



Course Syllabus

Title: One Year for the Church

Academic year: 2026/2027

Length: 1 year, 40 weeks

Study pace: 100%

Study time: Daytime

Type of instruction: On-campus with boarding school*

Language of instruction: English and Swedish

Level: Post-Gymnasium

Organizer: Sankt Ignatios Folkhögskola

* There is a non-boarding option as well.

Introduction

One Year for the Church is a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in the life, prayer, and theology of the Orthodox tradition. Over the course of a year, students will explore the foundations of Orthodox faith and practice—learning how to pray, how to participate fully in the liturgical life of the Church, and gaining insight into the theological vision that shapes Orthodox spirituality. Students also receive an introduction to one of the classical languages of the Church, opening the door to its rich historical heritage. More advanced students will have individual language support.

Life on campus is at the heart of the experience. Students live together in community, sharing daily prayers, weekly liturgical services, meals, and fellowship. This shared rhythm of life creates a formative environment where friendships grow, faith deepens, and practical skills for Christian living are developed.

The year concludes with an international journey to an Orthodox country, where students encounter the Church as a living tradition—both in monasteries and in local parish communities. This experience offers a deeper understanding of Orthodoxy across cultures and contexts.

The program begins with a dedicated community-building period, during which students learn to live and work together in harmony, developing habits of cooperation, responsibility, and mutual support.

The course also constitutes the first year in the Pastoral Degree Program, aimed for ministers. The course is also open for non-orthodox, especially for those who want to deepen their understanding of orthodox traditions. After successful completion of this course, students will receive the Parish Assistant certification.



A parish assistant is someone with a theological background who supports the parish by managing ministries and overseeing day-to-day operations.

Applications open on 15 March and remain open until all places are filled.

Overview

The course consists of three sub-courses that run iteratively across four modules, deepening in content and complexity as the year progresses.

	One Year for the Church
Module 1: Aug-Oct	Sub-course 1: Communal Training and Religious Education Immersion into the life of the seminary, with a hike on the trail in Södermanland to begin the process of embodied community formation.
	Sub-course 2: Church Languages with Church Music and Liturgy Students choose a preferred language that they already know or want to learn. They are given the opportunity to participate in the spiritual life of the seminary.
	Sub-course 3: Theology (Apostolic Scriptures) Students build a theological foundation starting with the apostolic scriptures and the vision of Christian faith and practice.
Module 2: Oct-Dec	Sub-course 1: Communal Training and Religious Education The pedagogical platform—the ontological calling to knowledge—is introduced. Together, we learn how to build communities and investigate various methods for how it is done. We also explore various models of organizations, ecclesiastically and according to legal requirements, including archiving and making minutes. We also learn the basics of conflict resolution.
	Sub-course 2: Church Languages with Church Music and Liturgy We continue with pronunciation and reading, with some minor vocabulary. Together, we explore the meaning of worship as primary theology.
	Sub-course 3: Theology (Church History and Patristics) We continue with the church fathers and church mothers, the concept of tradition, and how we can participate in and improve tradition.
Module 3: Jan-Mar	Sub-course 1: Communal Training and Religious Education We begin religious education by uncovering the mission of religious educators: to learn and teach for life. We explore the relationship between the Christian faith and leadership and pedagogy. The mission unfolds as a set of concepts to be further explored: Knowledge formation, Socialization, Meaning-making, and Communication. Through these concepts, we can map and analyze educational processes in everyday and formal contexts. Together, we will also learn the difference between arguing in a



	lecture and preaching in the sermon, both in practice and in theory.
	Sub-course 2: Church Languages with Church Music and Liturgy Now we expand the vocabulary, and for those with previous knowledge in church languages, we start with translational exercises. Together with our seminary instructors and the Senior Lecturer in Liturgical studies, we begin to map the liturgy, understand how it is constructed, and identify the essential parts. For those oriented toward church music, we now partially separate the group.
	Sub-course 3: Theology (Liturgics) The third perspective is the primary theology of the Church and how this differs from systematic explorations of theology (secondary theology). We take a closer look at the understanding of sacraments.
Module 4: April-June	Sub-course 1: Communal Training and Religious Education Based on the map of Religious Education, we compare different didactic methods and disciplines, with a focus on the relationship between teaching and learning, and how concepts are used in various contexts, making a distinction between general and subject-specific didactics.
	Sub-course 2: Church Languages with Church Music and Liturgy Those with previous linguistic skills prepare for an examination, and those who started from scratch will try to read and translate small texts with lexica. Those who orient themselves toward church music will now conduct a full liturgy with their choir mentor. Those more focused on ministry will immerse themselves as servants.
	Sub-course 3: Theology (Ecclesiology) The final perspective will provide an orientation on how the church is organized and how it relates to the public square, but also how canon law works within the various traditions. It will also provide an insight into the meaning of ecclesial self-understanding, the understanding of creation as the first church, how the eucharist makes the church, and how the church is the prime sacrament.

