A student exploring the Academy may attend one weekend session free of charge. After this, tuition payments are expected. Please contact the Dean for scholarship questions.

Committees on Ministry

The Application and Credentialing of all students takes place through the Association Committees on Ministry. Please submit the application found on the last page of this Catalogue to the chairperson of your Association Committee on Ministry.

Completion of the full four-year course of the Academy will result in a Certificate of Completion being issued; the Academy does not guarantee nor grant credentialing. Questions of Licensing, Commissioning and credentialing in the United Church of Christ are the responsibility of the Associations. Please be in direct and frequent covenantal contact with the Committee on Ministry of your Association regarding your discernment status.

Audit Option

The Penn West Academy now offers an audit option for those who would like to get some Continuing Education or have interest in a particular topic but do not wish to take the complete course offerings. Auditors will have access to four class lessons in a specific subject area (ie. Worship & Preaching or Old Testament) during the year for \$60. Auditors will not be expected to turn in assignments but are welcome to participate in classroom discussion, etc. Course descriptions and topics covered can be found at the Conference Website: www.pennwest.org. So if you would like to hear what is new in the field of New Testament Studies or have trouble remembering the difference between John Calvin and John of Patmos, call the Dean, Joseph Hedden at (412)-956-5252 now!

2025 Association Representatives

Clarion:	Rev. Barry Fillman 1970 Big Run/Prescottville Rd. Reynoldsville, PA 15851	814-427-2468
Juniata:	Rev. James Neatrou 8810 King Saint Clair Road Osterburg, PA 16667 jabez1924@gmail.com	814-937-0201
Lake Erie:	Rev. Steve Craft 260 Main St Greenville, PA 16125-2058 info@zionsucc.org	724-588-6940
Pittsburgh:	Rev Lisa Griffin 644 Ridgemont Dr. Pittsburgh PA 15220 lgucshot@live.com	412-921-8242
Somerset:	Rev/Dr Joseph Beer 130 Forbes St Somerset, PA 15501 joseph.beer175@gmail.com	814-442-3653
Westmoreland:	Rev. Don Watkins 2003 Denmark Manor Rd Export, PA 15632 dmuccpastordon@gmail.com	724-468-3266



***The United Church of Christ
acknowledges as its sole head,
Jesus Christ, Son of God and
Savior.***





2025-2026 Faculty

The Rev. Dr. Bonnie Bates

Instructor of Covenant and Polity

484-705-3438

revdrbbates@gmail.com

Bonnie earned her M.Div. and D. Min from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. She also obtained an Executive Certificate in Gender, Sexual and Racial Justice. She has taught Polity in the New York, Heartland and Penn Northeast Conferences.

The Rev. Joseph Hedden

Instructor in Theology and Dean of the Academy

4915 Sardis Road, Murrysburg, PA 15668

412-956-5252

hills.church.3618@gmail.com

Rev. Hedden is pastor of Emmanuel Reformed (Hill's) United Church of Christ in Export and a graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He also has obtained a certificate in Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Leadership from the Pneuma Institute.

Ciera James

Instructor in Church History

757-434-5374

Ciera James is a graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary where she earned a Master of Divinity and Graduate Certificate in Urban Ministry. She completed the joint degree program and obtained a Masters in Social Work from The University of Pittsburgh simultaneously. She is a licensed social worker and is in the ordination process with the UCC.

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Lawrence

Instructor in Old Testament & New Testament

716-462-8201

yonatan1970@gmail.com

398 McKinley Avenue, Kenmore, NY 14217

Rev. Dr. Lawrence is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Theology at Canisius University in Buffalo, where he has taught since 2005. He is also the Pastor of St. Peter's United Church of Christ in North Tonawanda, NY. He is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and has traveled in Israel, Jordan, India, and Fiji.

The Rev. Melissa McLean

Instructor in Worship and Preaching

814-706-9930

mclean.melissa.a@gmail.com

707 Follett Run Rd, Warren, PA 16365

Rev. McLean serves as Pastor of Emmaneul UCC (Warren) in the Clarion Association and is an alumna of the Penn West Academy for Ministry. She holds a Master of Divinity with a Chaplaincy Concentration from Chicago Theological Seminary and a Master of Education focused on Adult Learners from Elmira College.

Course Descriptions

Old Testament

In this course, students will survey the Old Testament as they develop critical skills for Biblical interpretation. Strong consideration will be given to historical context as students reflect on how the authors' messages relate to our present time.

New Testament

In this course, students will survey the New Testament as they develop critical skills for Biblical interpretation. Strong consideration will be given to historical context as students reflect on how the authors' messages relate to our present time.



Church History

This course will attempt to answer the question 'Who is Jesus Christ?' from an historical perspective. Students will sail through 2000 years of Christian thought from the close of the Canon until today.

Worship & Preaching

This course offers a comprehensive exploration of the theology behind Christian preaching and worship. We will delve into the liturgical, exegetical, homiletical, theological, and pastoral elements that shape worship and preaching. Students will engage in both practical and didactic assignments designed to deepen their understanding of not just the underlying philosophy, but also the practical application of these practices. *All fourth-year students are required to submit a Worship & Preaching portfolio/project before the final class. With approval from their association advisor, this project may be included in their Members in Discernment portfolio.

