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# Prior Learning Assessment Portfolio

## Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies (MAPS) 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 honors the applicant's ministerial background while supporting a more efficient and personalized path toward completing the Master of Pastoral Studies degree.

#### **Requirements to Complete the PLA**

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



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- a) Cover Letter or Statement of Intent
- b) Reflective Essay detailing prior learning and its relevance to pastoral ministry
- c) Learning Outcomes Alignment Document
  - 1) Supporting Documentation (e.g., transcripts, ministry records, certifications)
  - 2) Evidence of Competency (e.g., reflection talks, pastoral plans, formation materials, outreach initiatives)
  - 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 pastoral ministry, leadership, or formation and express your commitment to the pastoral, spiritual, and ministerial 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 pastoral, ministerial, and formational outcomes of a graduate-level program in Pastoral Studies.. Use the following bullet points to guide your reflection:

- **Pastoral Application of Scripture**
  - Describe your experience using sacred scripture in pastoral settings (e.g., retreat work, teaching, counseling, or ministry leadership).
  - Reflect on how Catholic teaching informs your pastoral use of scripture.
  - Share how you apply scripture to address contemporary pastoral challenges and the needs of individuals or communities.
- **Pastoral Reflection and Theological Integration**
  - Discuss your experience reflecting on pastoral situations in light of theological principles.
  - Describe how you integrate Catholic tradition into real-life ministry contexts.
  - Share examples of decision-making or leadership shaped by theological reflection.
- **Spiritual and Human Formation**
  - Reflect on your personal and spiritual formation in the context of ministry.
  - Describe how your experiences in ministry have shaped your pastoral identity and vocation.
  - Share examples of growth, conversion, or deepened understanding through ministerial experience.
- **Leadership and Formation of Others**
  - Describe your experience leading, mentoring, or forming others in faith communities.
  - Share examples of programs, initiatives, or formation efforts you have led or contributed to.



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- Reflect on your approach to fostering spiritual growth and community engagement.
- **Pastoral Skills and Ministry Practice**
  - Reflect on your experience in pastoral care (e.g., counseling, accompaniment, outreach, crisis response).
  - Describe your ability to respond to diverse pastoral needs with sensitivity and competence.
  - Share examples of ministry initiatives or pastoral interventions you have implemented
- **Integration and Readiness for Graduate Pastoral Ministry**
  - Summarize how your experiences have prepared you for graduate-level pastoral studies.
  - Reflect on your readiness to engage in advanced pastoral leadership and ministry formation.
  - Describe how you hope to grow in your capacity for pastoral service through this program.



**Learning Outcomes Alignment Document**

<b>Master of Pastoral Studies Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Description of Your Experience</b>	<b>Examples of Supporting Documentation or Evidence</b>
Ability to apply sacred scripture in pastoral and ministerial contexts	Describe how you have used scripture in reflections, teaching, counseling, or ministry leadership	Lecture, talks, lesson plans, Bible study outlines, ministry reflections
Capacity for pastoral reflection integrating theology and lived experience	Share examples of reflecting on ministry situations through a theological lens	Reflection papers, journals, case studies, ministry evaluations
Demonstrated growth in spiritual and human formation for ministry	Explain how your formation has developed through pastoral experience	Formation program records, notes or journaling from spiritual direction sessions, personal statements
Ability to provide effective pastoral care and leadership	Describe your experience in pastoral care, leadership, and community engagement	Ministry records, program descriptions, letters of recommendation
Skills in leading faith formation and community development	Highlight experience in teaching, mentoring, or organizing ministry initiatives	Curriculum materials, workshop outlines, parish program documentation



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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.