# A Study of the Thirteen Official Theological Schools of The United Methodist Church

A Report Presented to the Deans and Presidents
of the Thirteen Member Institutions of the
Association of United Methodist Theological Schools



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*December 2018*

## Introduction

It was a December Friday. Evil took hold of some human frailty and left twenty first graders and five adults lifeless in an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut. Newtown United Methodist Church, the church nearest the school, began responding immediately. It opened its sanctuary to the community. The preschool teachers moved outside the building to welcome people into the sanctuary as soon as they could, the trustees gathered to welcome persons who had come for prayer or counseling—and kept media away. Inside, lay people were available to meet with people who needed someone with whom to talk, or pray, or cry. Because of its location near the school, the church building remained open and staffed round the clock that weekend. This congregation had several children who attended Sandy Hook School, teachers who taught there, as well as cafeteria workers, and school bus drivers. It also had one family who lost a first grade child in the shooting.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief sent a consultant to work with the Newtown United Methodist Church. The pastor said that she provided a non-anxious presence in the midst of a congregation that was numbed with shock and wanting to help. The consultant talked with staff, had meetings with preschool teachers and parents, and counseled the church about how best to respond in a community crisis. A representative from United Methodist Communications helped the church with media representatives, many of whom were working from broadcast trucks in the church parking lot. The Friday tragedy was followed by an Advent Sunday, which in the customary cycle of themes celebrates joy.

As the weeks wore on, the pastor said that church members responded in three ways. Some became activists. One mother went to Washington to participate in an anti-gun protest. She told the pastor, "I'm way out of my comfort zone"— but didn't want to leave the protesting to others. Some cared for people who continued to suffer from the trauma, especially people who worked at the school or with the school children, or taught there, and were trying to help surviving children learn to go to school again, and not be afraid. Still others, the pastor said, were beginning to ask the hard questions about this horrible event: Why this kind of violence? Where is God? Why didn't God intervene? The pastor told me that he was beginning to address the theodicy issue, but that, upon reflection, his first theological response was new insight to grace.[1]

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It was the South in the 1960s. The established apartheid of Jim Crow was being tested, and while it would tumble in time, pushing it to its end was contested and dangerous. Timothy Tyson wrote about his father's pastoral ministry in the middle of this struggle. He recalled his father reading Martin Luther King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail.* "The effect of King's words on my father was electric. He was already committed to racial equality, but Dr. King hit him with the conviction that he needed to do something."[2] Vernon Tyson was pastor of the Jonesboro Heights Methodist Church in Sanford, North Carolina, a city where tensions had been rising, jails had been filling with protestors, and the streets were hostile at times. In the middle of the most severe moments of national trauma about race, Rev. Tyson heard Samuel Proctor, who was then president of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, speak at a meeting of the North Carolina Council of Churches. Afterwards, he invited Proctor to preach at

1 A few months after the school shooting, I interviewed the person who was pastor of Newtown United Methodist Church at the time. This summary is taken from that conversation.

2 Timothy Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 69.

Jonesboro Heights on Race Relations Sunday, 1964. "Dr. Proctor accepted, immediately smiled warmly as he shook my father's hand, and said, 'Yes, and we'll get run out of town together.'"[3]

Indeed, the church was "rocked to its foundations at the thought of having a black man in their pulpit…. Fifty church members called a protest meeting in the fellowship hall and insisted that my father rescind the invitation…My father found himself under enormous pressure from within and without. Not only was he afraid that someone might make good on the threats and dynamite [our] house, he was also afraid that he would lose his job."[4] The day of the protest meeting "was the worst day of all." Mrs. Tyson wrote in her diary that, "Several [people] made terribly cutting remarks to him. He just took it, but afterwards shed tears."[5] As a result of the protest meeting, Tyson called an emergency meeting of the congregation's administrative board. After several confrontational remarks, a sixty-year-old school teacher, who had taught many of the people in the meeting, spoke. In an elegant story, she declared a convincing truth, and at the end of the meeting, the board voted 25–14 to stand with Tyson and welcome Dr. Proctor.

Tyson remembered the service this way: "I looked up and the sanctuary was slam full, no visitors that I could see—these were our people. The ushers had flat run out of bulletins. It was our folks who had come." Proctor didn't preach on race; "the brilliant theologian proceeded to deliver the most elegant sermon on Jacob and the angel that you could ever want to hear." After church, the Tyson family, Dr. Proctor, and some others church members gathered for lunch at a church member's home (Proctor could not be seated at most of the restaurants in town). Tyson recalls, "we all enjoyed fried chicken and deviled eggs and all kinds of Methodist church dinners-on-the-grounds casseroles at Margie Mann's house."[6]

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In a report that is essentially technical, why begin with two stories of Methodist ministry? I begin this way because theological education itself does not begin with schools, enrollments, finances, and comparatives. It begins in the work of ministry, which has its share of the mundane and tedious, but also has moments when the stakes of faith are high, when the work of ministry is overwhelming, when congregations serve communities as agents of mercy and voices of moral courage, moments when everything learned in seminary is needed, and when people know in their bones that what they have learned is not always enough. Ministry is about handling the holy, and sometimes the holy is embodied and scriptural holiness becomes a vehicle for grace.

Theological schools, if they are good at all, know this, and if they are truly good, they nurture students toward gifts of grace that serve both the not-worth-talking-about parts of ministry and the unspeakable moments when the only words that count are the ones that become flesh.

Near the end of his book, Timothy Tyson quotes Bernice Johnson Reagon, an original member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Freedom Singers and founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock

3 Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, 73.

4 Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, 74.

5 Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, 76.

6 Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, 80.

as saying: "If, in moving through your life, you find yourself lost, go back to the last place where you knew who you were, and what you were doing, and start from there."[7]

Theological education begins in Newtown, CT and Sanford, NC, and if it does not provide the resources for caring with wisdom or leading with courage, it has forgotten who it was when it last knew what it was doing.

7 Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, 288.

# I
# A Study of the Official Theological Schools of The United Methodist Church

This is a deeply contested time in The United Methodist Church, fifty years after its founding. Conflicts in church bodies create sides, breed suspicions, and weaponize perceptions of what is right and faithful. In such a time as this, theological schools can be viewed as either causing or contributing to the contestation because of what they teach or have failed to teach. And in this contested time, the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools has commissioned this study.

It is not as if these schools have not been amply studied. Books have been written about them. Each of them undergoes an extensive self-study and accreditation review at least every ten years as part of their accreditation by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools. They do the same thing at least every ten years for their accreditation by a regional accrediting body, a different agency with different standards and procedures. Each school is reviewed at least every ten years by the University Senate of The United Methodist Church, still another study, conducted using still other procedures. Methodists track numbers in many ways and that includes numbers about these schools. There is little that has *not* been studied in these schools. So why another study? This particular study has been commissioned as a means for the schools to tell their own story by answering some specific questions.

In a contested moment in a church body, multiple stories exist about theological schools. Some of them are anchored primarily in fact, some in assumption, and some in opposition. In this context, the schools have assumed responsibility for telling their own stories as honestly as possible. This is an era, however, when a story told by or on behalf of an institution is suspect, even if the teller is assiduous about it being accurate. Marilynne Robinson, in assessing the current American moment, writes: "We have allowed ourselves to become bitterly factionalized, and truth has lost its power to resolve or persuade."[8] In the interviews on the thirteen campuses, I typically concluded my questions by asking what participants most wanted to tell me. Often, their response was for me to be honest and tell the truth, and this report seeks to heed that counsel. While a draft of the report was presented for discussion with the presidents and deans, they gave me the final say and this report is presented to them with their final approval.

The questions this study tries to answer have not been addressed in other studies. The overarching question asks: **What is the work and character of these schools?** And more specifically*: (1) What is the place of the thirteen UMC schools in the larger ecosystem of theological education in the United States, including the other 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 of The United Methodist Church?, and (3) What is the contribution that UMC seminaries make to the witness and ministry of The UMC?*

8 Marilynne Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here: Essays* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 144.

## Method for this Descriptive Study

The goal of this project is to address these questions by providing an accurate description of these schools at this time. A descriptive study, if it is done well, draws a map but does not give directions. It may point out high cliffs and fast moving streams, but leaves it to others to determine when guard rails or "No Swimming" signs should be posted. A descriptive study interprets reality. In fact, interpretation is inherent to good description. Clifford Geertz describes the importance of interpretation in descriptive analysis.[9] Suppose one boy has an involuntary tick that causes him to contract his right eyelid rapidly. Another boy has no tick, but looking to a friend whom he is teasing, winks—rapidly contracting his right eyelid. A photograph of both boys would show the same thing. The two actions, however, *mean* something very different. What Geertz calls a "thin description" would be limited to saying that both boys rapidly contracted their right eyelids. A "thick description" would say that the same behavior reflected two very different human actions. Interpretation is not an embellishment of good description; it is an intrinsic part of good description.

This report is based on several sources of information. The *first* is visits to each of the schools that included interviews with similar groups on each campus: senior administrative offices, Methodist faculty, non-Methodist faculty, UMC students, non-UMC students, donors, members of the governing or advisory boards, UMC bishops related to the school, and graduates. The school visits began and concluded with interviews with chief executive officers. Interviews at schools embedded in larger educational institutions also included interviews with the provost and/or president of the larger institution. The interviews followed a relatively common set of questions and were recorded in what totaled more than five hundred pages of handwritten notes.[10] The *second* source of information is data submitted by these schools to the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools. All member schools provide extensive data annually as part of their responsibilities as member institutions, and these data make possible comparisons of United Methodist schools with the larger community of theological schools. The *third* source of information is data reported to the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry by both the thirteen official UMC schools and other schools recognized by the University Senate for the education of United Methodist ordinands. These data were used for issues related to UMC candidates that are not included in the data submitted to the ATS Commission on Accrediting.

## Organization of Report

The report is organized in six sections, beginning with this one.

*I. A Study of the Official Theological Schools of The United Methodist Church.*

*II. History and Context of United Methodist Theological Schools*. The past does not determine the future, but its shadow never goes away. The schools have more of a history than can be told in a report like this,

9 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000 [1973]), 4.

10 Because many of these group interviews included some people present on campus, others participating in conference call interviews, and still other groups that included both people present in the room and on a conference or internet-facilitated connection, it was not deemed reasonable to record the sessions for later transcription, and the handwritten notes taken during the interviews are the primary record of the interviews.

but the present reality cannot be described without some attention to the past. The schools deserve an individual introduction before more technical analysis, and are briefly described in this second section.

*III. The Official Schools as a System of United Methodist Theological Schools.* The United Methodist Church formally identifies thirteen schools in a way that it does not identify any others. They comprise a group of schools that are connected to The United Methodist Church in a way that forms them into a system of schools, and this section explores the characteristics of that system of schools.

*IV. The Thirteen Schools as Individual Institutions.* While the schools form a group or system of theological schools related to The United Methodist Church, each is an individual institution, with its own founding saga, ethos, culture, and salient characteristics. In the past decade, they have experienced very different fortunes in enrollment and financial capacity, and this section attends to these differences and focuses on the schools as individual institutions.

*V. The Official United Methodist Schools, Other Schools Approved by the University Senate, and American Protestant Theological Education.* One of the questions in the commissioning of this project focuses on the place of the UMC schools in the context of the others approved by the University Senate and broader community of Protestant schools in the United States. This section explores that question.

*VI Contributions of the United Methodist Schools.* Part of the story of these schools is the contribution that they are making to the education of students who are called to religious leadership, as well as contributions to theological scholarship and the intellectual witness of the church. This section discusses some of those contributions.

The report ends with a summary of conclusions that have emerged from the various analyses. They are presented as executive conclusions, briefly highlighting the findings of the study.

# II
# History and Identity of United Methodist Theological Schools

> I suspect that there lurks at the bottom of most of the opposition manifested against theological seminaries a vague, but somewhat stubborn notion that they are somehow unfavorable to the development of the highest style of piety, or at least they are prone to become hot-beds of heresy and ecclesiastical revolution.
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> —*James Strong in an article in the* Northwest Christian Advocate, *April, 1854*[11]

Theological schools are hybrid institutions: they draw part of their identity from the church or founding communities of faith, and another part from higher education. Their purpose, for the most part, comes from the first source of identity, and their practices, for the most part, come from the second. Sometimes purpose and practice flow easily alongside one another and sometimes they form conflicting currents. The context for these thirteen schools is tied to the history of church and higher education.

