



Keystone
CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Keystone Academy for Ministry Annual Catalogue 2026-2027



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Welcome Message



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the NEW Keystone Academy for Ministry Catalogue! The Academy is a spiritual and educational program of the Keystone Conference of the United Church of Christ that prepares women and men for service in local churches. Lay preachers, Members in Discernment, Ministers seeking Continuing Education, Bible study teachers, and church governing board members may all be interested in our offerings. Run under the authority of the Keystone Conference, the Academy provides courses in Biblical Studies, Theology, Worship and Preaching, Church History and United Church of Christ Covenant and Polity. This catalogue outlines educational opportunities for clergy and lay persons in the Academic Year of 2026-2027. If God is calling you to a deeper walk of faith or “to make this faith [your] own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God,” [from the UCC Constitution] you might discern that the Keystone Academy is for you.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Joseph Hedden, Dean
Hills.church.3618@gmail.com
412-956-5252



The vision of the Keystone Academy is: To know God and to be known by God in Christ Jesus.





TUITION & COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY

Tuition

The tuition for a student of the Keystone Academy has not been set at the time of printing. Payments should be made to the Keystone Conference by December 31st of each academic year. Payment should be addressed as follows:

Keystone Conference

PO Box 6625, Harrisburg, PA 17112

Students will be expected to purchase books or instructional materials. Students may wish to seek funding assistance from their home church or association. A student exploring the Academy may attend one weekend session free of charge. After this, tuition payments are expected. Please contact the Dean for scholarship questions.

Committees on Ministry

The Application and Credentialing of all students takes place through the Association Committees on Ministry. Please submit the application found on the last page of this Catalogue to the chairperson of your Association Committee on Ministry.

Completion of the full four-year course of the Academy will result in a Certificate of Completion being issued; the Academy does not guarantee nor grant credentialing. Questions of Licensing, Commissioning and credentialing in the United Church of Christ are the responsibility of the Associations. Please be in direct and frequent covenantal contact with the Committee on Ministry of your Association regarding your discernment status.

Audit & Continuing Education

Audit Option

The Keystone Academy offers an audit option for those who would like to get some Continuing Education or have interest in a particular topic but do not wish to take the complete course offerings. Auditors will have access to four class lessons in a specific subject area (ie. Worship & Preaching or Old Testament) during the academic year. Auditors will not be expected to turn in assignments but are welcome to participate in classroom discussion, etc. . So if you would like to hear what is new in the field of Preaching or have trouble remembering the difference between John Calvin and John Knox, call the Dean, Joseph Hedden at (412)-956-5252 now!

 ***The United Church of Christ
acknowledges as its sole head,
Jesus Christ, Son of God and
Savior.***



2025-2026 Faculty



The Rev. Dr. Bonnie Bates

Instructor of Covenant and Polity
revdrbbates@gmail.com

484-705-3438

Bonnie earned her M.Div. and D. Min from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. She also obtained an Executive Certificate in Gender, Sexual and Racial Justice. She has taught Polity in the New York, Heartland and Penn Northeast Conferences.

The Rev. Joseph Hedden

Instructor in Theology and Dean of the Academy
4915 Sardis Road, Murrysville, PA 15668
hills.church.3618@gmail.com

412-956-5252

Rev. Hedden is pastor of Emmanuel Reformed (Hill's) United Church of Christ in Export and a graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He also has obtained a certificate in Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Leadership from the Pneuma Institute.

The Rev. Ciera James

Instructor in Church History

757-434-5374

Cici James is a graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary where she earned a Master of Divinity and Graduate Certificate in Urban Ministry. She completed the joint degree program and obtained a Masters in Social Work from The University of Pittsburgh simultaneously. She is a licensed social worker and pastor.



2025-2026 Faculty (continued)

The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Lawrence

Instructor in Old Testament & New Testament 716-462-8201
yonatan1970@gmail.com
398 McKinley Avenue, Kenmore, NY 14217

Rev. Dr. Lawrence is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Theology at Canisius University in Buffalo, where he has taught since 2005. He is also the Pastor of St. Peter's United Church of Christ in North Tonawanda, NY. He is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and has traveled in Israel, Jordan, India, and Fiji.

