

MASTERS-LEVEL STUDIES AT THE LUTHERAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY IN GOTHENBURG

This fall masters-level theological studies will begin at the Lutheran School of Theology in Gothenburg. The degree program, *Master of Sacred Theology*, is offered by *Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana (USA)* in cooperation with LSTG.

The prestigious accrediting organization, the *Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada*, ATS (<http://www.ats.edu>), which accredits about 270 theological seminaries and universities, has recently approved the application to offer the STM degree.

“It is very positive that our planned Masters program has now been accredited,” says Torbjörn Johansson, who recently took over as principal of LSTG.

“The efforts of many individuals are behind this work,” says Rune Imberg, research director in Gothenburg and the coordinator of the master's program.

“The initiative began about six years ago when we at LSTG proposed the idea during a visit by Prof. Naomichi Masaki, Director of the STM Program in Fort Wayne. CTS embraced our proposal, and we have worked together to develop it. Professor Masaki has been a driving force on the American side. From the Swedish side, Bengt Birgersson, education secretary in our education foundation, among others, has made an important contribution. Thanks to support from the principals, faculties and boards at our two institutions, the effort has succeeded.”

The program is offered as a collaboration between Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana (USA) and LSTG. Prof. Naomichi Masaki of CTS is in charge of the program, with Imberg as Swedish coordinator.

The formal degree is titled Master of Sacred Theology, commonly abbreviated STM after the Latin title, *Sacrae Theologiae Magister*. An STM degree in Fort Wayne normally requires about four quarters of study and may have slightly different profiles. Most people who take the degree are pastors or prospective pastors. The focus is on the central theological disciplines, primarily exegesis (biblical studies) and systematic theology (dogmatics / study of Christian beliefs) as well as church history and practical theology.

The program in Gothenburg will follow the same requirements as the CTS STM program. The ATS has approved the program as an international extension site in the CTS STM program, so the degree will be granted by CTS. At LSTG's request, the focus of courses and schedule have been adjusted to fit the particular needs of students in the region. Both schools will work together to operate the program.

“For several reasons, we in Gothenburg will focus on dogmatics and exegesis in our course structure,” says Imberg.

“We expect to recruit students from half a dozen countries in nearby regions, mainly the Nordic and Baltic regions. With our approach, the student will normally study 3-4 years part-time to earn the degree, and all classes will be held in Gothenburg.

“In a manner unique for the Nordic region, our Master's program will highlight Lutheran theology, which makes it extra valuable for parish pastors and future church leaders. For many pastors in the Swedish church, this should be an ideal course for further training. Experience shows that many pastors who have completed the STM degree with the profile we offer have often received leading positions in their church bodies or in theological seminaries and colleges.”

An introductory course, an “exploratory” course, has already been held in January 2014 in Gothenburg by Prof. Masaki. It focused on the theology of the Lord’s Supper and brought together ten participants. A few weeks later Rune Imberg taught a course in English in Fort Wayne, as part of the regular CTS STM-offerings, with 15 participants. This focused on the Swedish Bishop Bo Giertz, his life and theology and, not least, on his classic book *Stengrunden / The Hammer of God*.

“A total of about nine instructors will teach the various classes,” says Imberg. “Most are from Fort Wayne, where they serve as professors in various disciplines. From the Swedish side, three of our doctors – Timo Laato, Daniel Johansson and I myself – will teach in the first years. Daniel Johansson, one of the Swedish instructors in the master's program, has, after studies at LSTG itself, earned the STM degree in Fort Wayne. He subsequently earned a PhD in Edinburgh and has now returned to LSTG as a teacher of Greek, among other subjects.”

“I’m glad we have been able to establish this cooperation,” says Daniel Johansson. “I am convinced that it will enrich both institutions.”

“Another advantage to pursuing our STM degree is that it prepares one for research,” points out Imberg.

“Because it is accredited by the ATS, the degree is automatically recognized by institutions offering doctoral degrees, if one would have the ambition to continue his studies ...”

Rune Imberg
Research Director, STM-Coordinator