Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is an integral part of the chaplaincy curriculum at Ashland Theological Seminary (ATS). Each chaplaincy student is required to take a basic unit of CPE (400 field hours). The basic unit substitutes for the field study requirement found in other professional degrees. Typically, a CPE unit is taken at a hospital. On some occasions, a student may take a CPE unit in another setting.

What is CPE?
According to the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education:
“[CPE] is interfaith professional education for ministry. It brings theological students and ministers of all faiths into a supervised encounter with persons in crisis. Out of an intense involvement with persons in need, and the feedback from peers and teachers, students develop new awareness of themselves as persons and of the needs of those to whom they minister. From theological reflection on specific human situations, they gain a new understanding of ministry. Within the interdisciplinary team process of helping persons, they develop skills in interpersonal and interprofessional relationships.” Association of Clinical Pastoral Education at http://www.acpe.edu/studentsfaq.html (accessed Jan. 27, 2014).

A CPE placement will require the performance of ministry, reflection on ministry performed, peer review via small group interaction with a verbatim, one-on-one time with the CPE supervisor, and 100 hours of didactic training related to a variety of ministry topics (e.g., grief and dying, family system theory, or cultural issues in ministry).

Why does Ashland Theological Seminary include CPE as a requirement for the Chaplaincy degree?
Through a real life learning lab with supervision and feedback, CPE helps students develop a professional identity as a chaplain as well as, interpersonal skills, and ministry competencies. Also, the majority of chaplain jobs require that applying candidates complete CPE training. In fact, it is an industry standard. Even in settings that do not require CPE training, the completion of CPE training makes the candidate more competitive. In essence, the completion of CPE helps a student get a chaplaincy job upon graduation.

What is Board Certification?
The Association of Professional Chaplains (APC) offers nationally recognized board certification through the Board of Chaplaincy Certification, Inc. Board certification is annotated by “BCC,” e.g., the Rev. Jane Doe, BCC. Associate certification is annotated by “ACC.” Associate Certification (ACC) only requires the completion of two units of CPE and 48 hours of seminary education.

“Board certification is the process by which candidates demonstrate their competence, qualifications and ability to function as a professional chaplain. One purpose of board certification is to assure the public and the employing organization that the chaplain has met established national standards for professional competence, and is held to a code of ethics. A second purpose is to promote the continuing education and development of certified spiritual care providers.” Board of Chaplaincy Certification, Inc. at http://bcci.professionalchaplains.org//Files/benefits_of_bcc.pdf (accessed Jan. 27, 2014)

Most chaplain employers require either board certification or eligibility for certification. Board certification is the gold standard in chaplaincy. As such, the chaplaincy degree at ATS encourages students to become board certified.

How can I take CPE at ATS?
ATS does not offer CPE training. Rather, our students take CPE training through certified CPE sites. Students should speak with the Director of the Chaplaincy Program at ATS for additional site information and guidance. In order to receive academic credit and a grade for the completed CPE unit, the student must submit a copy of the supervisor’s evaluation, the certificate of completion, and pay tuition. Fees paid to the CPE site will be deducted from the tuition costs. Upon consultation with the student, the ATS professor of record will submit the final grade. A CPE unit may be taken as pass/fail. The Director of the Chaplaincy Program at ATS serves as the professor of record.
Even though ATS requires that a chaplaincy student complete a basic unit of CPE in order to graduate, it does not require that the CPE unit be taken while the student is matriculated at ATS. Additionally, it does not require that it be taken for academic credit. If a student has completed a CPE unit(s) before matriculating into the ATS chaplaincy program, the student may receive degree credit for it. In such cases, academic credit will not be given unless the student asks that it be given. If a CPE unit is completed but not used for academic credit, the student will need to take another chaplaincy elective in order to earn the necessary hours to complete the degree. Under some circumstances, a current student may desire to complete the CPE unit for degree credit but not take it for academic credit. In such cases, the student will not pay tuition for the CPE and the CPE will appear as N/C (Non-credit) on the student’s transcripts.

What is the difference between an Extended Basic Unit and a Summer Intensive Unit?
A student may choose to fulfill the CPE requirement via an extended part-time CPE program or a summer intensive program. CPE sites vary on some placement specifics. Typically, an extended unit will require 18 weeks and include four hours of group work one morning per week, one hour of individual supervision weekly, 10-17 hours of clinical experience weekly, and on-call experience at the placement site. An extended unit is the more easily secured since summer intensives fill up quickly. However, it may conflict with other classes. Nonetheless, it is a good option for working students and parents who cannot do a full-time internship.

An intensive summer unit will normally take 10 weeks and require the following weekly tasks: six hours of group work, one hour of individual supervision, 33 hours of clinical experience, and on-call experience at the site assigned. The summer intensive is the preferred method for most students.

If a student wants to apply for a summer internship, he should submit his application in the fall before November. Some chaplaincy students may wish to take the basic unit the summer before they matriculate into the chaplaincy program at ATS. If a chaplaincy student has not completed a basic unit of CPE before graduation, the student will not be allowed to graduate. Under exceptional circumstances, the Director of the Chaplaincy Program, and the Associate Dean for Academic Advising and Scheduling may grant a waiver to this requirement. Denials may be appealed to the Academic Dean.

What is a CPE Residency?
A residency is full-time work for 52 weeks. It will pay a stipend and offer benefits. A student may do a residency at any CPE site in American and Canada. For example, a student could do his residency in Hawaii. Hospitals like residency programs because a resident chaplain does the work of a chaplain at a fraction of the cost. Also, residencies often provide personal contacts that lead to full-time jobs. In order to qualify for a residency, a student needs to complete a basic unit. Under rare circumstances, a student will be offered a residency before completing the basic unit. This may happen when a placement site needs to fill a vacancy in their residency program. If the residency program only offers three units of credit for a one year residency, the student will still have to take a fourth unit to qualify for board certification. If the residency gives four units of credit, the student will not have to take an additional unit of CPE. The vast majority of students will have to take a basic unit before applying for a residency.

How does one earn additional units of CPE required for Board Certification?
Board certification requires the completion of four units of CPE. There are three ways to earn the additional three CPE units. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

- First, a student may complete the basic CPE unit, graduate from ATS, and move into a CPE residency program before seeking a full-time job. This is the standard approach.
- Second, a student may complete part of their chaplaincy curriculum at ATS, do a one year residency, and then return to ATS to finish the remaining courses.
• Third, students may complete four CPE units while matriculated at ATS by a combination of summer intensives and extended units.

If a student picks options two or three, the student may substitute the additional three units of CPE for pastoral care electives. ATS will give a maximum of 12 hours of combined credit for CPE. Since the MA in Chaplaincy requires 12 hours of pastoral care electives, the student who completed a residency would only have to take one additional pastoral care elective to graduate.

Options two and three will allow a full-time student to complete the MA in Chaplaincy and the four units of CPE in three years. However, these will require careful academic planning and a summer CPE intensive. Those who pick one of these options should be fully devoted to Seminary education. Those who go the traditional route will take all their pastoral care courses at Ashland Theological Seminary and enter their residency as a Seminary graduate.

Questions about Clinical Pastoral Education?
Please contact Dr. William P. Payne, Director of Chaplaincy Studies at (419) 496-1169 or wpayne@ashland.edu.