## Protestant Theological Education

The earliest Protestant presence in the colonies included: Puritans in New England, who founded Harvard and Yale for the education of ministers, among other purposes; Dutch Reformed in New York and New Jersey, who founded Rutgers for similar reasons; Anglicans in New York and Virginia, who founded King's College (now Columbia) and William and Mary; and Presbyterians who founded the College of New Jersey (now Princeton). There were others, of course, but these groups were a dominant Protestant presence in colonial America. These early colleges, now storied and elite, began as small, marginally resourced schools with few professors, few students, and few books. Nonetheless, they formed a pattern of education for ministers that was grounded in classical study of Latin, Greek, Western history and literature, theology, and Bible. It was a pattern of education, Glenn Miller notes, in which "clergy and laity were to receive the same education, one that fitted them ideally for service in either of the two public realms, church or commonwealth."[12]

Protestant education began to change in the early nineteenth century. Harvard appointed a Unitarian to the Hollis Chair (the oldest chaired professorship in the United States), and the Congregationalists responded by founding Andover Theological School. It was the first freestanding Protestant seminary in the United States and defined a pattern of theological education that would become dominant in the nineteenth century. The Presbyterian seminary that was part of the College of New Jersey separated from the college to become Princeton Theological Seminary. The curriculum in these freestanding schools changed significantly from what it had been in the earlier college-based model of theological education. Instead of theological study being part of a broader classical curriculum, theological disciplines developed over the nineteenth century —biblical disciplines, ecclesiastical history disciplines, and disciplines

11 This quotation is from Frederick Norwood, *From Dawn to Midday at Garrett* (Evanston, IL: Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1978), 6.

12 Glenn Miller, *Piety and Intellect: The Aims and Purposes of Ante-Bellum Theological Education* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 48.

in theology—and these disciplines developed critical patterns of research and study that differed from the more literary and interpretive patterns of theological study that were dominant in the classical model. Another dominant pattern of theological study was not housed in institutions at all. It was the educational practice of apprenticeship or study with an experienced minister. It was this less institutional form of theological education that was dominant among American Methodists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Little is known about how pervasive this model was other than it was the dominant pattern of education for Baptists, Methodists, and for other Protestant ministers working on the continually expanding Western frontier. Methodists took this apprenticeship model a step further by organizing it into courses of study within conferences and providing a structure that had not been part of earlier efforts. Russell Richey considers this pattern of ministerial education to be the third one that Methodists developed.

## Methodist Institutions

Methodists began to establish institutions in the 1820s by establishing colleges. These colleges were founded, at least in part, in response to a committee report at the 1820 General Conference that noted that,

> Almost all seminaries (academies and colleges) of learning in our country, of much celebrity, are under the control of the Calvinistic or Hopkinsian principles, or otherwise managed by men denying fundamental doctrines of the gospel. If any of our people, therefore, wish to give their sons or daughters a finished education, they are under the necessity of resigning them to the management of those institutions that are more of less hostile to our views of the grand doctrines of Christianity.[13]

Methodists followed the pattern that the "Calvinists and Hopkinsians" had chosen a century earlier: they founded Methodist colleges that educated Methodist ministers. A few decades after Methodists began founding colleges, they began theological schools. The earliest schools were called "institutes"–notably Methodist General Biblical Institute in New Hampshire (1839), which was a precursor to Boston University with its School of Theology; and Garrett Biblical Institute (1855), which was a precursor to Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. The Methodists did not appear to be anti-intellectual, like some other revival movements, but did worry that theological schools would promote advanced theological study at the expense of the piety, religious fervor, and practical knowledge that were central to Methodism and thus to Methodist ministry.

By this time, Methodists had used four models of ministry education—simple apprenticeship, apprenticeship with designated readings, colleges, and special schools for minister education. Succeeding patterns did not replace predecessor patterns as much as they provided multiple options. The result was that when Methodists established the more institutional forms of theological education, they adopted the models that other Protestants (like the Calvinists and Hopkinsians) had established for ministerial education: colleges and free-standing institutes. Because they started later, however, they were also able

13 Russell E. Richey provides a concise history of patterns of theological education for Methodist ministers in *Formation for Ministry in American Methodism: Twenty-first Century Challenges and Two Centuries of Problem-Solving* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 2014), 39.

to assimilate some of the other changes that were occurring in American higher education, such as the research university model.

The 1880s through the 1920s accounted for the founding of some of today's most prestigious private research universities, many with religious connections. They resulted from innovative educational ideas, huge wealth generated by the industrial age, and a growing sense of philanthropy. It was the era of Baptists William Rainey Harper and John D. Rockefeller and the founding of the University of Chicago; Methodist Bishop Holland Nimmons McTyeire's connections with industrialist Cornelius Vanderbilt and the founding of Vanderbilt University; the Duke family and the transition of Trinity College to Duke University; and the Candler and Woodruff families in Atlanta and the founding of Emory University. Before this time, very few multi-purpose universities with a focus on the generation of new knowledge existed in America.[14] The Methodist's later start to founding educational institutions meant that some of their schools were patterned after this new kind of American university. By the early twentieth century, Methodists had versions of every kind of institution that had been invented for the education of ministers.

This historical survey is too brief to do justice to the history, but provides some context for understanding the location of contemporary United Methodist theological education. *First*, those nineteenth-century fears about the dangers of theological schools reflected in the quotations at the beginning of this section have not dissipated. Methodists founded seminaries in the late nineteenth century, which was the very time that critical scholarship was raising questions about many traditional affirmations of the church. These questions grew into one of the greatest Protestant struggles of the twentieth century –the modernist/fundamentalist conflict, which entailed competing understandings of theological scholarship, personal faith, and the teaching of the church. Piety and critical scholarship have not always been friends. *Second*, Methodists were unique among the group of Protestants now considered "mainline" in the university context for many of their schools. Four of the thirteen official schools are located in research intensive universities, and these denominational seminaries in research intensive universities have had a profound influence on all United Methodist theological education. And *third*, the formation of Methodist theological schools follows a pattern evident across Protestantism: theological schools are founded by ecclesial bodies as those bodies are growing in membership, or expanding geographically, or seeking to advance ministerial education. The converse is also true: Theological schools not founded by denominations are declining or retrenching. No denomination has ever founded a seminary as its last corporate action. The founding of the United Methodist schools (between the 1840s or so to the 1950s) reflects a century of considerable growth of the Methodist movement in America.

## Denominational Theological Education

Recalling the committee report's challenge that: "If any of our people, therefore, wish to give their sons or daughters a finished education, they are under the necessity of resigning them to the management of those institutions that are more of less hostile to our views of the grand doctrines of Christianity," the 1820s motivation to start Methodist colleges was remarkably parochial. Nineteenth-century Protestant denominations were competitive with one another, and made the smallest doctrinal distinctions into the largest denominational differences. Denominational theological schools grew up in the context of this

14 See John Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004 [2011]), especially chapters 4 and 5, for an account of this era of institution building.

reality—Methodists had Methodist schools with Methodist faculty for Methodist students—and that pattern would dominate among mainline Protestant theological schools until after World War II.

While the primary purpose of these denominational theological schools was to train pastors for the denomination's congregations and other ministries directly connected to the denomination, these schools have served as the scholarly centers for a particular—in our case Methodist—theological position. Wesleyan theology, for example, was largely researched, taught, and advanced at Methodist seminaries. The tradition, of course, was practiced by itinerating elders, annual conferences, and national agencies, but the intellectual "soul" of Wesleyan faith was kept by the seminaries that curated library collections of Wesleyan books, that chronicled the history of Wesleyan thought and life, that appointed faculty who confirmed and argued with the meaning of Wesleyan theology and history, and that taught successive generations of Methodist ministers.

The denominational seminary emerged as an institutional home for the tradition. Institutions are important, especially for an activist pattern of religion that likes to think of itself as a movement, as was the case for the early American Methodists. "Institutions" attract the suspicion that they ossify the past more than cultivate and innovate their way to the future. Hugh Heclo argues that both past and future are crucial. Learning to think institutionally, he writes, "is to stretch your time backward and forward so that the shadows from both past and future lengthen into the present."[15] In many ways that is the work of the theological schools: to remember what has been given in the past, to test past thought in the context of present realities, to curate future possibilities, and to do all of three in the presence of students who will lead the continuing extension of the church's work.

## The Thirteen Official Schools

The United Methodist Church now has thirteen official seminaries, schools of theology, or divinity schools. They are all denominational theological schools, but none of them was founded by The United Methodist Church. The oldest of these thirteen schools trace their origins to the mid-nineteenth century and the youngest to the mid-twentieth century. These schools did not emerge by a coherent or orderly process. They embody different moments in Methodist history, represent the continuing presence of predecessor denominations, are the result of efforts of regional denominational leaders, have different theological emphases, and employ different pedagogical practices. The schools are a legacy received by The United Methodist Church when it began in 1968; it founded none of them and does not impose a common pattern of governance or institutional structure on them.[16] They are officially "United

15 Hugh Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 109.

16 By contrast, the six seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention have a common governance pattern controlled by the denomination and have common tasks assigned by the SBC.

Methodist" because they are named in the *Book of Discipline* as such and, as "official" theological schools, receive grants from The United Methodist Church's Ministerial Education Fund.[17]

The primary task of this study is examine these schools as a group, in comparison with one another, and in comparison with other Protestant schools in the United States. Before launching into this more technical analysis, however, the schools deserve a brief summary of their histories and some salient current characteristics. [18]

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The buildings of Boston University line both sides of Commonwealth Avenue for almost a mile and a half. March Chapel and the **Boston University School of Theology** sit at the center of the Charles River side. When I visited the campus for interviews, the provost noted the chapel's central location in the campus and its witness to the Methodist heritage of the university, which dates from 1839, and was one of the first efforts of Methodists to establish schools for the education of preachers. Many of the women who founded the Women's Foreign Mission Society in Boston in 1869 (the earliest predecessor of United Methodist Women) were related to Boston University faculty. The school gave considerable support to early Methodist missionary efforts, and The Center for Global Christianity and Mission continues this early attention to global issues. In the 1870s, the institution was admitting women and people of color, long before most other American colleges or universities. A century later, Martin Luther King Jr. earned his PhD at BU, and today, the Anna Howard Shaw Center, named for the second woman to graduate from the School of Theology, continues efforts to promote practices that empower women and honor diversity. Boston University was the hub of the American philosophical school of Personalism, and scholars in the School of Theology have since added other theological perspectives to those twentieth-century philosophical commitments. In this century, Boston University's School of Theology works to sustain Methodist intellectual life and educate Methodist ministers in the context of one of the more secular areas of the US.

Like many of the other Methodist schools, **Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary** bears the legacy of predecessor institutions. The oldest, founded in 1853, was Garrett Biblical Institute, the first Methodist seminary in the Midwest. Evangelical Theological Seminary was founded in 1873 by what would become the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Chicago developed as an early urban center with poor and ghettoized immigrant communities and their many social needs, and this urban context motivated Methodists

17 The Ministerial Education Fund is mentioned at several points in this report. It has two meanings and they are important to distinguish. The first is a portion of the General Church Budget for the 2017–20 quadrennium identified as the "Ministerial Education Fund." The budget adopted by the 2016 General Conference totals almost $105 million, or about $26 million per year. The payout rate, however, is always somewhat lower than the budgeted allocation, and of that amount, about $15 million is distributed annually to the thirteen official seminaries. This smaller amount that goes to the thirteen official schools is what is called the "Ministerial Education Fund" or MEF in this report. This revenue is distributed to each school by a formula that includes: 25 percent for basic support (which is the same for each school, regardless of its size); 40 percent for the full-time equivalent number of United Methodist students registered in the United Methodist Candidate and Record Entry System (UMCARES); 25 percent for the number of ordinands who graduated across the previous three years (a rolling average); 3.5% for the ethnic and gender inclusiveness of faculty, senior administrators, and UM students; 3.5 percent for the number of full time United Methodist faculty and senior administrators; and 3 percent for grants and special initiatives. The criteria in the formula encourage the enrollment of United Methodist students, employment of United Methodist faculty, educational programs that lead to ordination, and enrollment of racial/ethnic students (which together form the basis for 72 percent of the total distribution). The smallest distribution received by any of the thirteen official schools in 2017 was $587,225 and the largest was $2,162,151.

18 This is the only part of this report in which the schools are named and comments appear from some of their constituents identified by the school to which they are related.

to found The Chicago Training School in 1885. The Training School merged with Garrett Biblical Institute in the 1930s, and Garrett and Evangelical seminaries formed Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1974. Garrett Institute and Evangelical provided the legacy for pastoral education that is crucial to the current school's identity, and just as importantly, the DNA of the Chicago Training School continues to be evident in an educational emphasis on faith and service in the public sphere beyond congregational settings. It is the only Methodist seminary in the upper Midwest, and visiting around graduation, as I did, you will see the posted reminders for women to wear red shoes to commencement in honor of three remarkable former Garrett-Evangelical professors: Georgia Harkness, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Rosemary Skinner Keller. A lot of men wear red shoes in solidarity, as well. Garrett-Evangelical, along with many other official schools, was an important influence leading to the ordination of women and their full service throughout the life of the denomination. One student I talked with at Garrett said "G-ETS is doing it right."

The Civil War divided the nation, and along with it, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, and for half a decade, deferred efforts to found theological schools. The predecessor institutions of Boston University School of Theology and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary are the only official UMC theological schools that predate the Civil War. The division of Methodists into Northern and Southern branches would influence the development of Methodist theological education for the next half century.

