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## AST Diploma in Theological Studies David Bourque's Personal Story

I am honoured to share with you my experience with the Diploma in Theological Studies Program at the Atlantic School of Theology. As a senior citizen, it was daunting to think of the intellectual challenge this undertaking might bring. Fortunately, I decided to just jump in with both feet and it was one of the best decisions I ever made. The entire experience was overwhelmingly positive and provided much opportunity for spiritual growth. The topics covered were the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament, Christian Theology and Pastoral Ministry.

The courses are offered online, and all have a reference textbook on the specific course material covered. In addition to reading assignments from the textbooks, the professors provide additional materials and their personal reflections on the material covered each week. The students are given a choice of topics each week for the course discussion forum. Active participation in the forum is a requirement for all courses. The forum is a wonderful opportunity for the exchange of views, opinions and ideas between students. I was truly humbled and inspired by the insights provided by my classmates! I really learned so much from them as well as from my teachers. The ecumenical aspect of the Atlantic School of Theology truly offers a unique experience to the students. The class size for each course was about twenty and included Catholics, Anglicans, United Church members and of course, one Baptist. Discussing the various issues confronting the Christian Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the reality of our diversity, was truly fertile ground for personal growth and understanding.

Most courses require completion of mid-term and end of term assignments on a topic related to the course material. These provided the opportunity to research in depth, topics of personal interest. The courses are graded on a pass/fail system. Although the program involves a fair bit of commitment and work, the benefits far outweigh the challenges. I would strongly recommend this program to any of our congregants wishing to deepen their knowledge and understanding of scripture, theology and pastoral ministry.

David J. Bourque