



SCHOOL OF  
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# Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio

## Master of Arts in Liturgy (MAL) Program

### Introduction to the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)

#### **Purpose of the PLA**

The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a formal process used by academic institutions to evaluate and recognize learning acquired outside of traditional classroom settings. This includes knowledge and skills gained through pastoral ministry, professional experience, spiritual leadership, volunteer service, independent study, and other non-academic avenues.

For applicants to the Master of Pastoral Studies program at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, the PLA provides an opportunity to demonstrate how prior learning aligns with graduate-level pastoral competencies and ministerial formation outcomes. The PLA seeks confirmation that the applicant's experience reflects the ability to engage in pastoral reflection, ministry leadership, spiritual care, and the practical application of theology in real-world contexts.

#### **Why the PLA is Needed**

Many individuals entering pastoral studies programs bring extensive experience in ministry, leadership, and faith formation. The PLA ensures that this experience is formally recognized and may be credited toward academic requirements. This process not only honors the applicant's background but also allows for a more efficient and personalized academic journey.



## **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 liturgical studies
- c) Learning Outcomes Alignment Document
  - 1) Supporting Documentation (e.g., transcripts, ministry records, certifications)
  - 2) Evidence of Competency (e.g., homilies, liturgical 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 liturgical ministry or theological formation and express your commitment to the academic and spiritual goals of the program.

## **Reflective Essay**

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

- **Personal and Spiritual Formation**
  - Describe your spiritual journey and how it has shaped your understanding of liturgy.
  - Reflect on how liturgical prayer and sacramental life have influenced your personal formation.
  - Share any experiences of spiritual direction, retreats, or formation programs.



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- **Academic and Theological Engagement**
  - Discuss any formal or informal theological education you've received.
  - Identify key texts, theologians, or traditions that have influenced your liturgical understanding.
  - Describe your ability to engage critically with liturgical theology and history.
- **Liturgical Leadership and Practice**
  - Outline your roles in liturgical planning, sacramental preparation, or worship leadership.
  - Share examples of liturgical celebrations you've coordinated or contributed to.
  - Reflect on how you've applied theological principles in pastoral settings.
- **Teaching and Formation of Others**
  - Describe any experience teaching or mentoring others in liturgical or sacramental topics (e.g., RCIA, catechesis, workshops).
  - Share materials or approaches you've used to help others understand and participate in the liturgy.
- **Research and Writing**
  - Reflect on any theological writing, research, or presentations you've done.
  - Describe your ability to analyze liturgical texts and communicate theological insights.
- **Integration and Readiness**
  - Summarize how your experiences have prepared you for graduate-level studies
  - Reflect on your readiness to contribute to academic and ministerial conversations in liturgical studies.



**Learning Outcomes Alignment Document**

<b>Master of Arts in Liturgy Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Description of Your Experience</b>	<b>Examples of Supporting Documentation or Evidence</b>
Mastery of Liturgical Theology and History	Describe your theological studies, workshops, or ministry roles that involved deep engagement with liturgical theology.	Certificates, transcripts, theological essays, workshop outlines
Ability to Conduct Scholarly Research	Mention any research projects, published articles, or theological reflections you've written.	Copies of papers, published work, annotated bibliographies
Engagement with Liturgical Texts and Traditions	Share experiences where you interpreted or taught liturgical texts (e.g., Roman Missal, Lectionary)	Teaching materials, homily notes, RCIA curriculum
Application of Liturgical Knowledge in Ministry	Describe your role in planning liturgies, sacramental prep, or leading worship.	Bulletins, liturgical plans, sacramental prep guides
Integration of Theology into Spiritual Formation	Reflect on how your liturgical work contributed to spiritual growth in yourself or others	Retreat outlines, testimonials, formation program materials



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Leadership in Liturgical Settings	Highlight leadership roles in parish liturgy, diocesan events, or music ministry.	Letters of recommendation, event programs, planning documents
Demonstrated Spiritual and Intellectual Formation	Share your journey of spiritual growth and theological reflection.	Personal statement, spiritual direction notes, formation program records

Please compile the above documentation and submit to Linda Couri at [lcouri@usml.edu](mailto: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.