



# THE MASTER'S SEMINARY

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## PLAN FOR IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

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**Institutional Mission:** Through an advanced academic program prioritizing biblical authority and local church discipleship, The Master's Seminary trains men for pastoral ministry—to preach the Word of God, reach the world for Christ, and teach others to do the same.

**Relationship to Grace Community Church:** The Master's University and Seminary is a ministry approved by the Board of Elders of Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California, with a line of spiritual authority established and maintained by a representative on The Master's University and Seminary Board. (TMUS *Bylaws*, 2.2)

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Master's Seminary intends to offer in-person instruction on the campus of Grace Community Church during the Spring 2021 semester. Our commitment to doing so is motivated by our mission, which prioritizes a kind of personal discipleship and life-on-life fellowship that cannot be replicated adequately in a purely online learning environment.

We are also committed to care for the health and safety of our students. This document provides a summary overview of the guidelines and procedures the Seminary is implementing in an effort to comply with the recommendations published by the Center for Disease Control with regard to Institutions of Higher Education.<sup>1</sup>

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## ESSENTIAL TRAINING

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Governmental guidance concerning the operation of institutions and businesses during the pandemic has included an exemption for efforts to support essential workplace activities. The State of California permits institutions that “support essential workplace activities” to continue to provide in-person training and education.<sup>2</sup> The State defines the “essential workforce” to include:

“Workers and instructors supporting academies and training facilities and courses for the purpose of graduating students and cadets that comprise the essential workforce for all identified critical sectors.”<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, California also identifies clergy as part of the essential workforce.<sup>4</sup> The Seminary agrees that Christian pastors and counselors provide essential services, by delivering the hope of the gospel and by helping people navigate the duress caused by the current health crisis. In times of fear and uncertainty, members of the clergy function as first responders to meet the spiritual, mental, and emotional needs of the moment.

Because The Master's Seminary exists to train men for pastoral ministry (e.g. to produce graduates who are members of the clergy), and because clergy comprise an essential part of the workforce, the seminary is exempt from closing in-person classes. Personal interaction is essential to our educational model, which places a priority on both pastoral discipleship and biblical fellowship.

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### RETURNING TO CAMPUS

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Pastoral training is most effectively delivered in person. Accordingly, our desire is for our students to be on campus, either in Los Angeles or at one of our Distance Locations. The dynamics of campus life, including personal interaction with professors, the use of the library, the development of spiritual and ministry skills in a hands-on setting, and the camaraderie of being part of a cohort, cannot be effectively replicated at home with a screen. For this reason, we seek to deliver this training on our campus, doing so in ways that prioritize the safety of our student body and that comply with the protocols established by the CDC.

At the same time, we recognize some students may find themselves or their families in situations where coming on campus may not be advisable due to health concerns. Students in such situations should contact the seminary. The seminary will work to accommodate students in such situations, so that students are able to continue their studies without significant interruption.

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### PERSONAL HEALTH AND SYMPTOM SELF-CHECKS

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It is essential that each member of the campus community take precautions and preventative measures to care for the wellbeing of others. These measures include the following:

1. **Performing Self-Screening** – Students, faculty, and staff are instructed to perform a daily self-screen using #CampusClear for any potential symptoms related to COVID-19. Members of the campus community who exhibit symptoms of illness are not permitted to participate in class or other on-campus activities.
2. **Practicing Protective Measures** – Members of the campus community are encouraged to exercise good health practices, including regular hand washing, properly covering coughs and sneezes, and keeping surfaces clean and sanitary.

3. **Knowing Your Symptoms**– In practicing self-screening and personal preventative measures, it is important to understand the possible symptoms of COVID-19, in contrast to influenza, the common cold, and allergies. Common symptoms of each are outlined below:

#### COVID-19

- Fever (temperature above 100.4 degrees)
- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Symptoms appear 2–14 days after exposure

#### Influenza

- fever or feeling feverish/chills\*
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- headaches
- fatigue (tiredness)
- *\*It is important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.*

#### Common cold

- sore throat
- runny nose
- coughing
- sneezing
- headaches
- body aches

#### Allergies

- itchy, runny, or blocked nose
  - sneezing
  - itchy, red, watery eyes
  - wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, cough
- **Important Note:** Each student is required to self-monitor his health for potential symptoms on a daily basis. By coming to the seminary, each student affirms that he meets the minimum health guidelines set forth in this document and posted on our campus.

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#### ISOLATING AT HOME

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- Students who begin to feel ill, or who exhibit any symptoms of illness during the semester, will be required to self-isolate at home and seek medical attention, as necessary.

- In such cases, students should contact the TMUS Office of Health Services, either by phone (661-362-2510) or by email ([covidcare@masters.edu](mailto:covidcare@masters.edu)). The Health Center is equipped to advise students while also protecting their privacy.<sup>5</sup>
- Anyone exhibiting COVID-like symptoms may not return to campus until they have met the CDC's criteria for discontinuing home isolation. Those criteria can be found at the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html>
- Additionally, before returning to campus, students must obtain permission to return from the Office of Health Services (see contact information above).
- While recovering at home, students may continue with their classes using a hybrid modality (via platforms like Zoom or Teams). Alternatively, they can make up late work after the semester ends, in keeping with the seminary's current Incomplete Policy. It is the student's responsibility to communicate with each professor. The TMS faculty has been instructed to provide leniency and flexibility to students in such situations.
- The CDC offers the following guidelines to administrators at institutions of higher learning:
  - "Students, faculty, and staff should stay home when they have tested positive for or are showing symptoms of COVID-19."
  - "Students, faculty, and staff who have recently had a close contact with a person with COVID-19 should also stay home and monitor their health."