Content

Sub-Course 1: Communal Training and Religious Education

Through communal formation, the course introduces students to what we describe as the ontological calling to knowledge. Theological and spiritual study involves the whole human person; through empathy and humility, we are guided toward transformation — both personal and mutual — within the life of the community. Our fellow human beings become a primary context for this transformation, which, in the Orthodox tradition, takes pre-eminence and constitutes a foundation of Orthodox Christian life and values.



Through a variety of practical methods, students learn how to accompany one another in building supportive communities, as well as how to address injustice and engage in constructive conflict resolution.

Communal formation also includes the practical work of building *One Year for the Church* together, with the international journey serving as a culmination of the community's development. This involves participation in daily seminary life: preparing meals together, welcoming guests, and cultivating a spirit of hospitality. Throughout the year, students also take part in the regular social outreach of the Church.

Each student is assigned an individual mentor who accompanies them throughout the year and serves as a partner in their formation journey.

The Religious Education component of this sub-course develops iteratively across the year. At the beginners level, we begin by uncovering the mission of religious educators; to learn and teach for life. We explore the relationship between the Christian faith and leadership and pedagogy. The mission then unfolds as a set of concepts to be further explored: Knowledge formation, Socialization, Meaning-making, and Communication. Through these concepts we can map and analyze educational processes in everyday and formal contexts.

Building on this foundation, we go on to compare different didactic methods and disciplines, with a focus on the relationship between teaching and learning, and how concepts are used in various contexts, and make a distinction between general and subject-specific didactics. This will enable us to form a deeper understanding of Religious Education that unfolds as two kinds of educational models: religious education in higher education institutions (HEI), with a focus on generating and integrating knowledge, and religious education in institutions for diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI), focused on the ontological calling toward knowledge through empathy and humility.

Sub-Course 2: Church Languages with Church Music and Liturgy

Decoding one of the Church's classical languages is a thrilling experience, opening the door to a new dimension of the Orthodox tradition. Even learning the alphabet is exciting, and as students gradually acquire basic vocabulary, they encounter the life of the Church step by step. For those who already have prior knowledge, the course offers an opportunity to deepen their skills and further develop their linguistic potential.

We offer instruction in Classical Greek, Classical Syriac, Coptic, Ge'ez, and Church Slavonic. Students are grouped according to their level of knowledge, allowing both beginners and more advanced learners to progress appropriately. Language classes are often conducted together with other students at our school who are studying the classical languages, which fosters broader connections and a stronger sense of academic community.

Communal life is shaped by the rhythm of prayer rooted in the Orthodox tradition. Students are invited to pray together throughout the school day and to



participate in liturgical services according to their respective traditions during mornings and weekends.

We celebrate the liturgical life through four seminaries: the Coptic Orthodox Seminary, the Syriac Orthodox Seminary, the Ethiopian Orthodox Seminary, and the Byzantine Orthodox Seminary. Together with instructors, students are guided to discover the depth of their spiritual heritage and to immerse themselves in the liturgical life of the school.

In this context, students encounter what may be called the primary language of the Church — the language of prayer — which differs from the more conceptual language found in systematic theological study. The program also explores how the early Church celebrated the liturgy and how these traditions developed into the forms used today.

In the course of their studies, the students will be able to choose between assisting in services or participating in the choir.

Sub-Course 3: Theology

The course introduces participants to the Orthodox Church's theological foundations through the four interconnected sources of Tradition, which in Tewahedo tradition is equivalent to Arat Ayna, but more aligned with academic disciplines. These sources are the Apostolic Scriptures, Church History and Patristics, Liturgics, and Ecclesiology. By directly engaging with these sources together, participants develop the knowledge and skills needed to continue learning from tradition throughout their lives. The course equips participants with the keys to participate actively in the Church's living witness—understanding how Scripture, the Fathers and Mothers of the Church, liturgical practice, and ecclesiological principles guide Christian life and community discernment. Through the study of diverse Orthodox expressions and engagement with one another, participants gain the capacity to interpret tradition faithfully, integrate tradition in their lives, and apply it within their own contexts, learning to draw on these sources as ongoing sources for understanding faith, navigating pastoral challenges, and contributing to the Church's witness in the world.