The Rev. Melissa McLean

Instructor in Worship and Preaching 814-706-9930
mclean.melissa.a@gmail.com
707 Follett Run Rd, Warren, PA 16365

Rev. McLean serves as Pastor of Emmaneul UCC (Warren) in the Clarion Association and is an alumna of the Penn West Academy for Ministry. She holds a Master of Divinity with a Chaplaincy Concentration from Chicago Theological Seminary and a Master of Education focused on Adult Learners from Elmira College.

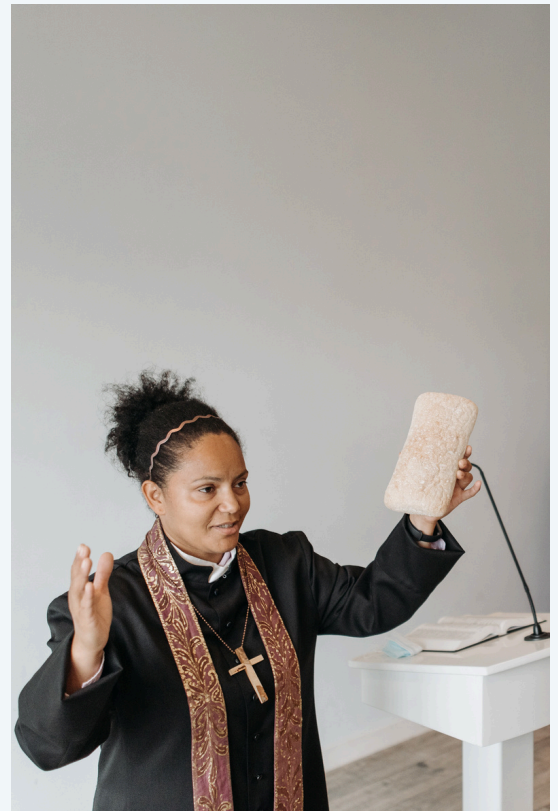
Course Descriptions

Old Testament

In this course, students will survey the Old Testament as they develop critical skills for Biblical interpretation. Strong consideration will be given to historical context as students reflect on how the authors' messages relate to our present time.

New Testament

In this course, students will survey the New Testament as they develop critical skills for Biblical interpretation. Strong consideration will be given to historical context as students reflect on how the authors' messages relate to our present time.



Church History

This course will attempt to answer the question 'Who is Jesus Christ?' from an historical perspective. Students will sail through 2000 years of Christian thought from the close of the Canon until today.

Worship & Preaching

This course offers a comprehensive exploration of the theology behind Christian preaching and worship. We will delve into the liturgical, exegetical, homiletical, theological, and pastoral elements that shape worship and preaching. Students will engage in both practical and didactic assignments designed to deepen their understanding of not just the underlying philosophy, but also the practical application of these practices. *All fourth-year students are required to submit a Worship & Preaching portfolio/project before the final class. With approval from their association advisor, this project may be included in their Members in Discernment portfolio.

UCC Covenant and Polity

Students in this course will discover a deeper understanding and appreciate of the concept of covenant and how it relates to polity and structure in the UCC. Some Church and Ministry Committees may require this course for non-UCC ministers serving in UCC settings. *All fourth year students are required to turn in before the final class a UCC Polity paper that may be included in the portfolio of Members in Discernment, upon the approval of their association advisor.

Theology & Spirituality

Students in the Theology course will be introduced to approaches of theological study of the past and present. As they engage in these studies, students will learn to think and reflect theologically and spiritually. **All fourth year students are required to turn in before the final class a theology paper that may be included in the portfolio of Members in Discernment, upon the approval of their association advisor.

2026-2027 Students

OUR HOSTS:

First Reformed UCC
312 South Maple Avenue
Greensburg PA 15601

Cohort 2027:

Cory Childers: (St. John's UCC, Bedford UCC), 6605 Milligans Cove Road.

