



SCHOOL OF
**PARISH
LEADERSHIP**
— AND —
EVANGELIZATION

Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio

Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) Program

Introduction to the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

Purpose of the PLA

The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) for the Doctor of Ministry degree is a formal academic process designed to evaluate and recognize theological and ministerial learning acquired outside of a traditional master's degree in theology. This includes knowledge and skills gained through professional ministry, leadership, independent theological study, spiritual formation, and other non-academic avenues. For applicants to the Doctor of Ministry program at The University of Saint Mary of the Lake, the PLA provides an opportunity to demonstrate how the applicants prior learning aligns with doctoral-level academic and ministerial outcomes.

The PLA seeks confirmation that the applicant's experience demonstrates their ability to engage in theological reflection, cultural and contextual adaptation, vocational clarity, and spiritual maturity appropriate for advanced professional ministry.

Why the PLA is Needed

Many individuals called to advanced ministerial leadership possess extensive experience and formation but may not hold a traditional Master of Divinity or theology degree. The PLA ensures that this experience is formally acknowledged and may be credited toward academic prerequisites. This process honors the applicant's vocational journey and affirms their readiness to engage in doctoral-level theological education and peer collaboration.



Requirements to Complete the PLA

To complete the PLA, applicants must submit a comprehensive portfolio that includes the following components:

- a) Cover Letter or Statement of Intent
- b) Reflective Essay detailing prior learning and its relevance to doctoral ministry studies
- c) Learning Outcomes Alignment Document
 - 1) Supporting Documentation (e.g., transcripts, ministry records, certifications)
 - 2) Evidence of Competency (e.g., reflection/talks, strategic plans, teaching materials)
 - 3) Third-Party Evaluations or Letters of Recommendation

Cover Letter or Statement of Intent

The cover letter should clearly state your intention to seek academic credit through the Prior Learning Assessment process. It should briefly outline your background in ministry, leadership, and theological engagement, and express your commitment to the academic and spiritual goals of the Doctor of Ministry program.



Reflective Essay

The reflective essay (approximately 1,500–2,000 words) should demonstrate how your prior learning and experience align with the academic and ministerial outcomes of a Doctor of Ministry program. Use the following bullet points to guide your reflection:

- **Interpretation of Scripture and Theological Reflection**
 - Describe how you engage Scripture in your ministry context.
 - Reflect on theological themes that shape your pastoral practice.
 - Share examples of preaching, teaching, or theological writing.
- **Cultural and Contextual Adaptation**
 - Describe how you have adapted your ministry to diverse cultural or social contexts.
 - Reflect on challenges and insights gained from ministering across cultural boundaries.
 - Share examples of contextualized ministry initiatives or outreach.
- **Ministerial Identity and Vocational Calling**
 - Describe your journey of vocational discernment and ministerial identity.
 - Reflect on how your personal story and spiritual formation inform your leadership.
 - Share experiences of mentoring, spiritual direction, or pastoral care.
- **Ongoing Personal and Spiritual Formation**
 - Reflect on your commitment to lifelong spiritual growth.
 - Describe practices of prayer, retreat, theological reading, or supervision.
 - Share how you cultivate resilience and renewal in ministry.
- **Academic and Professional Background**
 - Describe your accredited master's degree in a field related to your ministry (e.g., social work, education, counseling, leadership).
 - Reflect on how this academic background supports your theological and pastoral work.



• **Ministerial Experience and Peer Engagement**

- Outline your years of ministerial leadership and key roles held.
- Reflect on how your experience equips you to engage as a peer with other doctoral students.
- Share examples of collaborative ministry, leadership development, or strategic planning.

Learning Outcomes Alignment Document

Doctor of Ministry Learning Outcomes	Description of Your Experience	Examples of Supporting Documentation or Evidence
Thoughtful Interpretation of Scripture and Theology	Describe your preaching, teaching, or theological writing.	Reflections/talks, Bible study outlines, theological essays
Cultural Adaptation in Ministry	Share examples of ministry in diverse or changing contexts.	Outreach plans, community engagement reports
Vocational Clarity and Ministerial Identity	Reflect on your discernment and leadership journey	Spiritual autobiography, formation program records
Commitment to Ongoing Formation	Describe practices of spiritual growth and renewal.	Retreat reflections, spiritual direction notes
Accredited Master's Degree in Related Field	Provide transcripts and describe relevance to ministry.	Transcripts, degree certificates
Significant Ministerial Experience	Outline leadership roles and collaborative ministry.	Ministry resume, strategic plans, letters of recommendation



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Please compile the above documentation and submit to Linda Couri at lcouri@usml.edu or:

Linda Couri
University of St. Mary of the Lake
1000 E. Maple Ave.
Mundelein, IL 60060

After the application deadline, the admissions committee will review all completed applications and notify applicants of the admission decision.