**Drew Theological School**, located in Madison, New Jersey was founded in 1867, in part to commemorate the centennial of the first Methodist work in the country and as an effort to begin rebuilding a church broken by the Civil War. One of Drew's early graduates, Henry Gerhard Appenzeller along with his wife Ella, established Methodist work in Korea in the nineteenth century. That work included the first Methodist church in Korea, a publishing house, and Ella's work with Mary Scranton to found what is now Ewha Women's University, now a modern research-focused institution with a medical school and major medical center. The link with Korea continues, and nearly 20 percent of Drew's students are Korean. Drew made a decision in the 1980s to become a multicultural theological school and today no one racial/ethnic group comprises a majority of its student body. Its faculty is among the more diverse faculties in American theological education. The Theological School existed by itself for decades before it expanded to begin with an undergraduate division that is now Drew University. The school honors its past, but it is very much focused on the present, with intellectual leadership in environmental, racial, sexual, and gender justice.

Two years later in Ohio, the predecessor institution of **United Theological Seminary** began with a 1869 vote of the United Brethren in Christ to found Union Biblical Seminary. The motion was made by Milton Wright, and the school began classes in Dayton in 1871. The name was changed in 1909 to Bonebrake Theological Seminary in honor of a donor family, six years after Milton Wright's sons, Orville and Wilbur, flew the first motorized aeroplane at Kitty Hawk, NC. The school's denomination changed with the formation of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in the 1940s, and the school's name was changed to United Theological Seminary when Bonebrake merged with another EUB school. Its denomination changed again in 1968 with the merger that formed The United Methodist Church. United has had three names and three denominations, not to mention three locations, but has continued as a theological school focused on the education of pastors and religious leaders. In the past thirty years, United has developed a significant DMin program focused on African American pastors, and more recently, has innovated the (then) largest program of distance education of any UMC official school. In the past decade, United has

distinguished itself with its attention on the work of the Holy Spirit, including its annual Holy Spirit Seminar.

**Wesley Theological Seminary** in Washington DC wasn't always in DC, nor was it always Wesley. It began in 1881 as Westminster Theological Seminary by the Methodist Protestant Church and was located in Western Maryland. It moved to Washington in 1958, at the end of Embassy Row on Massachusetts Avenue, next to the American University. Its future would be as a Methodist school in an international city where power and poverty are both abundant. It took seriously its urban setting and began a focus on urban ministry in the 1960s. It also has taken its location in the nation's capital seriously with several programmatic emphases across the years, most recently with the Institute for Community Engagement housed at the seminary's downtown campus at Mount Vernon Place. The Institute helps students learn to engage public structures on behalf of community needs and theological commitments, and has advanced public theology. It is a one-of-a-kind program in American theological education, as is the seminary's Luce Center for Religion and the Arts, which provides studio space for working artists, a gallery, and a vision for the ways in which art and faith are fellow travelers. Most recently, Wesley founded the Lewis Center for Church Leadership that has served United Methodist ministers and leaders in a variety of ways.

**Gammon Theological Seminary** was established in 1883, the first Methodist school founded in the South after the Civil War that has a continuing presence among the 13 official schools. Founded by Elijah Gammon, a white Northerner and abolitionist, it was initially a part of Clark University, later became independent, and from its founding, was intended to be multi-racial. Its genius and most significant contribution to Methodists, however, likely resides in its education for African Americans. It holds claim to being the first historically Black theological school accredited by the (then) American Association of Theological Schools (1938). Gammon is a United Methodist seminary that led in the founding of the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) and now functions with four other historically black schools through ITC as a single academic entity. Gammon is unique among the UMC theological schools because its student body comprises only United Methodist students, and while not all are Black, all are learning in an African-centric consortium of theological schools that has contributed significantly to the development of womanist theology and attention to the African American community and historically Black congregations. It also counts among its former faculty distinguished persons like Edward Wimberly, noted pastoral care professor who served as vice president and interim president of the ITC, and Anne Streaty Wimberly who has researched extensively on issues of African American youth and ministry with them. One student told me that his grandfather went to Gammon and he can feel the presence of other leaders like him who have gone before.

Far from the devastation caused by the Civil War in the South, Maclay College of Theology was founded in 1885—thirty-five years after California was granted statehood. It was the predecessor institution of the **Claremont School of Theology**. California may be the West coast of the United States, but it is the East coast of the Pacific Rim, and Claremont has many Methodist students from Hawaii and the Pacific Islands. It is where John Cobb developed Process Theology and where the Center for Process Studies continues work in that theological tradition. The Claremont School of Theology was not always in Claremont, but then its real name is not Claremont School of Theology. Maclay College affiliated with the University of Southern California, which at the time of affiliation, was also Methodist. In 1957, the school withdrew from the university to become the free-standing Southern California School of Theology, and relocated to Claremont. It is the only United Methodist theological school west of the Rocky Mountains.

In Southern California, the school has absorbed the multi-racial character of the region, and like Drew, is the only other official theological school that has no majority racial/ethnic group in its student body. It has also responded to multi-religious character of the region and has sought to take seriously that presence as students at this Methodist school learn along with persons of other faiths. One student remarked that there is so much "racial and cultural diversity at CST—we are prepared to engage wide conversations across differences."

**Iliff School Theology** is located adjacent to the campus of the University of Denver, as it began as part of the university when it was known as Colorado Seminary, which remains the university's legal name. The newly independent theological schools was named for John Wesley Iliff, and as his name would suggest, Iliff is intimately connected to the history of Methodists in the Rocky Mountain region. Unlike many of the official thirteen schools, it operates at the same location it has had since 1892, when the cornerstone for Iliff Hall was laid. The nineteenth-century chapel binds this school to twenty-first century building renovations. Iliff has revolutionized its educational delivery programs to include distance and hybrid learning models that allow students around the nation to experience its social justice focus without having to move to Denver. Its theological vision is progressive and students clearly experience its commitment to Methodist theological education in that vision. I joined the donors in an exhibit of fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and as we walked around looking at invaluable fragments, one donor told me that part of his motivation was gratitude and another part was his desire to support the progressive theological stance of the school. A student told me in an interview that he chose Iliff "because he knew it would make [him] think about things [he] didn't want to think about."

Duke University's buildings are nestled among the seven thousand acres of the Duke Forest, and the Gothic tower of Duke Chapel soars above the trees of the West Campus. The chapel was designed by Julian Abele, an African American architect in Philadelphia, and until it was removed in 2017, a statue of Robert E. Lee was located at the chapel's inner entrance area. Methodists and race have a complex history. The **Duke University Divinity School** building sits next to the chapel, a privileged place on the Duke campus, and has one of the largest enrollments of any official UMC theological school. It carries a history of theological scholarship and Methodist leadership as impressive as the university chapel tower. Like Wesley Seminary, Duke was not always Duke. It grew from institutions that had been founded by Methodists and Quakers that eventually became Trinity College, which was moved to Durham in the 1890s and became Duke University early in the twentieth century. Duke is an internationally ranked university, and it has an internationally respected divinity school. A graduating student told me how privileged—indeed proud—she was that her teachers had written the books her friends in other seminaries were required to read.

**Candler School of Theology** is situated just off the Emory University Quadrangle in two new LEED-certified buildings, along with the architecturally significant Cannon Chapel completed in 1981. The school's Pitts Theology Library is the third largest theology library in North America, and contains 614,000 volumes of significant research holdings and noted special collections. Candler was founded in 1914 by the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as the first school of Emory University, which the denomination chartered in early 1915 after a court decision stripped it of its governance role at Vanderbilt University. By the 1960s, Emory had emerged as a modern research intensive university, and Candler distinguished itself not only to Methodists but also to the broader community of theological scholarship. Candler faculty have pioneered models of contextual education and congregational

studies, led scholarship in most of the theological disciplines, and provide 50 percent of the faculty in Emory's highly regarded PhD program in religion. Emory and Duke together have granted degrees to 170 faculty members who teach in ATS member schools–5 percent of all the faculty currently teaching in ATS member schools.

Southern Methodist University was founded the same year as Emory, and from its beginning in 1915, the **Perkins School of Theology** has been part of SMU. Perkins is located at the far end of campus, across the street from the museum and occupies buildings the flank the chapel. Perkins developed one of most sophisticated internship programs in all of theological education in the 1970s, and through many decades of gifts, curatorial care, and good librarianship, the Bridwell Library is among the best in theological education, particularly its collection of antique books and manuscripts. Perkins claims many professors of note, both in its past and among its current faculty. Schubert Ogden served decades on the Perkins faculty, and helped shape an intellectual tradition in Perkins as well as Southern Methodist University. He was accompanied in this task by Albert Outler, who provided leadership in Methodist theology. There are many more faculty of note, of course, but these two influenced Methodist and theological studies in the second half of the twentieth century at Perkins and far beyond. Today, Perkins is attending carefully to the Hispanic community with its Intersections program and efforts to support Hispanic churches and ministry needs in Texas, as well as its continued attention to the many areas of theological scholarship.

Two of the thirteen official schools were founded after the reunion of the Northern and Southern branches of the church and before the merger of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical Brethren Church.

**Methodist Theological School in Ohio** was founded in 1958, and located on a new campus built on seventy acres that were surrounded by farms, near Delaware, Ohio. In an interesting turn of events, the farmland around the campus has been turning into exurban subdivisions while much of the MTSO campus has been turned into farmland. The seminary began Seminary Hill Farm in response to increasing needs for sustainable farming and care of creation. Though begun as an effort to provide organic food for the campus, the farm now provides certified organic food to the surrounding community, and in the process has become one of the most interesting classrooms among the United Methodist schools. The MTSO also pioneered a seminary-based program to educate counselors working with addicted persons. Central Ohio, one alumnus told me, was a "pill mill," and addiction to prescription painkillers has been rampant in Ohio. This most pastoral setting of any United Methodist theological school has educational foci on two critical issues in urban America: food security and addiction—and of course, on the education of persons who will serve as Methodist pastors.

**Saint Paul School of Theology**, founded in 1959, is the youngest of the official seminaries. It is located in a single story building in the shadow of the undulating form of the new sanctuary of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection—the largest United Methodist Church in the nation. The Saint Paul building is at the opposite end of the church's campus from the sanctuary. Before its present location, Saint Paul was located on a campus originally built for a Methodist women's training school in East Kansas City. During the years it was at that location, Saint Paul cultivated a history of innovative education, took seriously life and ministry in heartland America, and with support from the Oklahoma Conference, began an extension campus at Oklahoma City University. United Methodist theological education has always had a close connection to the church, most typically through the national connection, but the relationship between Saint Paul and Church of the Resurrection is unique. The move to the Church of the Resurrection has provided the opportunity for Saint Paul to develop more flexible and

accessible patterns of theological education. Saint Paul has a small faculty, but as one student noted in an interview, Saint Paul "faculty care about your soul."

These schools are distinguished by different characteristics that have emerged as each institution has embedded itself in its community or in a particular way of constructing theological education. Most of the rest of this report focuses on statistics that describe these schools, but schools are more than their statistical characteristics. They are about faculty engaged in their study and teaching, devising and revising the theological curriculum and delivery systems. Schools are students who have come to a theological school because of some vocational call and the perception that the school they chose will prepare them for ministry—from the tried and true expressions of ministry to forms that do not yet exist. Schools are donors who have supported a particular educational vision and way of being Methodist. They are administrators trying to make institutions work and balance budgets. These thirteen schools have diverse and deeply held theological commitments, all bound with an understanding of Wesleyan theology. They have different ways of constructing theological education, different visions of the church, and different ways of imagining the future of Christian ministry. The variety and diversity of these efforts is matched only by fidelity to a vision of what is Christian in this time and what is needed for the future.

# III
# The Official Schools as a System of United Methodist Theological Schools

> Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set the kingdom of heaven on earth.
>
> —*John Wesley*[19]

> The UMC needs theological education that prepares women and men for leadership in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This education will be rooted in Wesleyan understanding, practices, and ethos and will be shaped by missional identity.
>
> —*From a 2010 report of a Council of Bishops' Task Force*[20]

This section describes these schools *as a group or system of schools* that has a formal place in the structures of The United Methodist Church. In many ways, theological schools closely aligned with a denomination serve a unique function on behalf of the denomination. These schools, more than others that may educate students of a denomination, tend to the issues most central to the denomination's mission and identity. In a sense, denominational schools are identity schools: places where someone will stay up late at night to think about the issues the denomination faces and care about the outcomes. Other schools can educate students of a denomination, but they seldom have faculty or administrators who care about the work and witness of the denomination in the way that persons in the identity theological schools do. Not every one cares, of course, and people in identity schools are often generous in the amount if not the tone of critique they raise toward the denomination. But more than other institutions, these schools are home to individuals who are invested in the denomination's future. Other sections of this report focus on comparative ways of describing these schools, but this section focuses on this group of schools. They are, after all, who they are regardless of how they compare to other groups of schools; and they are a group with a common standing in The United Methodist Church, regardless of their individual similarities or differences.