814-310-1154

cfc161@icloud.com

Entering Year 4

Dave Creamer: (Unity UCC), Shanksville, Berlin, PA 15530

814-777-2280

dmc159@psu.edu

Entering Year 4

Christina Lonsinger: (Faith UCC, Altoona) 3 Duff Drive Altoona PA 16602

814-650-9486

christinapoppinz@gmail.com

Entering Year 4

Cohort 2028:

Bonnie Skelley: (Faith UCC, Altoona), 405 Clair Street, Altoona, PA 16601

814-505-3208

BSkelley72@gmail.com

Entering Year 3

Brian Woy: (First Ebensburg UCC), 206 Maplebrook Road, Ebensburg 15931

814-248-5182

brianwoy@hotmail.com

Entering Year 3

Hybrid Course Format:

Our courses are offered in a hybrid format. The in-person location is at First Reformed Church in Greensburg. Online participation is not only accepted but encouraged. In addition, Course instructors are working on providing asynchronous lessons for some sections of courses, which can be watched at the students' leisure.



2026-2027 Special Block



Elevate your People Skills through S. A. Shaw Consulting's, Nurture and Grow Workshop.

This specialized emotional intelligence course will empower participants to cultivate deeper self-awareness and resilient, empathetic relationships which are essential foundations for effective leadership and spiritual guidance.

The September 2026 Module is Part One of the four-part emotional intelligence program.

Part One: The Art of Relational Communications. *Grant that I may not so much seek to be...understood as to understand, St. Francis of Assisi*

- ☒ Face-to-Face Communications
 - o Characterize the elements necessary to understand others and to be understood by others
 - o Verbal's, voice tone, inflection, and nonverbals matter more than is imagined
 - o Identify common obstacles
 - o Learn ways to overcome those obstacles
- ☒ Master the keys to empathy and clarity in human connections
 - o Develop an Action Plan
 - o Choose an Accountability Partner

Our Facilitator: **Sandra Shaw** will be the facilitator of the emotional intelligence program. Sandra has presented countless workshops for over 25 years in the areas of interpersonal skills development for a variety of clients in business, government, churches, and nonprofit organizations. She earned a M.A. in Human Resources Management/Labor Relations from St. Francis University, and a B.S. in Human Resources with a focus on Organizational Development from Geneva College.

Course Schedule & Dates

September 11 & 12, 2026

October 9 & 10, 2025

March 12-13, 2027

May 14-15, 2027

The regular schedule for these sessions is as follows:

Evening Classes:	6:00-7:20 PM	Special Block
	7:30-8:50 PM	Church History
Saturday Classes:	8:00-9:20 AM	Theology & Spirituality
	9:30-10:50 AM	Worship & Preaching
	11:00AM-12:20 PM	Hebrew Bible
	12:20-1:30 PM	Lunch
	1:30-2:50 PM	New Testament
	3:00-4:20 PM	Covenant & Polity

All regular sessions are held at First Reformed United Church of Christ, 312 S. Maple Street, Greensburg, PA, 15601. The Church is located at the corner of Third and South Maple Avenues. *These schedules may change at any time.*

2026-2027 Application



Auditors: Fill out the application below and send to Joseph Hedden, 3618 Hills Church Road, Murrysville, PA 15668. Email: hills.church.3618@gmail.com. (You do not need to complete the same steps as full load students.)

Full-load students: Submit this application to the chairperson of your Association Church and Ministry and to Joseph Hedden, Dean, along with the following: 1) A written recommendation from your home church; 2) Three letters of reference (see below; including one from your pastor); 3) Proof of high school education; and 4) A short written statement about your sense of call to ministry.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Occupation: _____

Local Church Membership: _____

Educational Background: _____

Church Activities: _____

Pastor's Reference & Contact Information: _____

Business Reference & Contact Information: _____

Character Reference & Contact Information: _____

After submitting this application and its supporting documentation, you will be asked to meet with your Association Committee on Ministry. Additionally, you are encouraged as a first step to work with your congregation to form a discernment committee. See the Manual on Ministry, <https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Local-Church-Discernment-Committee-Best-Practices.pdf>

Please Note: This application will be shared with the Conference Committee on Ministry as well as the Academy Faculty.