UCC Covenant and Polity

Students in this course will discover a deeper understanding and appreciate of the concept of covenant and how it relates to polity and structure in the UCC. Some Church and Ministry Committees may require this course for non-UCC ministers serving in UCC settings. *All fourth year students are required to turn in before the final class a UCC Polity paper that may be included in the portfolio of Members in Discernment, upon the approval of their association advisor.

Theology & Spirituality

Students in the Theology course will be introduced to approaches of theological study of the past and present. As they engage in these studies, students will learn to think and reflect theologically and spiritually. **All fourth year students are required to turn in before the final class a theology paper that may be included in the portfolio of Members in Discernment, upon the approval of their association advisor.

2025-2026 Students

**OUR HOSTS:**

First Reformed UCC
312 South Maple Avenue
Greensburg PA 15601

Cohort 2026:

Harvey Noel: (Christ Church UCC), Latrobe, PA 15650
724-863-4193 noelharv52846@gmail.com

Entering Year 4

Cohort 2027:

Cory Childers: (St. John's UCC, Bedford UCC), 6605 Milligans Cove Road.
814-310-1154 cfc161@icloud.com

Entering Year 3

Dave Creamer: (Unity UCC), Shanksville, Berlin, PA 15530
814-777-2280 dmc159@psu.edu

Entering Year 3

Christina Lonsinger: (Faith UCC, Altoona) 3 Duff Drive Altoona PA 16602
814-650-9486 christinapoppinz@gmail.com

Entering Year 3

Cohort 2028:

Bonnie Skelley: (Faith UCC, Altoona), 405 Clair Street, Altoona, PA 16601
814-505-3208 BSkelley72@gmail.com

Entering Year 2

Brian Woy: (First Ebensburg UCC), 206 Maplebrook Road, Ebensburg 15931
814-248-5182 brianwoy@hotmail.com

Entering Year 2

Cohort 2029:

Rhonda Hose: (Salem UCC, Frostburg MD). 33W College Avenue, Frostburg, MD 21532
240-979-7250. esl.instruction123@gmail.com

Entering Year 1

***Special Block: Pastoral Leadership with Graham Standish.***

Graham Standish has been the Executive Director of the Samaritan Counseling Center since 2017. Graham presents workshops and provides spiritual direction/coaching to pastors. Prior to coming to Samaritan, he served for 22 years as the pastor of Calvin Presbyterian Church in Zelienople, PA, where he tripled the size of the congregation and garnered national attention in several studies. Graham earned his Ph.D. and M.A. in formative spirituality from Duquesne University, his Master of Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh, and his Master of Divinity from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Course Schedule & Dates

September 2025

September 12	6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Orientation & Church History
September 13	8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	See below for class schedule
September 19	6:00 p.m. - 7:20 p.m.	Special Block with Graham Standish, Congregational Leadership

October 2025

October 10	7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Church History
October 11	8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	See below for class schedule
October 17	6:00 p.m. - 7:20 p.m.	Special Block with Graham Standish

March 2026

March 13	6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Church History
March 14	8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	See below for class schedule

May 2026

May 8	7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Church History
May 9	8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	See below for class schedule
May 15	6:00 p.m. - 7:20 p.m.	Special Block with Graham Standish

Regular Schedule

The regular schedule for these sessions is as follows:

Evening Classes:	6:00-7:20 PM	Special Block
	7:30-8:50 PM	Church History
Saturday Classes:	8:00-9:20 AM	Worship and Preaching
	9:30-10:50 AM	Theology & Spirituality
	11:00AM-12:20 PM	Hebrew Bible
	12:20-1:30 PM	Lunch
	1:30-2:50 PM	New Testament
	3:00-4:20 PM	Covenant & Polity

All regular sessions are held at First Reformed United Church of Christ, 312 S. Maple Street, Greensburg, PA, 15601. The Church is located at the corner of Third and South Maple Avenues. *A Zoom option is available if traveling is prohibitive for either students or faculty. These schedules may change at any time.*

2025-2026 Application



Auditors: Fill out the application below and send to Joseph Hedden, 3618 Hills Church Road, Murrysville, PA 15668. Email: hills.church.3618@gmail.com. (You do not need to complete the same steps as full load students.)

Full-load students: Submit this application to the chairperson of your Association Church and Ministry and to Joseph Hedden, Dean, along with the following: 1) A written recommendation from your home church; 2) Three letters of reference (see below; including one from your pastor); 3) Proof of high school education; and 4) A short written statement about your sense of call to ministry.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Occupation: _____

Local Church Membership: _____

Educational Background: _____

Church Activities: _____

Pastor's Reference & Contact Information: _____

Business Reference & Contact Information: _____

Character Reference & Contact Information: _____

After submitting this application and its supporting documentation, you will be asked to meet with your Association Committee on Ministry. Additionally, you are encouraged as a first step to work with your congregation to form a discernment committee. See the Manual on Ministry, <https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Local-Church-Discernment-Committee-Best-Practices.pdf>

Please Note: This application will be shared with the Conference Committee on Ministry as well as the Penn West Academy Faculty.