## Some Common Characteristics

The United Methodist schools share several common characteristics. Whatever else may be true of these schools, they are committed to the education of religious leaders, especially United Methodist leaders; they take seriously their role as bearers of the Wesleyan and United Methodist ethos; they attend seriously to issues of race and ethnicity; and they are self-consciously ecumenical in thought and practice.

19 John Wesley in *The Letters of Rev. John Wesley*, edited by John Tilford, VI, 272, in W. Stephen Gunter, *The Quotable Mr. Wesley* (Candler School of Theology, 1999), 23.

20 Excerpted from "A Working Document from the Council of Bishops Task Force on Theological Education and Leadership Formation," May 2010, in Richey, *Formation for Ministry in American Methodism*, 126.

### *Educating Religious Leaders*

All of these schools are professional schools, and central to their missions is the education of religious leaders. United Methodists comprise the majority of students in all thirteen of the official theological schools, and the MDiv features prominently as the degree required by the Discipline for ordination as elder. The observations of United Methodist faculty at one school were typical of faculty and administrators in other schools: They want to educate leaders who will be 'faithful to tradition but take innovation seriously,' who have 'a certain kind of imaginative capacity; know how to listen carefully to people and settings, and know how to use a variety of disciplines in service to the church.'[21] While the schools are committed to educating leaders, uncertainty exists regarding the kind of leadership for which they are being educated. A donor at another school said that graduates should have 'passion for social justice, be interested in new forms of ministry, and [have a] willingness to engage in ways to bring God into peoples' lives.' A United Methodist faculty member at another school said that 'graduates have a fear of denominational decline; they have come with calling and passion but are worried [about whether] that call can be realized.' Across The UMC, educating for religious leadership at this time involves equipping persons for leadership in congregations that are changing and taking on new challenges; educating other leaders for expressions of ministry that extend the witness and ministry of the church, such as in organizations that promote social justice, community development, and provide needed social services for food and housing; and educating still others for avenues and expressions of ministry that are not yet defined.

### *United Methodist and Wesleyan Ethos*

These schools give credible allegiance to their United Methodist identity: the way United Methodists organize denominational life and structure local congregations, diversity, and ecumenicity. United Methodists are alone among mainline Protestants in their connectional structure and polity. For many students, the annual conference is the denomination. Their confidence (and anxiety) in The UMC is located more in the conference in which they are considering membership than the national denomination. Faculty and administrators, by contrast, tend to think of the UMC ethos more in terms of national agencies, global structure, and the Council of Bishops. A United Methodist congregation is organized in a particular way. Some research participants, when asked about the difference of clergy who had attended one of the thirteen official UMC seminaries or other schools approved by the University Senate, stated that the graduates of the official seminaries know how to 'do church:' they know, for example, how to organize a congregation, how lay leadership of the congregation is empowered, how the staff-parish relations committee works, and how the *Book of Discipline* guides and orders congregations. Interviewees in every visit to the official schools mentioned diversity as an important aspect of United Methodism. Listening to their conversations, one might conclude that The UMC is as united in diversity as it is in Methodism. While diversity means different things to different people, all affirmed diversity as a significant characteristic of The United Methodist Church. It is the same with ecumenicity. The United Methodist Church was formed at the height of the twentieth-century ecumenical effort and has been formally committed to it. The United Methodist ethos includes theological commitments as well, but these are not in the foreground as much as organization, structure, diversity, and ecumenicity. There are certainly other characteristics that can rightly be included in the content of United Methodist ethos, but these four were the ones most evident in the interviews.

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21 Statements that occur with single quotation marks '…' in this report are from hand written notes. The statements are direct quotes from the notes, but the notes were not a transcript of what was said, and while in some cases a statement may be a direct quote, in other cases in may be a paraphrase. As a result the single quotation mark is used as a method of quoting with this qualification. This report contains almost 90 of these single quotation mark citations.

Wesleyan ethos seems more theological and, perhaps, more subtle. A Wesleyan ethos involves a way of understanding grace as a pervasive hermeneutic for both interpreting and living the Christian faith. It reflects a filial piety related to the teaching and preaching of John Wesley. It has a focus on holiness, both personal and social, and a perception that the community in which a pastor serves is as much at the heart of pastoral attention as the congregation to which the pastor is appointed. One senior administrator said that Wesleyan formation is characterized by 'theological emphasis on grace, a practical ministry model, accountability in spiritual formation, (in a pattern of) covenant discipleship.' If Wesleyan ethos was a noun that was modified with several adjectives, most participants would agree with the noun but not the adjectives. There is not agreement, for example, about the boundaries of grace nor the weighting that should be given to personal as opposed to social holiness. The study participants seemed to agree that grace and holiness are hallmarks of a Wesleyan ethos, but agreement eviscerates over how these core elements are defined or modified.

One United Methodist faculty member contended that the nineteenth-century task of Methodist theological education was 'to make Wesleyans' and the task of the twentieth century was 'to make United Methodists.' It would seem that the task of cultivating a United Methodist ethos is not very much different than the task of cultivating a Wesleyan ethos. When United Methodist faculty at one school were asked specifically how the United Methodist ethos is conveyed, they said it was the 'presence of bishops in residence, the United Methodist faculty of the school, chapel worship that is conducted like Methodist worship, and the preponderance of Methodist students in the student body.' The cultivation of a Wesleyan ethos seems to be embodied in similar practices. Graduates thought that it is conveyed through the experience and practical wisdom of United Methodist faculty, through the conversations among United Methodist students about their work in churches, their conversations with boards of ordained ministry, and their understandings of Wesleyan theology. Ethos can be taught, no doubt, but perhaps more importantly, it is "caught"—carried from persons to persons. This was an important part of ministerial formation among the United Brethren: "Each of the preachers spoke of his condition, how it is with him in his preaching and how his purpose is further to do in his office, to call heartily upon God for his help, and that ever he might through humility give to another higher esteem than to himself."[22] The students at one seminary noted how important their frequent meetings with the resident bishop were as they gathered around historic questions to explore 'how… it [is] with your soul.'

### *Race and Ethnicity*

The interviews on campuses revealed a pervasive sensitivity to questions and issues regarding race and ethnicity. On every campus, conversations included references to racial/ethnic presence, to addressing white privilege, to taking seriously communities of color in the scholarship of faculty and education of students. Gammon is the most racially homogeneous of the thirteen schools, but not all of it students are African American. Its enrollment includes some Hispanic and white students, but the center of gravity at Gammon and at the Interdenominational Center is African American. Students at Gammon spoke appreciatively of the ability to learning the history of, and finding a sense of identity among, African and African-American Christianity. The other twelve schools have racially inclusive student bodies, faculty, and administrative staffs. Some schools, like Claremont and Drew, are dramatically multi-racial, with no one racial/ethnic group comprising a majority of its student body; and others, like Wesley and Garrett-Evangelical, have student bodies that are about equally divided between students of color and white

22 From the minutes of early United Brethren conference, in Richey, *Formation*, 106.

students. Still others, like United and its DMin program, have sustained programs over an extended period of time that have focused on one racial/ethnic group. None of these schools would consider itself a "good" school absent racial/ethnic and other forms of diversity. The schools have significantly larger percentages of racial/ethnic faculty and students than The United Methodist Church has clergy or members. The racial diversity of the schools has and will continue to provide an important resource for The United Methodist Church as the American population becomes increasingly racially plural. The students in seminary now will lead congregations through the fundamental changes that will occur as the majority of the American population shifts from white to communities of color.

### *Ecumenical*

Conversations at all of the schools reflected, in one way or another, a commitment to ecumenical Christianity that was nuanced in a particular way. The ecumenicity in the schools is reflected in faculties with both a strong presence of Methodists and a strong presence of faculty who identify with other denominations and in student bodies that have a small majority of United Methodist students and a significant percentage of students from a broad range of denominations. The ecumenicity is also reflected in the care that faculty take in trying to educate both Methodist students and students of other denominations for the contexts in which they will most likely serve. A Methodist student said, 'I have been UMC my whole life, but …it wasn't until I got here that I began to discover what being Wesleyan means for me…and (this seminary) has provided that perspective,' One non-Methodist student commented that she had been 'well-grounded in the ecumenical context because of The UMC (and) influenced by The UMC ethos but [didn't] feel that it crowded out [her] own learning.' A United Methodist faculty member, commenting about Wesleyan identity and non-Methodist students said, 'Wesleyan perspective is a gift to the broader church—I love Wesleyan vision and want students to know this gift, whether Wesleyan or not.' A part of being Wesleyan in ethos and practice is to be ecumenical, and a part of being ecumenical is to share the Wesleyan contribution with the broader Christian community.

### *Educational Innovation*

The official schools have shown evidence of educational innovation, but not so much that it is a distinguishing characteristic. Although not the first schools to experiment with educational innovations, they have been attentive to the ways that theological education is changing and how the schools need to change educational practices to meet new demands or accommodate constituency needs. A majority of the schools now offer some courses or degree programs on line, which likely constitutes the most significant education innovation of the past two decades. In recent years, The Association of Theological Schools has invited member schools to participate in a major effort addressing educational models and practices. The project has involved two grant programs—one for innovating new practices and another for faculty development related to these new practices. Five of the official UMC schools received innovation grants and five received faculty development grants. ATS has also worked with the American Association for the Advancement of Science on a "Science and Seminaries" program, and two of the official schools have participated in it. Other schools have been developing educational programs for incarcerated persons, a variety of educational partnerships with congregations, and are addressing emerging issues like food justice and expanding educational programming. The official schools may not be the most innovative of American theological schools, but they certainly are not the least innovative.

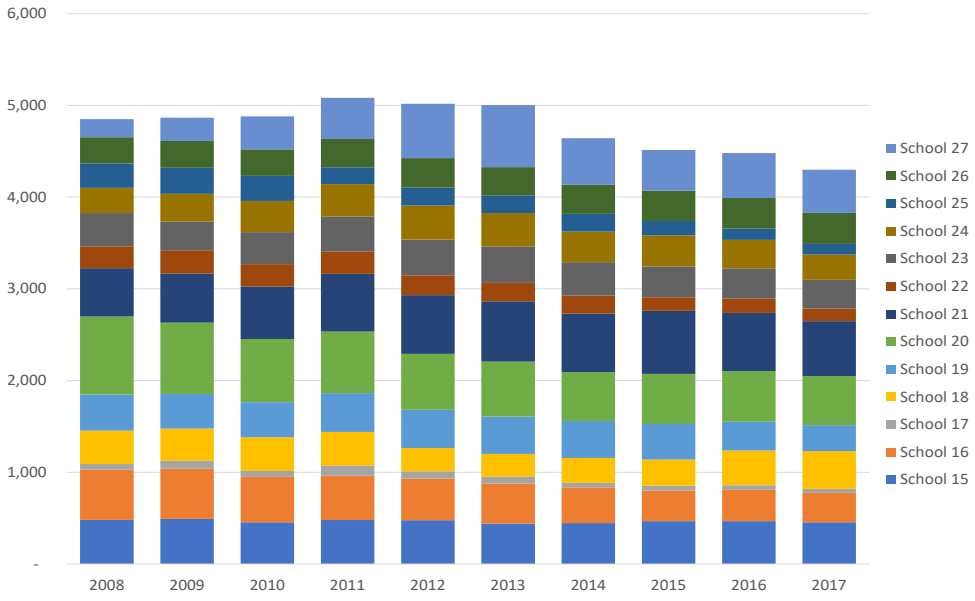
## Enrollment Characteristics

The total enrollment across all degree programs, the enrollment by programs, especially the MDiv, and the characteristics of students tell part of the story of this group of schools.

### *Total Enrollment Characteristics in the United Methodist Schools*

Perhaps the most significant descriptive statistic about any group of schools is the enrollment and how that enrollment has changed over time. Figure 1 displays total enrollment contributed by each of the thirteen schools over the decade. The total enrollment of individuals in the official UMC schools increased slightly early in the past ten years followed by annual decreases most of the ensuing years. This pattern reflects the trend among all of North American theological education. The enrollment in the UMC schools peaked in 2011, and has fallen almost 15 percent since then—from almost 5,100 total students to about 4,300 in the fall of 2017.[23] This overall decline is slightly greater than the decline in United Methodist Church membership during this same period, which will be discussed more fully in section IV.

Figure 1 Total Student Enrollment in UMC Theological Schools



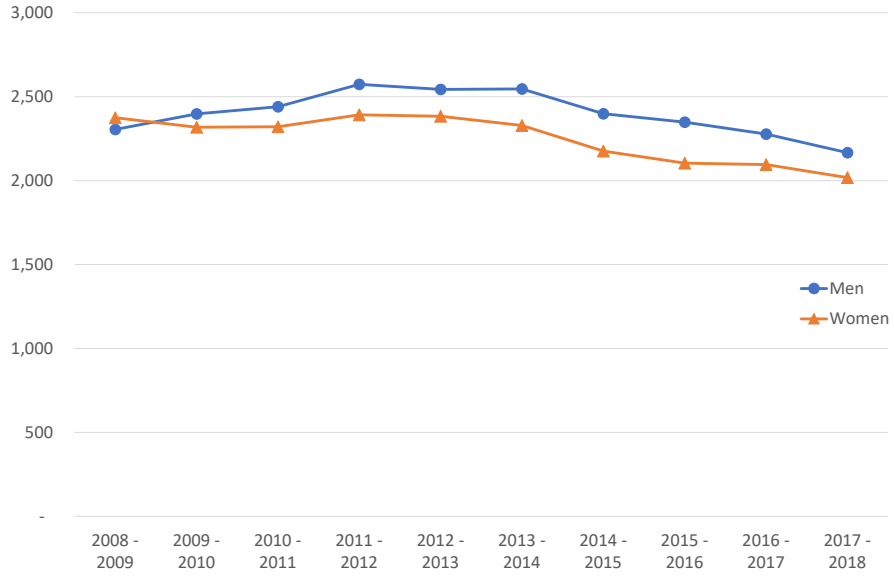

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Total enrollment is important, but the composition of that enrollment may be more significant still: What is the gender of students, and what is the racial/ethnic composition of the student body as a whole? While men outnumber women slightly in the overall enrollment, they do so only slightly. It is interesting to note that women outnumbered men in the first year of the ten years depicted in Figure 2.[24] Men have outnumbered women in all subsequent years. The gender gap in enrollment was greatest in 2013–2014, and has narrowed in the past four years.

23 These data represent the enrollment of all students in the fall of the 2017–2018 academic year, which is the enrollment number reported to the ATS Commission on Accrediting.

24 The data in Figure 2 and most other figures and tables exclude Gammon Theological Seminary because Gammon operates within the Interdenominational Theological Center and it is not possible to disaggregate enrollment characteristics of Gammon students from the data that are available for this project. All of the data shown in these figures and tables are from the institutional data base of the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools.

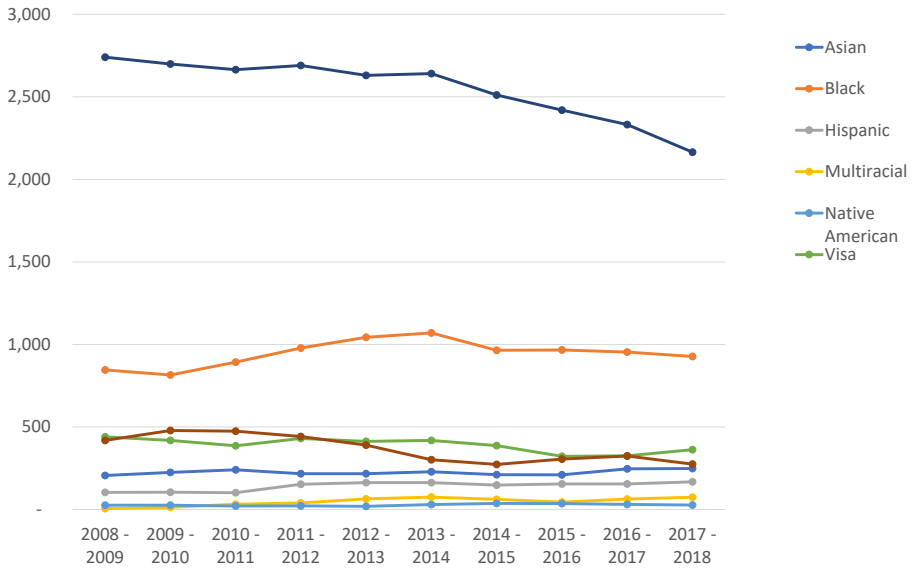
Figure 2 Total Enrollment in United Methodist Schools by Gender




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Figure 3 shows the number of students by each racial/ethnic classification, and identifies several important characteristics. First, the total number of students of color (including all groups except white) constitutes almost 44 percent of enrollment. African-Americans alone constitute more than 25 percent of total enrollment. The data also show that white enrollment had decreased over the past ten years while racial/ethnic enrollment has held steady. That means that all the decline in the overall enrollment shown in Figure 1 is accounted for by a decline in the number of white students. The United Methodist schools are educating students now in the demographic reality that will be dominant in two decades—when communities of color as a group will be nearly the same proportion of the US population as whites. Students learn from faculty of color along with student colleagues of color, and this is a significant asset for ministry in the context of an increasingly racially plural population. Second, the data raise at least one pressing issue: Hispanic/Latino students account for only 5 percent of the enrollment in United

Figure 3 Total Enrollment in United Methodist Schools by Race/Ethnicity



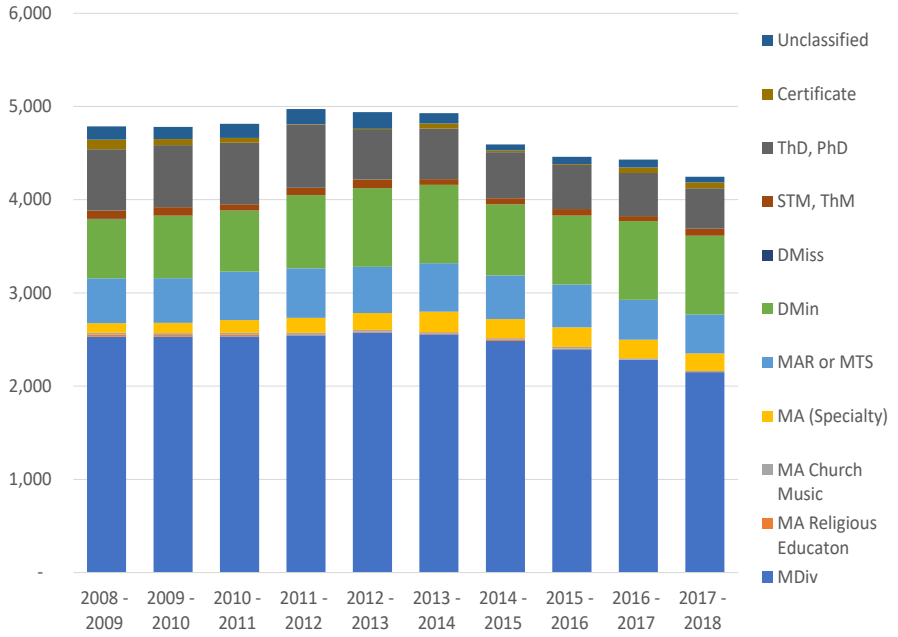

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Methodist seminaries. This community currently represents 14 percent of the US population, is growing as a percentage of the total number of Americans, and constitutes the most underrepresented racial/ethnic community both in United Methodist theological schools and in American theological education in general.

### *Enrollment by Degree Programs*

Figure 4 shows the enrollment for all UMC schools by degree category. The MDiv has accounted for approximately half of the total enrollment in the United Methodist schools over the past decade, and because the proportion has remained stable and the overall enrollment has declined, the enrollment in the MDiv has declined proportionately—from almost 2600 students in fall 2012 to about 2200 in fall 2017. This high percentage of MDiv students likely reflects both the commitment of The United Methodist Church to sustain educational requirements for elders and the commitment of schools to keep pastoral education central in their overall educational programs. The DMin has the second highest enrollment over these years, and because a majority of the official schools offers research doctorates, and even though the number enrolled in PhD and ThD programs is undercounted in these data, these programs comprise the third largest enrollment of any degree programs.[25]

Figure 4 Enrollment in United Methodist Theological Schools by Degree




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

25 The actual enrollment of PhD/ThD schools is because the enrollment in these programs is counted through university graduate schools not the theological school, even though the degree is in theological disciplines and the theological school faculty serve as primary instructional and supervisory faculty for these programs.

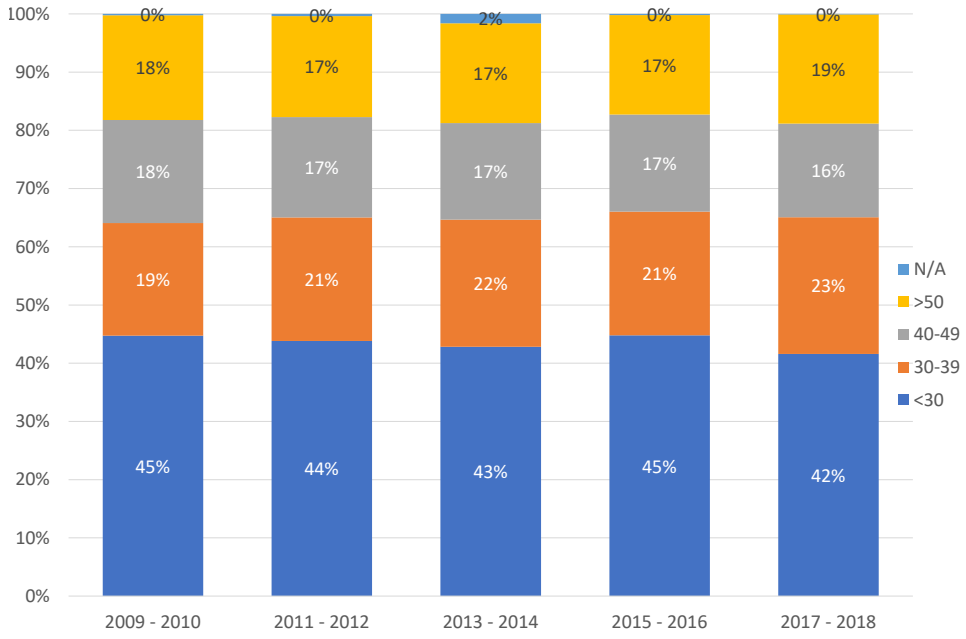
*MDiv Enrollment in United Methodist Schools*

Of all the degree programs offered by theological schools, bishops and other church leaders interviewed during campus visits were particularly interested in the MDiv. Enrollment in this degree has declined over the past several years, but so has the number of pastoral charges in The United Methodist Church.

Because of the particular importance of the MDiv, and the age, gender, and racial/ethnic composition of MDiv students, it is instructive to look at these characteristics for the MDiv students, in addition to examining them for the total enrollment, because they say something about the future face of UMC elders.[26]

Age. Figure 5 shows that the percentage of students over thirty has increased while the percentage of students under thirty has decreased. The changes of percentages by age group from 2009–2010 to 2017–2018 are minimal, but MDiv students under thirty declined from 45 percent of enrollment in 2009–2010 to 42 percent in 2017–2018. The largest percentage change is students in their thirties, who increased from 19 to 23 percent of MDiv enrollment over these years. While these data are qualified as explained (see footnote[23]), they likely will not comfort a denomination that is sensitive to the limited number of elders under thirty-five (less than 7 percent of all elders). These data don't hold the promise of any near term change in the relatively low percentage of elders under thirty-five.

Figure 5 Percentage of MDiv Students in UMC Schools by Age

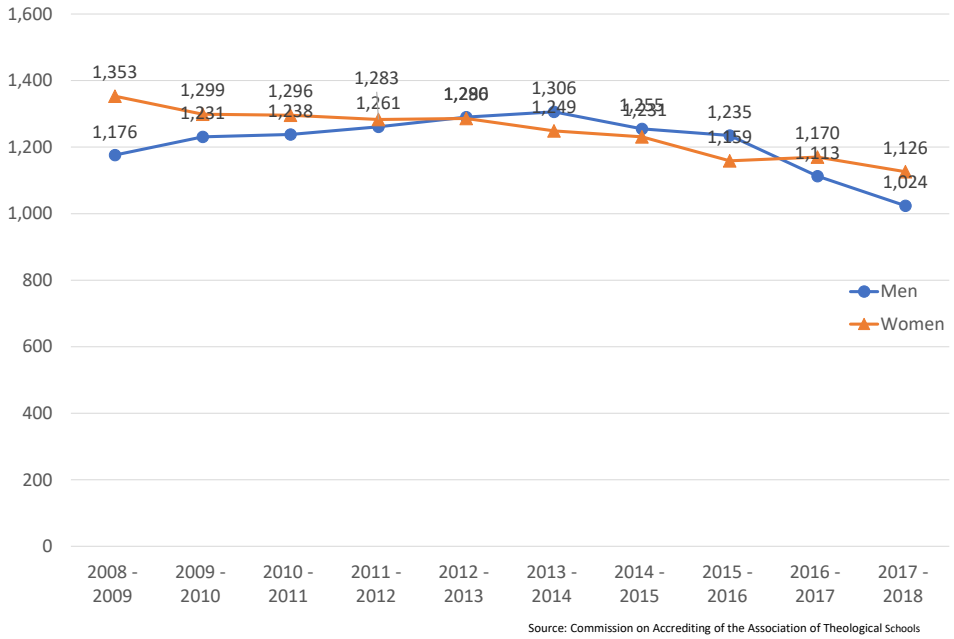



Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

26 Beyond the number and percentage of United Methodists students, it becomes more difficult to interpret the data with regard to gender, age, and racial/ethnic identity. The data are not collected in a way that makes it possible to say how many women, for example, are United Methodist, or how many of the under-thirty students are United Methodist. The data have been interpreted as addressing issues of age and gender among United Methodist elders, but this interpretation is qualified by the inability to sort among multiple variables.