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#### COMMUNICATING WITH TMS

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We encourage students to reach out to the seminary if they have questions or concerns. Our COVID-19 point person at TMS is Isaias Munoz, who serves as the Staff Services Coordinator and Human Resources liaison. He can be reached at [imunoz@tms.edu](mailto:imunoz@tms.edu).

As noted above, students can also reach out to the Office of Health Services at The Master's University, either by phone (661-362-2510) or by email ([covidcare@masters.edu](mailto:covidcare@masters.edu)).

- The seminary is committed to protecting the privacy of its faculty, staff, and students. All communications related to personal health will be strictly protected in keeping with applicable laws and the seminary's privacy policies.

- As noted above, if a student needs to miss class due to health-related concerns, it is the student's responsibility to communicate with each professor. Students who need assistance in that regard are encouraged to contact the Dean of Students Office.
- Flexibility and leniency will be given to students who need to be absent from class for reasons related to COVID-19. The CDC's guideline on this point is clear:
  - "Leave and excused absence policies should be flexible, not be punitive to people for taking time off and should allow sick employees and students to stay home and away from others. Leave and excused absence policies should also account for employees and students who need to stay home with their children if there are school or childcare closures, or to care for sick family members."

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SEMINARY BUILDING, CLASSROOMS, AND CHAPEL

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The following list reflects protocols being implemented for the seminary building and classroom spaces.

- As already noted,, students who feel uncomfortable or are unable to come to campus due to health concerns may continue their studies in a remote fashion (per the instructions outlined above).
- For students who attend in person classes, classroom assignments have been adjusted to accommodate the need for physical distancing.
- Desk and table surfaces will be disinfected regularly to maintain a clean environment.
- Cleaning supplies will be made available to students in class, to wipe their desk area before and after using it. Per the CDC recommendation:
  - "Encourage students, faculty, and staff to keep their personal items (e.g., cell phones, other electronics) and personal work and living spaces clean. Encourage students, faculty, and staff to use disinfectant wipes to wipe down shared desks, lab equipment, and other shared objects and surfaces before use."
- Per CDC guidelines, students should avoid sharing "electronic devices, books, pens, and other learning aids," or anything else that might potentially transfer the COVID-19 virus.
- Health notices and guidelines will be posted in the seminary building to remind students of relevant protocols and procedures.

- Hand sanitizer will be made readily available on campus.
- At the start of the semester, students will need to sign a release of liability waiver, acknowledging that they are aware of potential risks and appropriate health protocols.
- Tuesday chapel worship services will be held in (a) the Worship Center, (b) the outdoor tent, or (c) the Family Center to provide students with additional space for physical distancing.
- In light of CDC recommendations, the seminary will maintain a supply of available facemasks for students who request them.
- Students should be aware that protocols may change during the course of the semester, depending on how the current health situation continues to develop.

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#### FACULTY & STAFF

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The following list reflects protocols being implemented for TMS faculty and staff:

- A key priority for the seminary is the health and safety of its faculty, staff, and students. The seminary will pursue alternative teaching options for faculty who deem themselves at risk.
- Faculty are instructed to grant leniency and maximum flexibility to students, especially those who are unable to attend in person or who fall behind on course work due to health-related circumstances. The seminary will endeavor to provide continuity of instruction for students who are unable to attend class in person.
- TMS Staff who deem themselves at risk are able to work from home.
- TMS Staff who work from the seminary building have been instructed to follow the directives and guidelines as issued by the TMUS Human Resources Department. Employees are responsible to familiarize themselves with institutional regulations.
- Staff members who begin to feel ill, or who exhibit symptoms of illness, will be required to self-isolate at home and seek medical attention, as needed. If they exhibit symptoms of COVID-19, they will not be allowed to return to work until they meet the CDC guidelines for discontinuing self-quarantine.

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TRUSTING THE LORD

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The challenges presented by the current health crisis also represent significant opportunities, especially for men training to be pastors.

- **An opportunity to trust the Lord.** In times of uncertainty, including health pandemics, Scripture calls us to trust the Lord and not grow anxious (cf. Matt. 6:25–34; Phil. 4:6–7). The current situation provides an opportunity to walk in faith rather than fear, entrusting our lives to the Great Physician.
- **An opportunity to preach the gospel.** The world around us is gripped by the fear of death, as evidenced by the public response to this current pandemic. As believers, seasons like this remind us of the brevity of life and the critical importance of eternal life. A global health crisis provides a compelling context for gospel proclamation (1 Peter 3:15).
- **An opportunity to train for times of crisis.** As noted at the beginning of this document, clergy are part of the essential workforce, functioning as first responders by providing spiritual, emotional, and mental care to people in times of crisis. To discontinue their training during such a crisis would be a disservice, both to our students and to those they are called to serve. This current season offers our students the ability to train in “war-time” conditions; giving them a clearer sense of the shepherding challenges they will face as ministers of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 4:1–5; 1 Peter 5:1–4)..

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24–25)*

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**Sources:**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html#housing>

<sup>2</sup> <https://covid19.ca.gov/education/#:~:text=In-person%20higher%20education%20should,instruction%20for%20the%20essential%20workforce.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://covid19.ca.gov/essential-workforce/>. See section 8, paragraph 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. See section 8, paragraph 16.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.masters.edu/health-services/>