

Northeast Ohio School of Ministry (NEOSOM)
Dean's Report
EOA/WRA Annual Meeting
Nov. 3, 2018

One of the most significant accomplishments and challenges for the past year has been the inauguration of the Ordination Track in NEOSOM. This is the by-referral-only track in our program, developed over the course of two years (2015-2017) in response to the 2005 General Synod Ministry Issues Pronouncement. This track is intended to provide basic theological education for persons who feel called to ordained ministry and whose call to that order of ministry has been recognized by their respective Discernment of Call Working Group. For various reasons, these individuals are not pursuing a traditional, three-year Master of Divinity degree in a residential program at an accredited seminary, and our denomination has called for associations and conferences to provide alternative paths to ministry for such individuals. Our first cohort of students has been referred to the track by the Discernment of Call Working Groups of our two associations, and we have been developing individualized plans of study for these Members In Discernment (MIDs), in consultation with their advisers. This is an ongoing work; two students have entered this track as of this writing, and more are expected.

Another major development for NEOSOM was the successful teaching by Brian Burke of our first entirely online course -- Church Administration, offered in the fall term of 2017. Although online instruction is not new for us -- in 2010 we offered students the first opportunity to take a course online (Introduction to Biblical Studies in WRA's Lay School of the Church) -- up to last fall, all of these courses were hybrids, with some students taking the course on line and other students simultaneously taking the course face-to-face with the instructor. Brian's course was the first course in our program in which all the students were on line. Four students -- in Medina, North Canton, Richville, and Bath -- took the course, and their feedback was entirely positive. One student reported that, because of evening caregiver responsibilities with a parent, she would not have been able to take the course had she been required to drive to Wellington to meet at the instructor's location.

Our second entirely online course, Church History 1, was taught last fall by Steve Johnson. As dean of our program, I felt it important to experience online learning from the student's perspective, and so I audited that course (along with two other auditors and two students taking the course for credit), learning a great deal about how to make best use of technology for instructional purposes.

Our third entirely online course, Introduction to Biblical Studies, is currently underway with six students enrolled for credit and one auditor. And another course this term, Evangelism, will include an online component.

Online instruction is clearly the path forward for NEOSOM, the combined program serving both of our associations and formed from the former Partners in Ministry program of EOA and the Lay School of the Church in WRA. We are indebted to the New York School of Ministry, which teaches all of its courses online, for guidance and support as we rely increasingly on remote instruction to make more of our courses available to more students. This orientation toward course delivery will become more significant as conversations about the restructuring of the Ohio Conference, including its various adult lay education programs, move forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene McAfee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Gene McAfee
Dean

21 September 2018
Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist