



Association of United Methodist Theological Schools

2017-2020 Quadrennial Report of the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools

The thirteen official UMC seminaries are deeply dedicated to the UMC and to forming its leaders for making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. A comprehensive study of our schools was completed this year by the Rev. Dr. Dan Aleshire, fellow United Methodist and recently retired Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). An organization with a membership of more than 270 seminaries in the United States and Canada, ATS is one of three accrediting bodies who hold our thirteen UMC schools of theology accountable to the highest standards in theological education, and Dr. Aleshire is one of the most respected leaders in theological education. The full report is available at www.gbhem.org/GC20.

AUMTS commissioned this study of the thirteen UMC seminaries to address three questions:

1. What is the place of the thirteen UMC schools in the larger ecosystem of theological education in the United States, including the other 38 schools recognized by the University Senate for the education of United Methodist ministers?
2. What is the sustainability of a system of thirteen institutions with official support from the Ministerial Education Fund (MEF) of The United Methodist Church?
3. What is the contribution that UMC seminaries make to the witness and ministry of The UMC?

AUMTS commissioned this report in part to assist the denomination in better understanding who we are and what we do within the higher education and denominational contexts within which our thirteen schools function. We also wanted an external perspective on the schools to clarify our strengths, our

vulnerabilities, and our needs in faithfully serving the church now and in the future.

In separate chapters, the report addresses: the history and context of UMC theological schools, the thirteen official schools as a system of UMC theological schools, the thirteen schools as individual institutions, the 38 additional seminaries the UMC University Senate has approved for those seeking ordination in the UMC, and American Protestant theological education. The study also reviewed extensive financial data for each school, including MEF contributions from the UMC. The report concludes with findings emerging from the analyses.

A few key conclusions:

1. A deep Wesleyan theology and ethos pervades the campuses of the thirteen official seminaries. As Aleshire puts it, “these schools are Wesleyan in their bones...” We educate about 60% of (primarily US) UMC students enrolled in Master of Divinity degree programs as they seek ordination in the UMC, and about 60% of all (predominately US) ordinands are educated at our schools. Our faculties overall are 46% UMC (and 60% Wesleyan), and we employ 52% of UMC faculty teaching in all US seminaries. All the other 38 University Senate approved seminaries combined have only 9% UMC faculty. Chapel worship across our schools embodies the Methodist tradition and reflects the range of UMC liturgical practices. Aleshire states, “The thirteen schools...are pervasively United Methodist...Ethos can be taught, no doubt, but perhaps more importantly, it is ‘caught’ – carried from persons to persons.”
2. As is the Wesleyan tradition, the thirteen are also self-consciously ecumenical in thought and practice, teaching students from a wide array of denominations.
3. The thirteen are forming leaders for the future, not the past. Our student bodies overall are far younger and much more racially diverse than the UMC. Half of our UMC students are women. We are deeply committed to racial justice and to the equality of



women. Historically we pioneered work to achieve racial equality and women's full inclusion and continue to do so today. We systematically and enthusiastically engage and support new models of ministry every day.

4. The thirteen schools are very diverse in many ways, including that they reflect the full theological diversity of the UMC. Each school embodies its own range of styles and specialties, yet all thirteen are dedicated to making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Through their PhD programs, many of the thirteen educate future faculty who will populate not only UMC and other seminaries, but also UMC-related colleges and universities all over the world.

5. Overall, the thirteen seminaries provide far more resources to the UMC than we receive from it through annual MEF allocations. This is most strikingly evident in scholarships we provide for students; leadership our faculties provide in local churches, annual conferences, and national and international denominational arenas and agencies; and our subsidies for the denomination's Course of Study. In discussing the MEF, Aleshire points out that "the thirteen United Methodist seminaries bring in large amounts of financial resources from beyond the denomination to pay for the preparation of United Methodist clergy and lay leaders in the United States. And [they] provide the second largest source of funds for the preparation of United Methodist clergy from outside the US [i.e., second only to the Central Conference Theological Education Fund]....What other United Methodist organization is producing such a large net return on investment?"

6. MEF is a crucial material connection that the thirteen official seminaries and their students have with the denomination. We are proud of the historic commitment to MEF as one of the key indicators of the UMC dedication to an educated clergy. It is a crucial source of support for the schools, without which some would be in serious financial jeopardy. Moreover, loss of or radical reductions in MEF undercut the basic economic foundation for students

who are seeking ordination, adding to their financial hardship and debt. Overall, Aleshire concludes that "Most of the schools could likely find their way to a financial future that includes reduced MEF income, but denominational funding has value beyond its absolute amount. Its presence solidifies connections and its absence strains those connections, and weakened connections could be the more difficult to overcome than reduced revenue."

7. Are there too many seminaries? The study says maybe, but maybe not. Many factors must be considered in answering this question, and they are discussed in Aleshire's report. He notes, however, that per capita, the UMC has fewer seminaries than any other Protestant denomination. All thirteen have experienced substantial financial stress and across the last decade have reduced faculty, staff, and other non-scholarship expenditures (including for some radical reductions in the property they own), all while creatively innovating curriculum and pedagogy. For example, almost all provide online learning in one form or another.

8. We are highly regulated, and the outcomes we produce are continuously studied and evaluated by ourselves and our accreditors. As institutions of higher education that serve the church, we always welcome careful and critical analysis of what we do, which is why we commissioned the study.

9. The Wesleyan tradition is practiced by many people and institutions across the UMC, thanks be to God! The seminaries, however, are keepers of the "intellectual soul" of the Wesleyan faith through faculty who confirm and debate the meaning of Wesleyan theology and history and who teach generations of UMC ministers, as well as through library collections that chronicle the history of Wesleyan thought and life. The thirteen schools "remember what has been given in the past, ...test past thought in the context of present realities, ...curate future possibilities, and ... do all three in the presence of students who will lead the continuing extension of the church's work."



AUMTS will seek to draw further insight from this comprehensive report. We will use it, as well as all that we learn through our extensive connections throughout the church, to improve our individual and collective offerings of theological education so we may serve the church and the world to which we are called to minister. Methodism offers a profound legacy of theological education that responds to diverse contexts and times. The AUMTS is committed to maintain that historic legacy and characteristic openness to change for the sake of more effective ministries around the world.