



**WISCONSIN  
CONFERENCE**  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

## **The Damascus Project and The Lay Academy: A Comparison**

*by Rev. Tisha Brown*

Over the last year I have received a number of inquiries about the similarities and differences between the Wisconsin Conference Lay Academy and the newly emerging Damascus Project. I hope this article will help answer some of your questions. In addition, I am always available and eager to respond to questions and to receive comments. You can reach me at [tbrown@wcucc.org](mailto:tbrown@wcucc.org) or call me at 608-846-7880.

**The Damascus Project** is an initiative of the Wisconsin and Minnesota Conferences to form spiritually-grounded leaders for a changing church. We envision the Damascus Project as a hub in the network of educational resources and learning opportunities available to individuals and congregations, clergy and laity, seeker and lifelong church member alike. The Damascus Project uses an outcome-based approach to teaching and learning. While our primary focus is on equipping all who seek to grow in faith, the Damascus Project can be a viable path to ministry authorization for Members in Discernment within the United Church of Christ in both Minnesota and Wisconsin.

**Lay Academy** is a robust ministry of the Wisconsin Conference with a 24-year history of engaging lay people in spiritual growth and development through theological education. Anyone who longs to grow in faith, discover new ways to serve God and their community, and deepen their knowledge of Christian tradition, ministry, and mission is welcome.

The key similarities between these two programs are:

- they are both available to anyone longing to engage their faith on a deeper level
- they are both taught and resourced by instructors who are experts in their fields
- they are both drawing from the deep well of tradition, history and knowledge that is the Christian faith

Some key differences are:

- Lay Academy is more of a survey-level engagement with a broad range of topics within the Christian faith. The Damascus Project provides a deeper dive—courses are multi-week, assignments are more in-depth, and outcomes are evaluated by course instructors
- Lay Academy is for lay people only. The Damascus Project is for lay people, clergy (continuing education), and Members in Discernment.

- Lay Academy takes place in-person only. The Damascus Project offers courses in a variety of formats and lengths—both online, in person and a blend of these two
- There is one annual fee for each year of the Lay Academy. The Damascus Project fees are set per course and depend on the length of the course and its format.
- Lay Academy is primarily accessible only to Wisconsin residents. The Damascus Project seeks to reach people in Minnesota, Wisconsin and eventually beyond.

I hope this informational table will help you continue to make comparisons between the two opportunities for learning and growth offered within our Conference as you consider which program would best fit your needs or interests. We are incredibly blessed to have such rich resources in our midst.

	<b>Lay Academy</b>	<b>The Damascus Project</b>
<b>History</b>	20+ years	Emerging
<b>Format</b>	Five in-person weekend sessions per year; introductory level theological education due to limited instruction time	Varies depending on course; more in-depth engagement with subject matter is possible because courses are longer
<b>Courses</b>	Faith Foundations, years 1&2 Lay Leadership year 3 Lay Ministry Skills, year 4	Varies from year to year; plan to launch up to 8 courses for 2019-2020; courses are either single topic or multi-disciplinary
<b>Teachers</b>	Seminary professors, clergy	Seminary professors, clergy, other professionals
<b>Homework</b>	Project completion or paper due after each session	Varies depending on the course
<b>Assessment</b>	By Lay Academy Director	By course instructor
<b>Outcome based?</b>	No	Yes
<b>Lead to Authorized Ministry?</b>	Depends; this is not the primary goal of Lay Academy	Possibly, depending on successful engagement with the Member in Discernment Process through your Committee on Ministry. A track for Members in Discernment is available
<b>Cost</b>	One set fee for each year	Fees vary depending on the course
<b>Lodging Included?</b>	Yes	No
<b>Books and other materials included?</b>	No	No

Additional information, including how to register, is available for The Damascus Project at [wcucc.org/damascus](http://wcucc.org/damascus), and the Lay Academy at [wcucc.org/layacademy](http://wcucc.org/layacademy)