



## Description of Programs

Grace Communion Seminary (GCS) offers graduate-level education in theological, biblical, historical, and pastoral studies. We teach from the perspective of Incarnational Trinitarian theology, and our format is designed to suit the needs of part-time students with full-time jobs. All our courses are offered online in a program that is flexible enough to suit the needs of bivocational pastors, and at a depth that is suitable for full-time pastors.

### Master's Level Continuing Education

All students who are admitted to GCS are initially enrolled in the Master's Level Continuing Education program. This permits students to take courses according to their own interest and need.

Upon completion of seven courses, students become eligible to be considered for Candidacy Status for a master's degree. An increasing number of students want to increase their ministry skills and understanding, and this is a lifelong need of all who serve in the church. GCS wants to help in this by providing guidance, structure, training, and verification of your educational achievements. All our graduate-level courses require the same level of effort and commitment, regardless of whether your ultimate goal is Master's Level Continuing Education, or a master's degree.

If you begin your studies with a specific interest, such as youth ministry or one section of the Bible, you are welcome to take whatever subject interests you most. If you do not have a specific topic in mind, we suggest that you begin with an introductory course in theology, biblical studies, or Christian ministry – the courses numbered BI501, CM501, and TH501. Then take another introductory course – we arrange our schedule so that one of these introductory courses is taught every semester.

- *BI501 Hermeneutics* examines principles used in understanding the message of the Bible.
- *CM501 Ministerial Leadership* develops concepts of knowing oneself and developing plans for growth in relational skills for service in ministry.

- *TH501 Nature of God and Jesus Christ* provides an introduction to the doctrines of the Christian church.

Students may continue in this program for as long as they wish, at the pace they wish, as long as their GPA is 2.5 or above.

## **Masters Degrees**

GCS offers two degrees: Master of Pastoral Studies and Master of Theological Studies. Either degree requires at least 14 courses, or 42 semester units of credit. After students have completed seven courses, they have the option of enrolling in one of our master's degree programs. This may be done if all of the following conditions are met:

- a) Must have completed seven GCS courses with a GPA of 2.7 or better.
- b) Must have completed at least two courses in Christian ministry (for enrolling in the MPS) or two courses in theology (for enrolling in the MTS).
- c) Students must commit to taking courses at a rate that would allow them to complete the program within eight years of when they first began taking GCS courses.<sup>1</sup>

Completed GCS courses will be automatically counted toward the master's degree as long as they were taken eight or fewer years before graduation. Up to eight units may come from transfer credit, and an additional nine units may come from documented experiential learning.<sup>2</sup> If a student wants to receive *both* master's degrees, a total of 78 units must be completed, including the specific courses required for each degree; all courses must be completed within ten years. See the *Academic Catalog* for the specific requirements of the Masters of Pastoral Studies and the Master of Theological Studies.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, if a student took the first course in 2013 and completed the seventh course in 2017, four of those eight years have already elapsed, and the remaining seven courses must be taken in the next four years. The student would therefore have to increase the number of courses taken per year. In calculating the rate required for completion, the student should take into consideration that the final course often takes more than one semester.

All GCS coursework must be completed within eight years. If the student takes longer than eight years, the student cannot graduate without re-taking any courses that are older than eight years. If a student cannot commit to completion within the eight-year framework, the student is welcome to take courses at whatever pace is desired, by remaining in Master's Level Continuing Education. If the student's circumstances change and permit a quicker pace, the student may apply for a master's degree program any time after the seventh course.

An extension of up to two years will be considered due to any official, documented academic leave of absence granted by GCS in its sole discretion. The submission of a formal petition for leave of absence is the responsibility of the student.

<sup>2</sup> Credit must come from courses relevant to the GCS curriculum, from appropriately accredited institutions, and must not be older than eight years prior to enrollment at GCS. See the *Academic Catalog* for details on transfer credits and experiential learning.

Students must be within six units of meeting all requirements in order to register for the capstone course. All courses must be completed within eight years.<sup>3</sup> A full-time student, taking nine units each semester, can complete a master's degree in only two years.

In the breadth and depth of the courses in our master's degree programs, we seek to prepare students for the spiritual responsibilities of church leadership. We do not ordain, nor do we have any job-placement services. Our program is designed to assist personal and professional development in the roles in which our students are already serving.

Education is a life-long need. Those who serve in the church of Jesus Christ learn and grow not only from their own experiences and studies, but also by continuing to learn from others, often through formal education. Even after a student has been awarded a master's degree, we believe that GCS can continue to help people grow in their ability to help others. We plan to add additional courses in coming years, and we invite you to grow with us.

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<sup>3</sup> It is not possible to complete a master's degree with only one course per year. Some bivocational pastors cannot reasonably accommodate more than one course per year into their schedules. We are happy to provide continuing education for such pastors, but we are unable to extend the length of our program.