

A man with short brown hair, wearing a grey blazer over a light blue shirt, is shown in profile from the chest up, speaking into a silver and black microphone. The background is a blurred interior with wood paneling and blue walls.

Overview of Standards for Theological Education and Pastoral Formation



NORTH AMERICAN
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NORTH AMERICAN
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CHURCH

Overview of Standards for Theological Education and Pastoral Formation¹

The matter of the proper education of preachers of the gospel is worthy of our ultimate commitment.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

We live in a time of unprecedented cultural change. The cultural cohesiveness provided by a broad religious and ethical consensus has collapsed. Our culture is increasingly pluralistic, secular, technological, and individualistic. In this post-Christian milieu, the Church is struggling with how to respond. Some Christians have opted to mirror the culture because it's reasoned that this makes the Church more "relevant" and able to engage in the culture.

The North American Lutheran Church is grateful for the many blessings and benefits of contemporary culture. We do not reject all the good things given to us through scientific and technological advancements. However, we believe that the Gospel always resists captivity to any prevailing culture and its attendant worldview.

As members of a confessional movement, we believe that the Church is the community built on biblical truths which are confessed in the ecumenical Creeds and given clarity in the Lutheran Confessions. In other words, we seek to respond to the cultural changes by intentionally becoming a denomination that reflects the faith and ensuing ethical commitments of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We are convinced of the timeless truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and seek to bear witness to that Gospel. Therefore, we believe that the best response to the unprecedented cultural changes is to be disciples, and make disciples, of Jesus Christ.

Crucial to this endeavor is the formation of pastors and lay leaders. The purpose of this document is to provide a clear snapshot of the NALS system and its structure, along with an overview of the residential requirements for each of our students.

¹This document is an overview of theological education and pastoral formation. Since it is an overview, specific exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis. Some students may have additional educational or formational needs, and some may have less. In such cases, the Candidacy Committee and the Seminary President may develop an individualized plan for students. The goal is to provide students with the best opportunities for growth as they prepare to serve Christ and his Church.

◆ Basic Overview of the NALS

The North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) is comprised of a network of seminaries that provide theological education and formation for pastors and lay leaders preparing for ministry in the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). The seminary center is located at Trinity School for Ministry (TSM) in Ambridge, PA. The network seminaries include:

Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania (NALS Center)

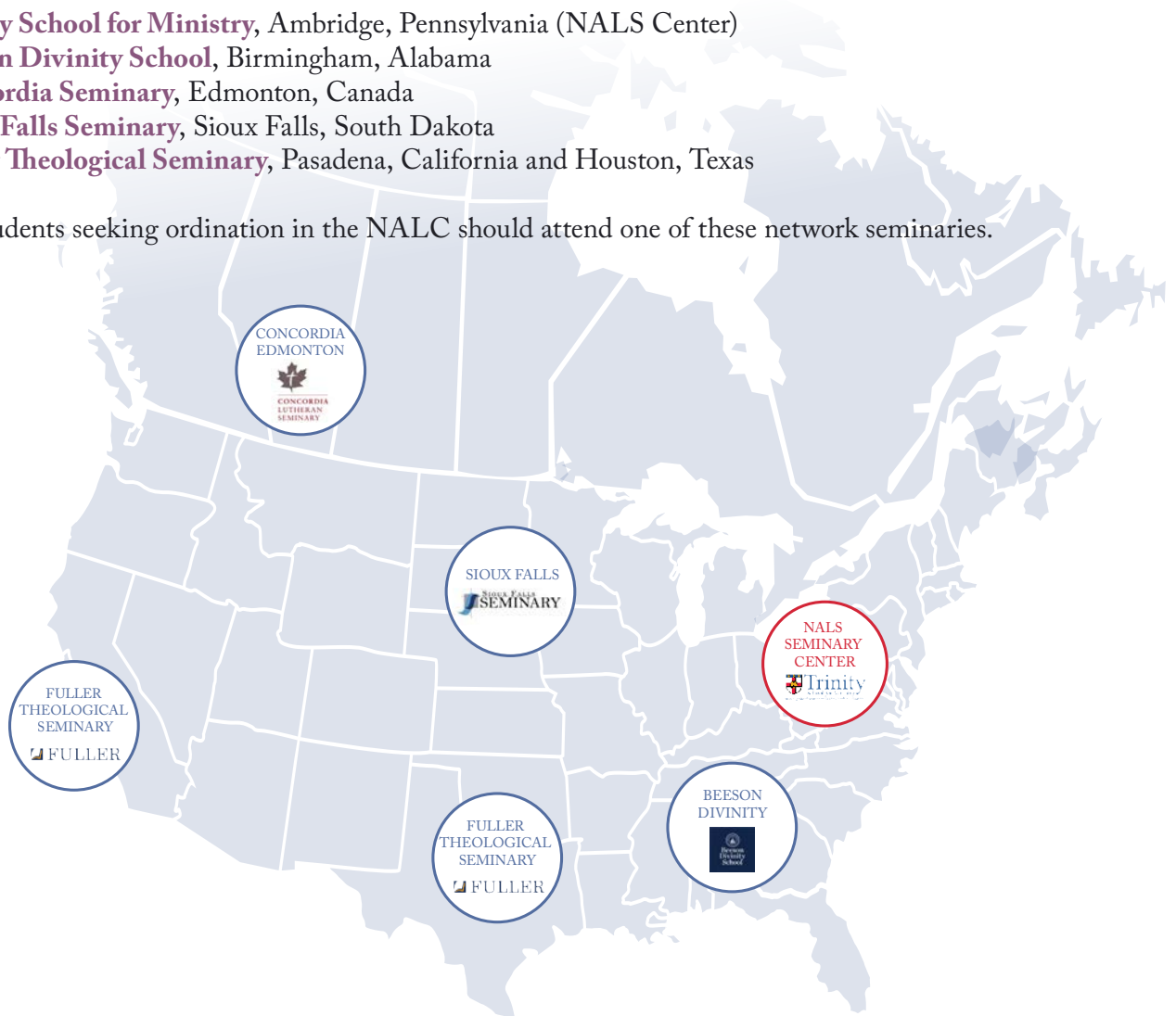
Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, Alabama

