



UNIVERSITY OF  
ST. THOMAS

Donald S. Nesti, CSSp  
Center for Faith & Culture

## Brief Course Descriptions for Family Life Certificate Program

### **Theological Methods and Reflections:**

In faith and ministerial formation, theological reflection is a foundational skill in processing and integrating life experiences through the lens of faith as experienced in community. This course is an introduction to reflective praxis in theological reflection through collaborative dialogue and written reflection, culminating in the guided construction and presentation of a formal reflection using a four-task approach.

### **Theology of the Human Person:**

This course centers on the dignity of the human person, including consideration of the Biblical foundations of our origin, made in God's image and likeness. It is the vocation to Trinitarian love in imitation of Christ that marks our destiny, and is lived out in family, church and community. Special emphasis will be placed on how the discipleship of man and woman is lived out in the Sacrament of Marriage, an intimate partnership of mutual self-giving.

### **Theology of Marriage:**

The history and development of the Church's understanding and teachings on marriage, of which God is the author, are the focus of this course. The development in understanding of marriage as covenant, sacrament, and vocation in service to communion is central to the call and mission of the Domestic Church. An understanding of the goods of marriage, as well as the quality of freedom required for valid consent to mutual self-giving in marriage will be considered.

### **Theology of Family:**

The theology of the family as the earthly expression of Trinitarian love and the Judeo-Christian tradition of the family are the center of this course. It will explore the history and development of the Church's understanding of the family as a Domestic Church through reflection on the relevant documents of Vatican II and successive papal and USCCB documents, along with the rights of the family in basic principles of Catholic social teaching.

### **Marriage and Family:**

The growth and development of the human person begins in the context of family. The purpose of this course is to understand the need for lifelong formation in the areas of marriage and family life. Preparation for marriage begins in early catechesis, through the immediate preparation prior to the wedding, with follow-up support necessary throughout the life of a marriage and family. Every area of ministry should play a role in this formation and promote understanding of the family as a system of relationships that develop and change over time.

### **The Family Today:**

This course will survey current research and statistics on marriage and family from variety of ecclesial and secular sources. Cultural understanding of the family in growing immigrant populations will be considered. Changing societal trends impacting Church ministry to families including: the variety of structures/forms of marriage and family life today, special needs of vulnerable populations, the increase in childless marriages with concomitant effects in building a healthy society will also be considered.

### **Family Partnerships:**

The place of the family in society across the ages is the focus of this course. In the last century, many family functions have shifted to other institutions, leaving the family dependent on experts in health care, education, recreation, and the protection of children. Pope John Paul II called a Synod to address the family's essential role as "the basic cell of church and society." Pope Francis called another Synod thirty years later, asking once again how we as Church support, strengthen and accompany families through these challenging times. His post synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* articulates the synodal teaching in today's context. The focus of the course will be on the "partnership model" proposed in the U.S. Bishops' document, *A Family Perspective in Church & Society*, and used successfully in a growing number of other institutions such as schools, hospitals, and social welfare agencies.