Gender. Perhaps most significantly, the proportions of men and women enrolled in the MDiv are very similar—almost 50:50, as shown in Figure 6. In some years, there have been more men than women, and in other years, more women than men. *The Clergy Age Report for 2018*,[27] issued by the Lewis Center at Wesley Seminary, indicates that the number of women elders under age thirty-five has declined from 404 in 2015 to 350 in 2017. This is a reversal of an earlier trend, according to the report, and the data in Figure 6, while not accounting for age, suggest that the number of women entering conferences as provisional elders may be greater than the number of men.

Figure 6 Total MDiv Students in United Methodist Schools by Gender



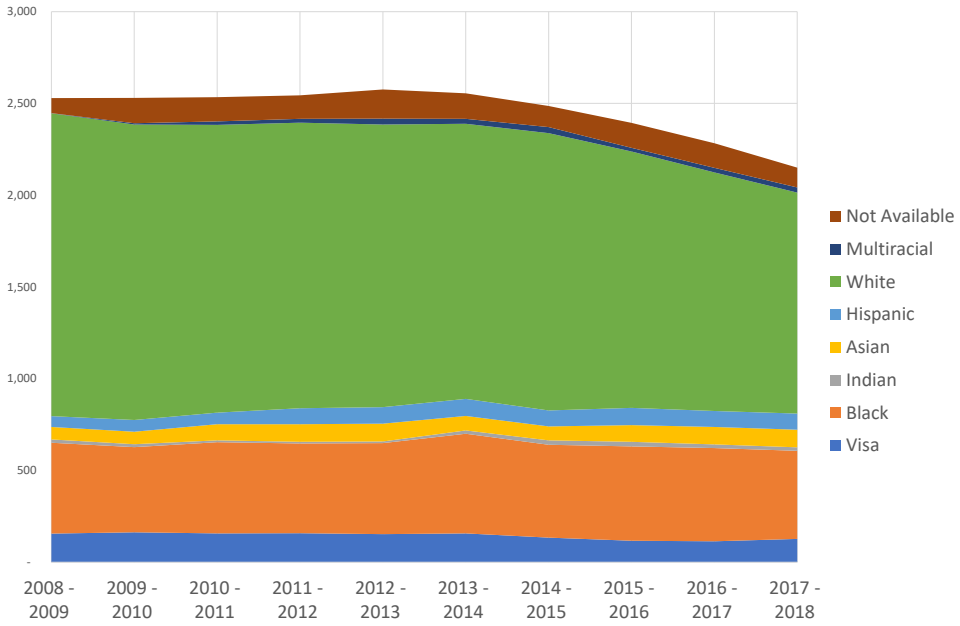

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Race and Ethnicity. Figure 7 shows that the racial/ethnic distribution of MDiv students generally follows the pattern of racial/ethnic distribution of the total enrollment (Figure 3). While white MDiv students are the largest group, they have declined significantly over the past ten years, while the number of students of color has remained stable. Virtually all of the decline in MDiv is a function of the decline in the number of white students enrolled.

MDiv enrollment by denomination. The discussion above about the implications of MDiv enrollment for the future of elders in The United Methodist Church holds true only if a significant proportion of the MDiv enrollment comprises United Methodist students. Figure 8 shows that not only are more than half of all students in United Methodist schools enrolled in the MDiv, but also that more than half of all MDiv students in these schools are United Methodists. Over the past decade, about 60 percent of all MDiv students in UMC schools have been United Methodist, and the percentage is slightly higher if AME and AME Zion students are included. United Methodist ethos is not just a function of subjects taught and faculty who teach them; it is also a function of other United Methodist students studying together with

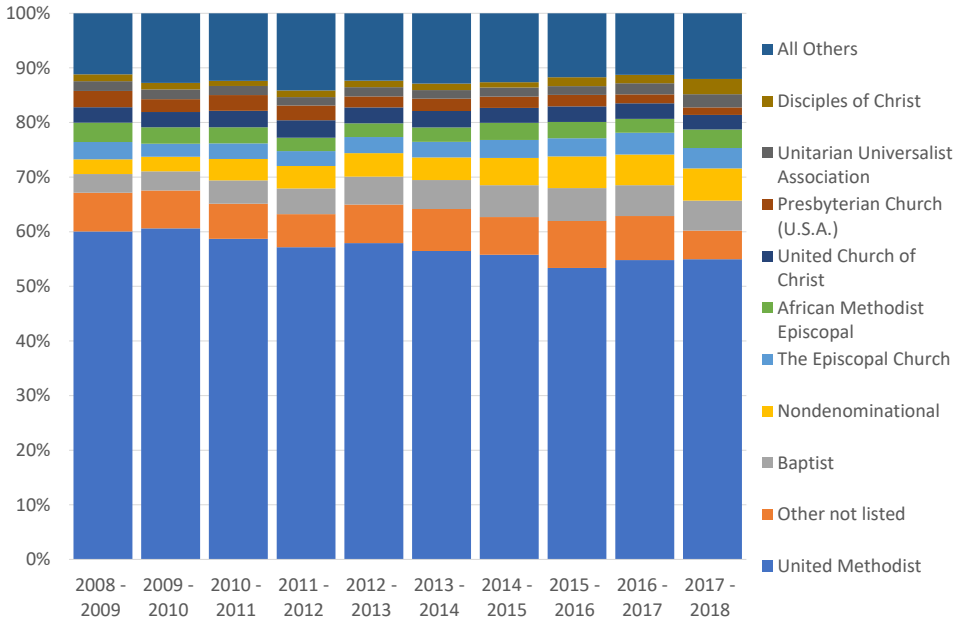
27 *A Lewis Center Report on Clergy Age Trends in the United Methodist Church*, 2018 Report, Lewis Center for Church Leadership, 2018.

Figure 7 MDiv Students in United Methodist Schools by Racial Ethnic Identification




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Figure 8 MDiv Enrollment by Denomination of Students in UMC Schools




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

similar vocational goals, learning United Methodist ways of doing ministry. Having a high percentage of United Methodist students no doubt constitutes a significant learning resource in these schools.

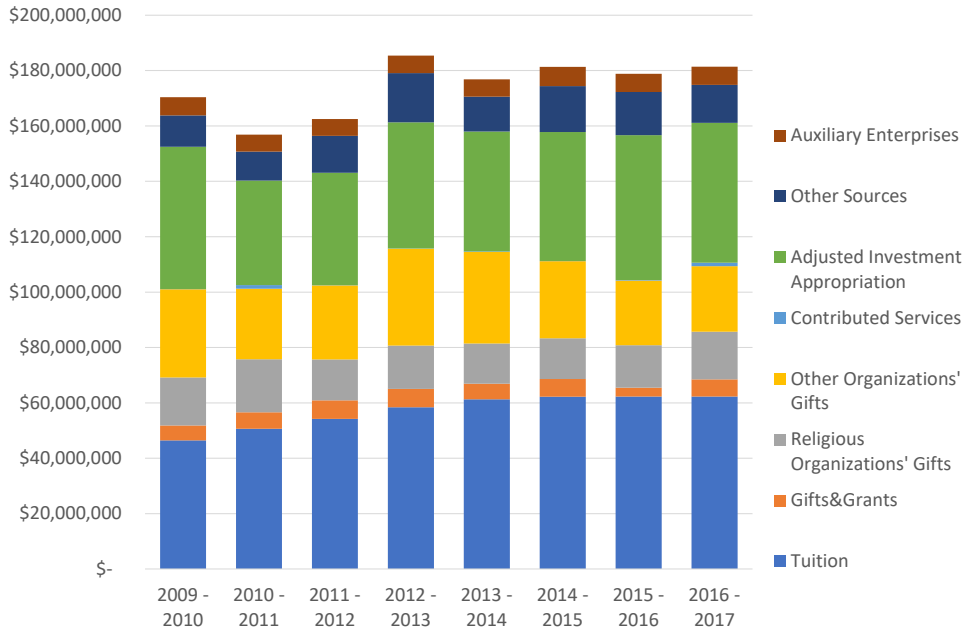
## Financial Characteristics

The financial characteristics of these schools, in contrast to enrollment, are much more difficult to interpret. While revenue across the schools can be readily identified, it is all but impossible to interpret expenses across the entire set of schools because expenditures in six schools that are parts of larger institutions (Boston, Candler, Drew, Duke, Gammon, and Perkins) follow neither a common accounting pattern among themselves nor do any of them follow patterns like the seven free-standing schools. While the overall financial status can be identified for individual schools, it cannot be ascertained for the schools as a whole. Yet with due caution, some indicators can be helpful.

### *Revenue*

Figure 9 shows total adjusted revenue over[28] the past eight years[29] for all the official schools, which signifies some good news and some bad news. The good news is that schools did not need to negotiate declining revenue during the most recent five years as they did for the first three years shown in Figure 9. The bad news is that for the past five years there has been no real growth in revenue. Like other parts of The United Methodist Church, the schools' overall revenue is flat.

Figure 9 Total Adjusted Revenue of United Methodist Schools




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

28 "Adjusted revenue" means that revenue from long term investments—endowment—has been set to 5 percent of the school's actual endowment for each of the years displayed in the figure. Some schools spend more, some less, but most financial analysts agree that expenditure above 5 percent is not prudent, and results in paying for present expenses with the resources needed to pay future expenses.

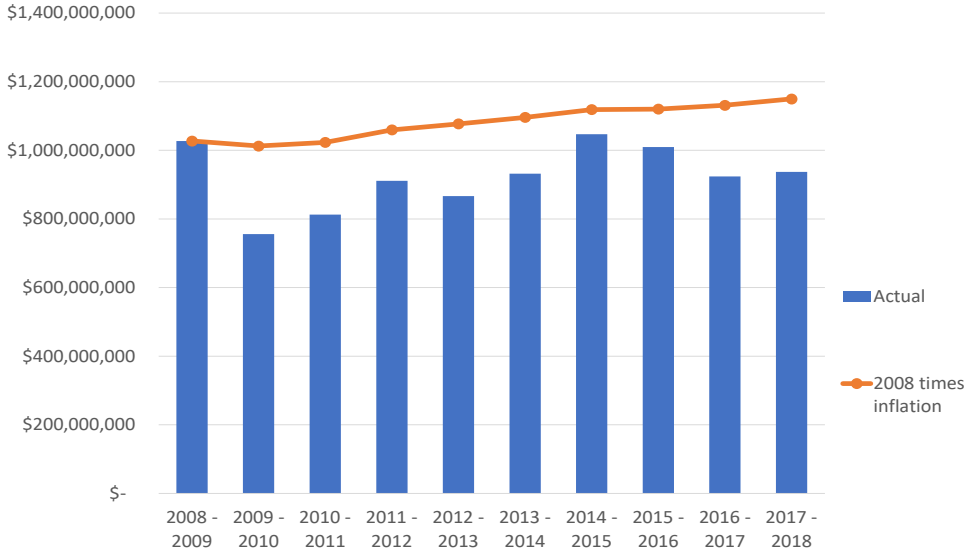
29 These eight years have been chosen to show revenue the year the "Great Recession" began and for the following years to identify the effect of the recession on revenue derived from long-term investments.

During all of these years, United Methodist schools have derived about 90 percent of their operating income from five sources: tuition, long-term investments, grants from foundations and other organizations, gifts and grants from individuals, and grants from the Ministerial Education Fund. These five revenue sources merit comment, the largest sources being tuition and long-term investments.

Tuition. In 2009–2010, total revenue from tuition was approximately $46 million, and by 2016–2017, tuition revenue was $62 million—a growth of about 35 percent. In 2009–2010, tuition revenue supplied about 27 percent of total revenue, and in 2016–2017, it supplied 35 percent of total revenue. This growth in revenue from tuition must be interpreted in the context of the decline in enrollment noted earlier. If enrollment had increased, increased revenue from tuition would be a function of more students paying tuition. That is not the case. The reality is that in 2016–2017 fewer students than in 2009–2-10 were paying considerably more tuition. Total revenue from tuition is an accounting figure more than an income amount. United Methodist schools return almost half of total tuition to students in the form of scholarships or grants in aid, and even more to United Methodist students. While the amount varies by school and degree program (MDiv students receive a higher percentage of aid than DMin students, for example) revenue from tuition must be interpreted in relationship to expenditures for scholarship support.

Appropriated revenue from long-term investments. In the most recent year shown in Figure 9, adjusted revenue from endowment amounted to just over $50 million, the second largest source of revenue. Endowments represent the financial commitment of current and past generations that has accrued over time to invest in the missions of these schools. They comprise a resource without which schools simply would not meet the requirements of their institutional missions. The benefits of endowments are obvious, but Figure 10 shows their volatility. The biggest recession since the Great Depression occurred in 2008–2009 resulting in the loss of market value of investments and leading schools to appropriate less revenue from these long term investments. The $50 million in 2009–2010 revenue dropped to $38 million the following year, when the full results of market decline had been factored into spending formulas. It was not

Figure 10 Aggregate Long Term Investments of United Methodist Schools Compared to Inflation CPI(U). (Value at the beginning of the fiscal year.)