Together, participants will build a learning community that explores the following sources of theology:

The Apostolic Scriptures – Canon, Witness, and Tradition

This part of the course examines the formation of the early Church through the Apostolic Scriptures—that is, texts produced during the first centuries of Christianity. These include the Gospels, the Letters of St Paul, and other writings of the New Testament, as well as the earliest works of the Apostolic Fathers—such as Ignatius, Clement, Polycarp, and Papias—and their role in transmitting the faith. We will explore the cradle of Christianity, considering the complex Jewish and Hellenistic contexts in which the Christian movement emerged, including significant developments among Jewish communities in Alexandria.



This part of the course also investigates the earliest interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, together with the processes by which biblical texts were transmitted, translated, and eventually incorporated into the liturgical life of the Church. Students will have the opportunity to study how tradition has been preserved through manuscripts and translations, as well as how these ancient texts continue to be maintained within the living life of the Church today. Various textual traditions will be introduced, including the Syriac Peshitta, the Greek Septuagint, and other historical language traditions such as the Coptic corpus, the Ge'ez corpus, and the Church Slavonic corpus. The course also examines the development of the biblical canon and the ways in which it differs across Christian traditions.

Particular attention is given to the Apostolic Fathers as primary witnesses to early Christian Tradition, including their interpretation of Scripture. We will also explore the broader witness of early Christianity by examining the early Church as a radical community of inclusion, which gave voice to women, enslaved persons, and the poor long before the emergence of modern political rights. Together, we will consider the critical question of whether later expressions of orthodoxy have remained faithful to this early Christian vision. Special attention will be given to often-overlooked voices, including female theologians and spiritual leaders whose contributions were significant for the development of Christianity.

Through engagement with primary texts, patristic commentary, and the history of canonical development, participants will gain an understanding of how Scripture functions within the living Tradition of the Church and how different Orthodox communities have sought to maintain fidelity to the apostolic witness. Together, we will also investigate the foundational principles of early Christianity.

Church History and Patristics

This part of the course traces the development of Christian thought and practice from the apostolic period through the medieval era, examining how the Church Fathers and Church Mothers articulated, defended, and transmitted the faith across diverse cultural contexts and in the face of theological challenges. Particular attention is given not only to the well-known Greek and Latin patristic authorities but also to the rich theological traditions that emerged within Coptic, Syriac, and Ethiopian Christianity. This part of the course recognizes that the transmission of Christian faith was never confined to a single cultural center, but unfolded across interconnected linguistic, geographic, and ecclesial worlds.

Alongside the major Fathers of the Church, the course highlights the contributions of women whose theological insight, ascetical authority, spiritual leadership, and literary creativity played a formative role in Christian tradition. These include female martyrs, monastics, mystics, theologians, hymnographers, royal patrons, and teachers whose influence extended across Byzantine, Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopian contexts. Figures such as Macrina the Younger, Melania the Elder and Younger, Syncletica of Alexandria, Perpetua and Felicity, Theodora of Alexandria, Kassia the Hymnographer, and royal Ethiopian and Byzantine women are studied as part of the broader theological landscape of the Church.



Participants engage with primary patristic sources—including writings on Christology, pneumatology, sacramentology, ascetical theology, and biblical interpretation—while also examining texts associated with women, such as martyr narratives, monastic sayings, letters, visionary accounts, liturgical poetry, and hagiographical traditions. Special attention is given to the Desert traditions of Egypt and Syria, where both men and women shaped early monastic theology and practice, and where the Sayings of the Desert Mothers stand alongside those of the Desert Fathers as witnesses to early Christian spirituality.

This part of the course explores key historical periods and councils that shaped Orthodox identities, including the Trinitarian and Christological controversies and the Iconoclastic period, while also considering how these debates were received differently within Byzantine, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Ethiopian (Tewahedo) traditions. Students examine how theological disagreements led to the formation of distinct ecclesial families, while also recognizing the shared spiritual and doctrinal heritage that continued across traditions.

Particular emphasis is placed on Syriac Christianity as a bridge between Greek and Semitic worlds, including the theological poetry of figures such as Ephrem the Syrian and the development of symbolic and liturgical theology. The course also explores the Coptic theological heritage rooted in Alexandrian Christianity, monasticism, and martyrdom spirituality, as well as the Ethiopian Tewahedo tradition, with its distinctive biblical and patristic canon, liturgical life, monastic movements, royal theology, and longstanding integration of Christianity within African cultural contexts. The role of women within these traditions—whether as ascetics, patrons, saints, or transmitters of tradition—is examined with attention to both historical evidence and theological interpretation.

This part of the course further considers how gender, holiness, asceticism, and authority intersected within late antique and medieval Christianity, exploring how female sanctity was constructed, narrated, and transmitted. Attention is given to imperial and royal women, monastic founders, spiritual mothers, and lay patrons who exercised influence through networks of hospitality, education, manuscript production, and ecclesial patronage.

Through study of patristic thought, ecclesiastical history, and the witness of both men and women across multiple Christian traditions, participants develop the capacity to understand how tradition emerges through the living experience of the Church. The Fathers and Mothers together provide models for faithful engagement with Scripture, theological reflection, and contemporary context, demonstrating that the transmission of Christian faith has always been a collaborative, intercultural, and embodied process within the whole people of God.

Liturgics

This part of the course examines the Orthodox liturgical tradition as the living expression of ecclesiological vision and theological understanding. Participants



study the structure, theology, and historical development of the Divine Liturgy alongside other sacramental and liturgical practices, exploring how worship embodies, transmits, and makes present the faith of the Church. The course emphasizes that Orthodox theology is not primarily abstract or systematic, but doxological—emerging from prayer, hymnography, sacramental participation, and the communal life of worship.

This part of the course traces the evolution of liturgical texts and practices across different Orthodox traditions, including Byzantine, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and Ethiopian (Tewahedo) contexts, considering how liturgy functions both as theological articulation and formative spiritual practice. Attention is given to the historical formation of euchological texts, anaphoras, hymnographic traditions, and the liturgical calendar, as well as to the ways local cultures shaped the expression of worship while preserving continuity with apostolic tradition.

A central component of the sub-course is the study of hagiography as a liturgical and theological genre. Saints' lives are examined not merely as historical narratives but as texts deeply embedded within the worshipping life of the Church, shaping feasts, hymnography, iconography, and devotional practice. Participants explore how hagiographical traditions communicate theological anthropology, models of holiness, ascetic ideals, and ecclesial identity, and how the commemoration of saints within the liturgical year forms Christian memory and spiritual imagination. Particular attention is given to the development of martyr cults, monastic saints, holy fools, hierarchs, and royal saints across Orthodox traditions.

This part of the course also integrates female perspectives within liturgical theology and practice, examining the roles of women as participants, patrons, ascetics, hymnographers, and saints within the worshipping community. Special attention is given to female sanctity as expressed through liturgical texts, including hymns composed by women such as Kassia, narratives of female martyrs and monastics, and the commemoration of women saints within the calendar of the Church. The course explores how women's experiences of asceticism, suffering, motherhood, leadership, and spiritual authority are reflected in liturgical commemoration and how female figures contribute to the Church's understanding of holiness, embodiment, and salvation.

Spirituality is approached as inseparable from liturgy, with emphasis on how participation in the services of the Church shapes Christian identity, perception, and transformation. Participants examine the relationship between liturgical prayer and personal ascetic practice, including fasting, confession, almsgiving, vigils, and the Jesus Prayer, as well as the theological meaning of sacramental life as participation in divine grace. The course explores how liturgical rhythms—daily offices, weekly cycles, festal seasons, and sacramental rites—form the spiritual life of believers across different cultural contexts.

Attention is also given to the sensory and embodied dimensions of Orthodox worship, including iconography, chant, incense, gesture, space, and procession, as



well as the theological anthropology underlying these practices. The integration of theology, aesthetics, and spirituality is examined as a distinctive feature of Orthodox liturgical life, demonstrating how doctrine is experienced and internalized through participation rather than solely through intellectual formulation.

Through engagement with patristic commentary, liturgical texts, hymnography, hagiography, and historical sources, participants develop an understanding of how the liturgy preserves apostolic tradition, shapes Christian formation, and reflects the Church's response to cultural and spiritual contexts. This part of the course ultimately presents the services of the Church as a dynamic environment in which theology, spirituality, memory, and communal identity converge, revealing liturgy as both the source and expression of Orthodox Christian life.

Ecclesiology

This part of the course examines the Orthodox Church's self-understanding as the continuing "Communion of the Holy Spirit" (cf. 2 Cor. 13:13), exploring the relationship between the Church's ontological connection with the world and its mission into the world. Participants study foundational ecclesiological sources, including patristic writings, conciliar canons, canonical commentaries, and the principle of *oikonomia* (economy)—the pastoral capacity to apply canonical tradition according to concrete circumstances. This part of the course emphasizes ecclesiology not merely as institutional theory but as a lived theological reality manifested in sacramental life, community structures, and pastoral practice.