Concordia Seminary, Edmonton, Canada

Sioux Falls Seminary, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California and Houston, Texas

All students seeking ordination in the NALC should attend one of these network seminaries.



♦ What About Other Non-network Seminaries?

Some students seeking ordination in the NALC will, for a variety of reasons, choose to attend other seminaries. Students who choose seminaries outside of the NALS network may not be eligible for financial aid. Also, students should find out if the seminary is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). This accreditation is important for the following reasons:



1. All ATS accredited seminaries must meet strict academic standards.
2. They are independently vetted to ensure that the demands of theological education are maintained.
3. ATS accreditation allows students who choose to do so to go on for further graduate study at the doctoral level.
4. ATS accredited seminaries allow for the transfer of credits to other ATS seminaries.

All students attending non-affiliated and/or non-ATS accredited seminaries must still fulfill all educational requirements of the NALS.

♦ The Lutheran Diploma Program

Some students entering the candidacy process may have already completed all, or a portion of, the M.Div. course work at another seminary. The Diploma in Lutheran Studies (DLS) is designed to help these students take the specific Lutheran courses they may lack. These core Lutheran courses are taught in a yearly rotation and are ATS accredited. For more information about the Lutheran Diploma program please see the NALS website (thenals.org).





◆ Life Together: The Residential Requirement

The NALS is committed to providing seminary education that is academically rigorous and pastorally and spiritually enriching. We want to prepare faithful pastors for the hard, but joyful, work of ministry in a culture that is increasingly distanced from Christ and His Church. Therefore, we want students to experience and be formed by the richness of life together in Christian community through study, prayer, worship, conversation, confession and absolution, and fellowship. We are convinced that pastoral formation and discipleship happen best in the context of Christian community (koinonia). This is why our seminary system includes a requirement for students from the various seminaries to come together for two June one-week intensive courses. This residential requirement takes place on the campus of Trinity School of Ministry (TSM) in Ambridge or at another site approved by the NALS Board of Regents and president. Financial aid is available.

The residential requirement is also important because seminary students are future members of the NALC Ministerium. The Ministerium is the collegial bond of all the ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament of the NALC. The residential requirement provides opportunity for future pastors to know each other and establish friendships. It is required of all NALC seminarians regardless of where and how their primary seminary training takes place.

◆ How to Begin Your Journey

The first steps of your journey are simple:

If you are interested in attending the NALS at Trinity School for Ministry, you can apply directly to TSM (tsm.edu). The application process will include a Zoom meeting with the NALS president and/or NALS faculty.

If you plan to attend one of the other network seminars go to the NALS website (thenals.org) and click the “Find Your Calling” tab. You will be asked to provide two letters of recommendation and a 5-7 page spiritual autobiography. Once we receive this information someone will contact you to arrange a Zoom meeting. This meeting is to answer your questions and help you to discern a call and how best to prepare for ministry.





◆ Financial Aid

After you are admitted into one of the NALS network seminaries you will be eligible for financial aid for two semesters of study. During those two semesters students meet with the NALC's Candidacy Committee to continue the "discernment of call" process. Continued financial aid is dependent upon successfully being "entranced" into the candidacy process.

◆ Concluding Comments

It is the fervent hope and prayer of the NALS that we provide a system of theological education which forms pastors to serve faithfully and with excellence. Pastors are to be disciples who are committed to the task of making disciples. All questions should be directed to the seminary center (nalsadmin@tsm.edu).

For more information, contact:

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