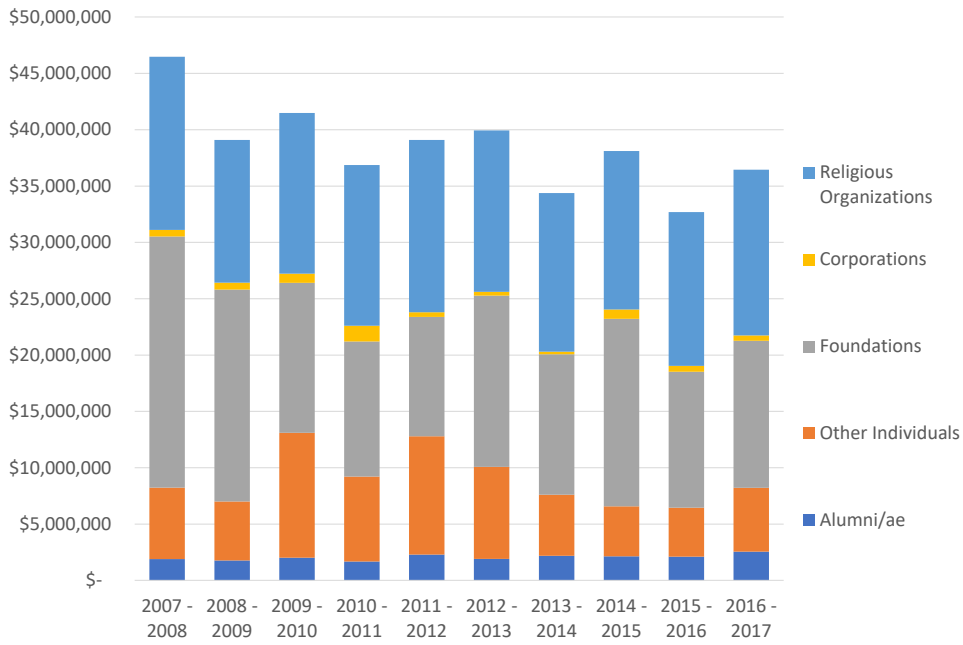



Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

until the most recent two years that revenue from endowment recovered to the $50 million range. Figure 11 shows that the combined long term investments have not fully recovered their 2008–2009 value, and perhaps more telling, have not grown to what would be needed in 2017 to equal the inflation-adjusted value they had in 2008.

Operating gifts and grants include gifts from graduates and other individuals, grants from other organizations—most typically foundations, and religious organizations. Figure 10a shows the amount of revenue that has been received from these souces over the past ten years. It has varied from a high of $45 million in 2007–2008—the year before the recession began, and a low of $33.5 million in 2016–17. These are gifts to operations, and do not include capital gifts.

Figure 10a Summary of Operating Gifts and Grants to the Official Schools by Source




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Individual gifts. Many of the gifts from individuals support capital projects or add to endowment. Some gifts are for current operations, and the official schools receive operating support from graduates and other individuals. During my visits to schools, I had the opportunity to talk with donors at almost all of the schools, and I asked them why they give. They identified several reasons, and the five that occurred most often included: (1) a relationship with current or former leaders of the school, or other persons associated with the school (3, 13, 9, 4, 1, 5); (2) a commitment to the mission and work of the school–what donors thought the school was accomplishing (3, 11, 4, 9, 5); (3) appreciation for the students and their needs and gratitude for graduates and quality of their work, as well as the school's need (3, 10, 13); (4) gratitude for what the school had done for them or people they knew or a sense of loyalty to the school (3, 4, 8); and (5) because the donor is Methodist, or their parents were Methodist, or because of a commitment to a vision of the kind of leaders The United Methodist Church needs (1, 5, 11). Two donors said they give because someone asked them and continues to ask!

Revenue from other organizations. United Methodist schools have been successful in securing grants and gifts from foundations and other organizations. During the eight years shown in Figure 9, these combined gifts and grants for all the schools ranged from a low of $23 million to a high of $35 million.

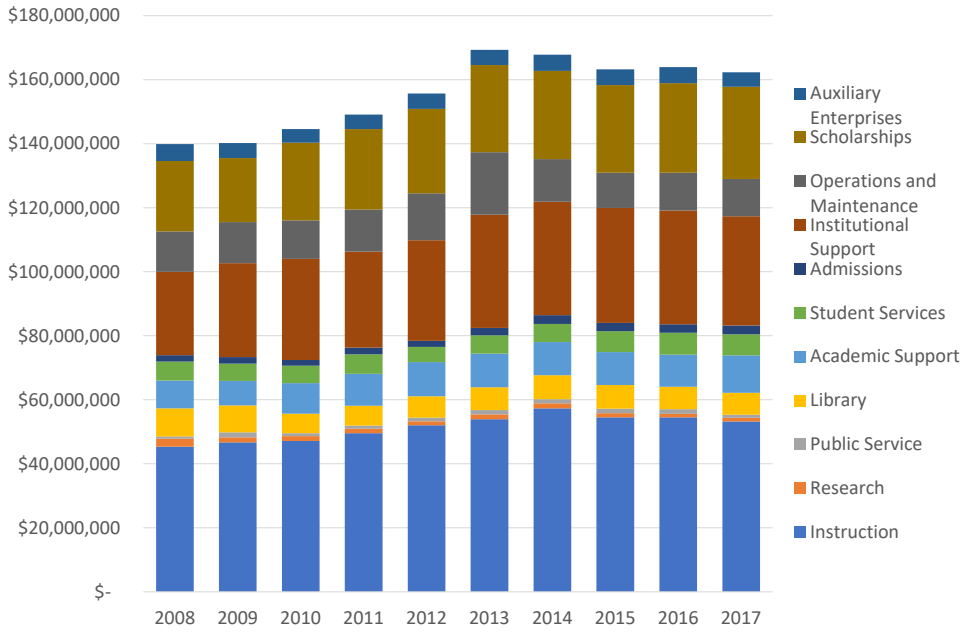
Typically these grants come to the schools in the form of restricted funds that are to be used only for agreed-upon activity; they cannot be used as the institution may choose to use them. They typically provide funds to undertake new initiatives, develop new program strategies, but they seldom provide resources to pay for utilities or other institutional expenses.

Revenue from the Ministerial Education Fund. While revenue categorized as coming from "religious organizations" may include funds from sources other than the Ministerial Education Fund, for the official schools the MEF is the primary source of revenue accounted to this category. The MEF channels money from the denomination to annual conferences, to the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and to the official United Methodist theological schools. Over the course of the eight years shown in Figure 9, revenue in this category has ranged from just under $15 million to just over $17, with the exception of one year when it was $19 million. The MEF has provided 9–10 percent of total revenue for United Methodist schools as a group in most of these years.

### *Expenditures*

Figure 11 shows the aggregated expenditures for twelve of the thirteen official schools over the course of the past decade. Expenditures, as noted earlier, are a little more difficult to interpret than revenue because of the different ways in which costs are accounted for in university-related schools, but the data remain instructive. Overall, aggregated expenditures rose by almost $30 million from 2008, the year the recession began, until 2013. Since 2013, expenditures have fallen slightly. Three major areas of expenditure deserve comment.

Figure 11 Aggregated Expenditures of United Methodist Theological Schools




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

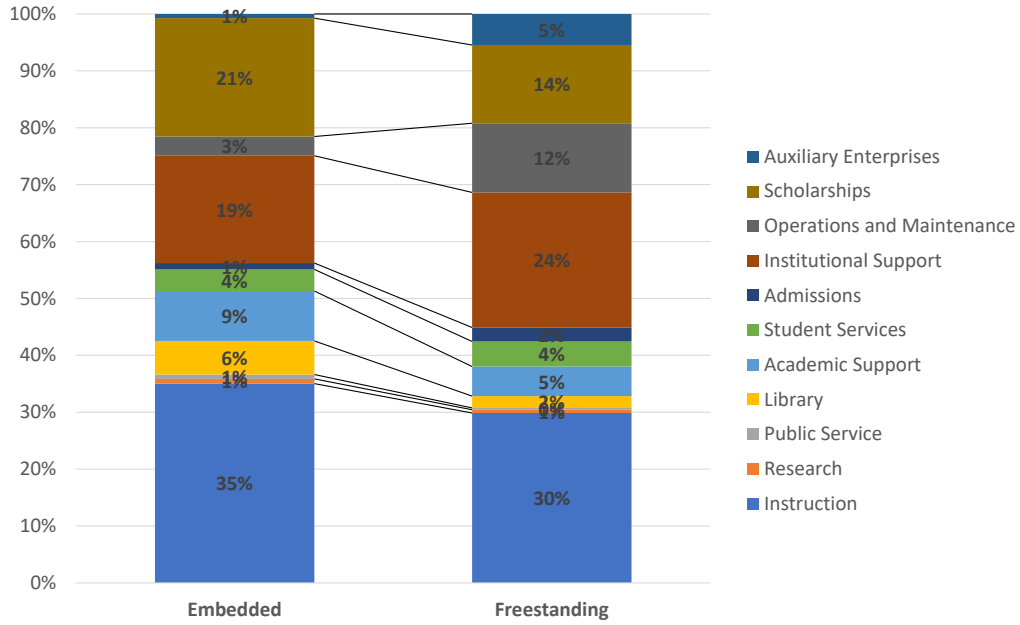
Funding Educational Activities. The instructional expenses of a theological school include the cost of faculty (instruction), support for research (research), library (library), academic program administration (academic support), and the services that students require as they move through their degree programs (student services). These various categories of expense total about half of the expenditures each year, over the course of these years.

Institutional and Facilities Support. Theological schools need executive leadership, business offices, development and institutional advancement, IT support, and other services to maintain a higher education institution (institutional support). They also need funds to operate and maintain facilities, which, for free-standing schools, comprise an entire campus (operations and maintenance). These functions cost less than educational activities, but together constitute the second largest area of expenditures.

Scholarships. The third_largest area of expenditure is scholarship for students. The expense for scholarship comes in two forms. The first is the (typically restricted) funds from endowment that support student scholarships. The second is funds from the operational budget of the schools that are administered as discounts or outright grants. Methodist students in all the visits to the thirteen theological schools mentioned appreciatively the amount of scholarship monies that they had received, and non-Methodist students mentioned that, while they received scholarship support, it was not at the level that the Methodist students received.

Variations and Inflation. The most significant influence on the pattern of expenditures is institutional type. Figure 12 shows expenditures by category as a percentage of total expenditures by two kinds of schools: freestanding schools and schools embedded in larger institutions. Embedded schools spend a smaller percentage of their expenditures on Operations and Maintenance and Institutional Support than freestanding schools do, which leaves a larger percentage of expenditures for the categories that comprise educational programming and scholarships for students.

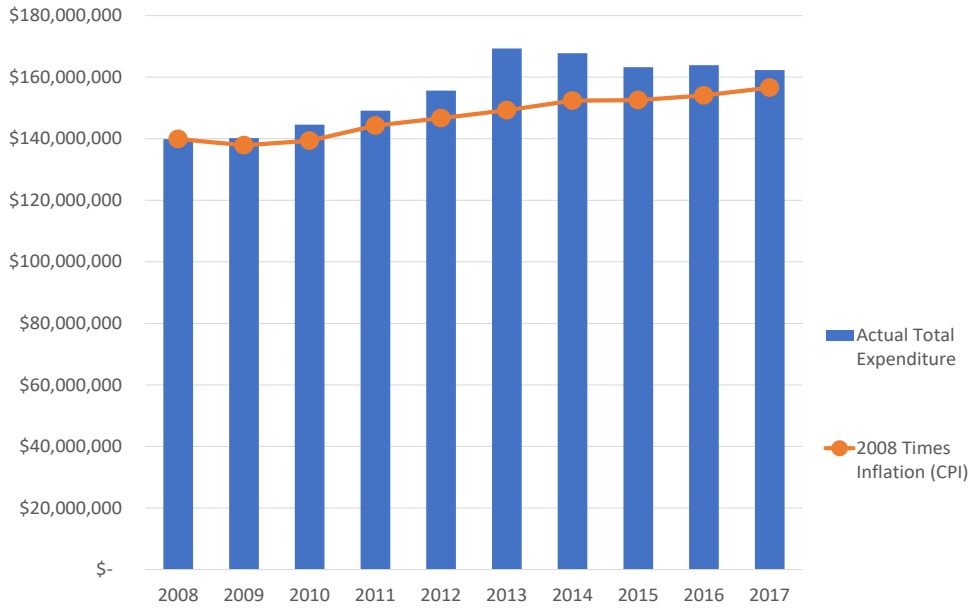
Figure 12 Comparison of Expenditure for Embedded and Freestanding United Methodist Theological Schools, in Percentages. Fiscal Year Ended 2017.