The course traces how different Orthodox traditions—including Byzantine, Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopian (Tewahedo) Churches—have developed and applied ecclesiological principles across diverse historical and cultural contexts. Particular attention is given to how authority is structured and exercised, how canonical norms are interpreted, and how communities have responded to pastoral challenges while maintaining continuity with apostolic tradition. This part of the course pays attention to how various traditions through time have related to the public square, and how the role of the church has developed over time.

A significant component of this part of the course explores the roles of women within the organizational life of the Church, both historically and in contemporary contexts. Participants examine the presence and functions of women in early Christian communities, including deaconesses, widows, monastic leaders, patrons, educators, and spiritual mothers, and consider how these roles were recognized, regulated, or limited within canonical tradition. The study includes examination of canonical sources concerning women—such as regulations related to marriage, monastic life, ordination-related ministries, ascetic commitments, and participation in sacramental and communal life—while also analyzing how such norms were interpreted differently across regions and historical periods.

This part of the course investigates the historical institution of the female diaconate within Eastern Christianity, exploring its liturgical, pastoral, and charitable functions, its canonical foundations, and its theological significance



within ecclesiology. Attention is also given to women's leadership within monastic structures, where abbesses often exercised significant administrative, spiritual, and economic authority, sometimes comparable to episcopal oversight within their communities. These examples provide insight into alternative forms of ecclesial authority that existed alongside hierarchical clerical structures. Participants also consider how women have influenced ecclesial life through less formal but equally significant channels, including royal and imperial patronage, philanthropic initiatives, education, manuscript preservation, and spiritual mentorship. The course examines how these contributions shaped ecclesiastical institutions, doctrinal reception, and canonical practice, even when women did not hold formal clerical office.

This part of the course further engages contemporary theological discussions concerning women and ecclesiology within Orthodox Christianity, including debates on ministry, participation, authority, and the interpretation of canonical tradition in modern contexts. Through examination of the principle of *oikonomia*, students explore how pastoral flexibility has historically allowed adaptation to new circumstances and how similar principles may inform present-day questions. By studying ecclesiology through patristic sources, canonical tradition, historical case studies, and diverse Orthodox experiences, participants develop a nuanced understanding of how the Church understands itself as both divine communion and historical institution. This part of the course highlights that ecclesial structures and canonical life have always been shaped by the participation of the whole people of God—men and women alike—and that the Church's mission in the world continues to emerge through this dynamic interaction between tradition, context, and lived experience.

Learning outcomes

Upon completion of the course, the participants are (individually and collectively) expected to be able to:

- understand Orthodox theological sources—Scripture, liturgy, patristics, and ecclesiology—as living traditions that emerge through collective witness and encounter across diverse contexts
- engage with Orthodox sources through dialogue and shared reflection, developing capacity to interpret tradition in relation to contemporary questions while maintaining connection to apostolic foundations
- draw on theological understanding to navigate pastoral issues and ecclesiological challenges, applying canonical wisdom contextually while taking shared responsibility for community discernment
- proactively contribute to the life and development of their local ecclesial communities and social contexts
- apply democratic educational leadership principles and practices with competence and confidence
- analyze and adapt folkbildning concepts and methods to diverse local educational contexts
- implement democratic and collaborative learning approaches effectively in educational settings



- demonstrate restorative education techniques and practices in teaching and learning environments
- address diverse educational contexts with cultural sensitivity, including trauma-informed approaches to education
- design comprehensive course materials and learning experiences that foster democratic processes and enhance self-awareness at both individual and group levels.

Learning Approach

At Sankt Ignatios Folkhögskola, the overarching principle that guides learning is that all knowledge is intersubjective.

Knowledge *is* dialogue, which requires humility and empathy.

This course is built on collaborative and dialogical learning where participants actively shape not only their common learning journey but also the course itself. The content, materials, and methods will be adapted in real time based on participants' needs, interests, and input. Beyond mastering subject matter, a central goal is for each participant to become aware of how shared learning experiences and dialogue transform their thinking, practice, and identity. Through dialogue, narrative, group discussions, shared reflection, creative expression, and collective exploration, participants develop awareness of their own growth while supporting others' development. The learning community becomes a space where everyone's experiences and questions not only enrich understanding but actively guide the direction of the course, helping each person to integrate learning into their own life context in meaningful, personally transformative ways.

Other requirements

Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to participate in all course activities, both by being present and playing an active role in scheduled sessions and by completing assignments outside of scheduled lessons. If participants miss lessons, they may be required to complete extra assignments to fulfill the participation requirements of the course. For the course to be considered completed, 80% attendance and participation are required.

The syllabus was approved by the Dean's Council on February 26, 2025.

The syllabus was revised by the Dean's Council on December 3, 2025.

The syllabus was revised by the Dean's Council on February 25, 2026.