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

While the past ten years has been a period of low inflation, inflation is still a threat to institutions that cannot raise revenue quickly enough to compensate for high inflation. Figure 13 shows that the expenditures of the United Methodist schools outpaced inflation for most of the decade.

Figure 13 Total Operating Expenditures of UMC Schools Compared to Inflation




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

## Is a System of Thirteen Theological Schools Sustainable?

As a system of schools that provide the majority of ordination candidates to The United Methodist Church, these schools have sustained their work in the context of changing enrollment patterns, a financially difficult period in the United States economy, and a contested time in The United Methodist Church. Enrollment has declined, just as both the numbers of members of The United Methodist Church in the US and the total number of pastoral charges have declined. Over the course of the decade, schools reduced expenditures when required by declining revenue early in the decade and restored spending when revenue grew in the later part of the decade. The system concluded the past decade less robust than it was at the beginning. The total enrollment was approximately 15 percent less at the end of the decade than at the beginning. Long term investments (endowment) were hit hard during the recession at the beginning of the decade, recovered most of the value that had been lost during the decade, but still ended the decade with a market value 10 percent less than the market value at the beginning of the decade (a decline from about $1 billion to about $900 million). This system of theological schools demonstrated both institutional weakness in the stress of the decade as well strength in adapting to pressure and responding to needs of students, schools, and the church—in a time when all of them were needy. They have given Mr. Wesley far more than his one hundred preachers. But is the system sustainable?

Most mainline denominations have abandoned close relationships to theological schools. Only one other mainline denomination provides any annual operational support to its theological schools. At the heart of the United Methodist ethos, however, is a theological commitment to a connectional church, and a connectional church, one might assume, would have a "system" by which the ministers of the connection

are prepared for their appointments. Sustaining a system of schools is an issue both for the schools and the denomination. The schools need to find the money and students their missions while sustaining a clear commitment to a Wesleyan vision. The United Methodist Church needs schools both for the education of ministers and also because they embody a Wesleyan commitment to intellectual effort and sustaining theological inquiry, because they provide contexts for interpreting the changing role of church in the culture, and because they engage research that extends the church's message in new intellectual moments. The system is sustainable, but may not be needed in the future in quite the way it has been needed in the past, and it may not be sustained in the same way as it has been in the past.

Does the system require thirteen theological schools even if there is a commitment to a system of theological schools? The answer to that question is more a function of the capacity of individual schools than the system as a whole, and the next section of this report addresses the individual school question. If the "UMC needs theological education that prepares women and men for leadership in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (that) will be rooted in Wesleyan understanding, practices, and ethos and will be shaped by missional identity," how many schools does that require?

# IV
# The Thirteen Schools as Individual Institutions

> Education that 'sharpens and strengthens the mental faculties'
> while 'invigorating the moral powers and inspiring the religious life.'
> *–From a 1914 letter accompanying Asa Candler's gift to found Emory University*[30]

While the official theological schools of The United Methodist Church form a system, share many common purposes, and affirm several common commitments, there are *not* multiple units of one kind of institution. On the contrary, one of these schools' most notable characteristics is their diversity. The previous section, with its focus on the schools as a group, identified several similarities. This section describes the schools as individual educational institutions, and is an exercise in describing diversity.

## United in Diversity

A bishop, when asked to compare official seminaries to others approved by the University Senate, said 'it is difficult to compare the thirteen to the other approved schools because there is so much diversity among the thirteen.' For United Methodists, diversity appears to be a good thing. When asked about the criteria that should be considered in determining the "right" number of UMC seminaries, one bishop said that 'because the church is so diverse, it needs to look at diversity as a key factor.' A donor at another school commented that a criterion should be the ability of each school to serve 'its niche' and a graduate of still another school said that 'if a school is not graduating a diverse group of students, it is failing the church.' Diversity is a theme that often emerged in the interviews conducted for this project, and if diversity is a strength, then each United Methodist school has a claim on its version of that strength.

### *Diverse Institutional Types*

Varying institutional forms are among the most obvious pattern of diversity. Seven schools (Claremont School of Theology, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Iliff School of Theology, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Saint Paul School of Theology, United Theological Seminary, and Wesley Theological Seminary) are freestanding theological schools. In the array of institutions of higher education in the United States, they are classified as special focus institutions.[31] Four of the schools (Boston University School of Theology, Candler School of Theology, Duke Divinity School, and Perkins School of Theology) are denominationally related seminaries housed in research intensive universities. Of these four, Boston, Duke, and Emory are not only classified as research intensive institutions, they are also members of the Association of American Universities (AAU), whose sixty-two institutions qualify for

30 *Candler Connection*, Fall 2014:13.

31 These classification of types of schools follow the Carnegie classification, which is briefly described on its website: "The Carnegie Classification® has been the leading framework for recognizing and describing institutional diversity in U.S. higher education for the past four and a half decades. Starting in 1970, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education developed a classification of colleges and universities to support its program of research and policy analysis. Derived from empirical data on colleges and universities, the Carnegie Classification was originally published in 1973, and subsequently updated in 1976, 1987, 1994, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015 to reflect changes among colleges and universities. This framework has been widely used in the study of higher education, both as a way to represent and control for institutional differences, and also in the design of research studies to ensure adequate representation of sampled institutions, students, or faculty." (http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu)

membership by criteria that include hundreds of millions of dollars of funded research, demonstrated faculty research productivity, the range and number of PhD programs, and other requirements. In a way, the AAU is the most elite club in American higher education, and these three United Methodist theological schools are the only *denominationally* related theological schools among AAU member institutions.[32] There is no parallel to these research university related schools in the Presbyterian Church, USA, the United Church of Christ (with the exception of a lose connection with Yale Divinity School), the Disciples of Christ, or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.[33] The other two UMC schools (Drew and Gammon) are embedded in other higher education institutions. Drew Theological School is part of Drew University, which is primarily an undergraduate institution with a theological school and small academic graduate program. While it has the name "university," it does not have the range of professional schools or graduate programs comparable to Boston, Duke, Emory, or SMU. Gammon is embedded in the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), comprising five historically Black seminaries that operate as a single academic entity through ITC. No other Protestant denomination—mainline or evangelical—has a system of seminaries with such diverse institutional forms as The United Methodist Church.

### *Diversity in Enrollment*

The official United Methodist schools vary from each other in terms of their overall enrollment, the percentage of United Methodist students, the percentage of students who are enrolled in the MDiv program, and the number of ordinands, as is evident in Table 1.[34] Enrollments range from a low of 45,[35] to a high of 599. The range of United Methodist students as a percentage of total enrollment varies from 22 percent to 100 percent, and the percentage of MDiv students who are United Methodist ranges from 37 percent to 100 percent. The United Methodist Church has a particular interest in the number of ordination candidates that graduate from these schools and Table 1 also shows that number for the most recent year. Because the MDiv requires at least three years of full-time study, because many students take more than three years to complete the degree, and because some people complete the degree but do not seek ordination, the data suggest that it takes three to four UMC MDiv students enrolled each year to yield a single ordination candidate. This too, varies by school; some schools require more MDiv students to be enrolled to produce a single ordination candidate; a few schools take fewer Methodist MDiv students for each ordination candidate.

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32 Several other AAU institutions (Chicago, Harvard, Yale, and Vanderbilt) have divinity schools, but none is related to or supported in part by a denomination.

33 Several ELCA schools are now related to universities, but they are comprehensive teaching universities, not research intensive institutions like the four UMC universities that are named.

34 In this table, and in all the tables in this section that identify data by individual school, the schools are identified by number and not name. The numbers do not identify the same school in all tables, nor does the same school occupy the same position (such as third or seventh school listed) in all the tables and figures.

35 Gammon operates as one of the five constituent seminaries of the Interdenominational Theological Center. By agreement among the constituent seminaries, all United Methodist students at ITC are enrolled through Gammon and Gammon can enroll only United Methodist students. Last year, the forty-five Gammon students were studying with a total of almost three hundred ITC students.

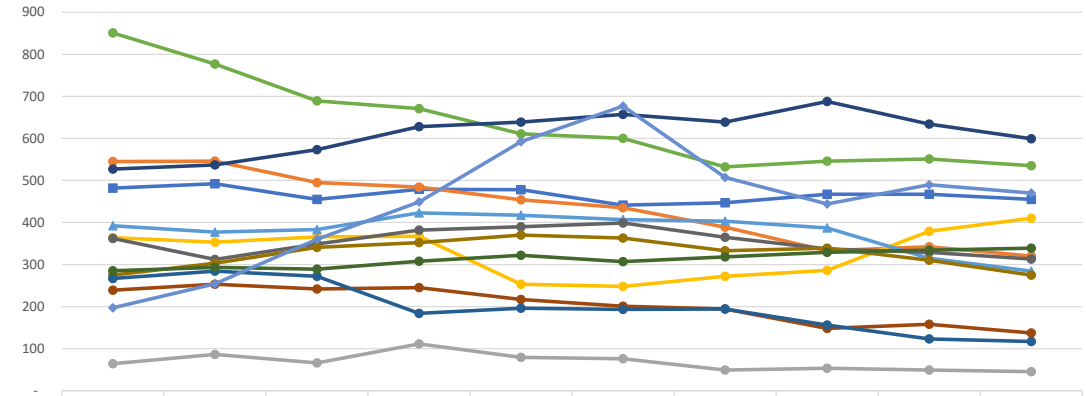
| Table 1: Summary Enrollment by School | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Institution** | **Total Enrollment, Fall 2017** | **Percent of Total Enrollment United Methodist** | **Percentage of MDiv Enrollment United Methodist** | **Number of 2017 UMC Elder Ordinands** |
| School 1 | 410 | 22% | 37% | 4 |
| School 2 | 117 | 80% | 89% | 12 |
| School 3 | 599 | 37% | 46% | 56 |
| School 4 | 339 | 24% | 36% | 4 |
| School 5 | 313 | 57% | 65% | 21 |
| School 6 | 275 | 29% | 44% | 6 |
| School 7 | 137 | 57% | 65% | 15 |
| School 8 | 320 | 42% | 64% | 16 |
| School 9 | 284 | 59% | 78% | 19 |
| School 10 | 470 | 44% | 56% | 16 |
| School 11 | 455 | 43% | 51% | 24 |
| School 12 | 535 | 50% | 66% | 26 |
| School 13 | 45 | 100% | 100% | 5 |

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

Enrollment in higher education is not subject to a big-is-good, small-is-bad dichotomy. Both large and small enrollments have educational assets and liabilities. In a theological school, too large an enrollment can impede the discipleship formation tasks of theological study while too small an enrollment can impede the community of learning that provides the range of experiences and diversity of ideas that are crucial to theological study. Nor is enrollment size necessarily related to financial health. Because most United Methodist schools provide significant scholarship support or tuition discounts, a larger enrollment does not necessarily translate into more income. Some schools have a high percentage of part-time students and, while part-time students increase the total enrollment number, they do not contribute as much tuition revenue per student, even in the small way that tuition counts for the United Methodist schools.

Enrollment declined each year for a decade across the ATS member schools, then leveled off and achieved miniscule gains. Most recently, it has stabilized, and in the two most recent years, shown slight increases. While most ATS schools have had a declining enrollment, some have had increasing enrollments. The trend is the same for the UMC schools: nine of the thirteen had fewer students enrolled in fall 2017 than in fall 2008. Four of them had more students enrolled. The data for individual schools indicates these variable enrollment patterns. Figure 14 shows the enrollment trends for the UMC schools for the past decade. A review of that data shows that while the enrollment has declined overall, it has not done so evenly across the thirteen schools. It has been variable, sometimes dramatically so, in the context of an overall decline. The variability may be as difficult for theological schools as the decline. Growth followed by decline, for example, means that schools either had to ramp up support systems quickly or stress existing systems only to have ramped up systems become surplus when the enrollment declined. Unsurprisingly, theological schools are better at handling consistent changes than variable ones.

Figure 14 Comparative Total Enrollment from Fall 2008 through Fall 2017




| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | 482 | 492 | 455 | 479 | 478 | 441 | 447 | 467 | 467 | 455 |
| 16 | 545 | 546 | 495 | 484 | 454 | 435 | 389 | 333 | 342 | 320 |
| 17 | 64 | 86 | 66 | 111 | 79 | 76 | 49 | 53 | 49 | 45 |
| 18 | 364 | 353 | 366 | 367 | 253 | 248 | 272 | 286 | 379 | 410 |
| 19 | 392 | 377 | 383 | 423 | 417 | 407 | 403 | 387 | 315 | 284 |
| 20 | 851 | 777 | 689 | 671 | 611 | 600 | 532 | 546 | 551 | 535 |
| 21 | 527 | 537 | 573 | 628 | 639 | 657 | 639 | 688 | 634 | 599 |
| 22 | 239 | 253 | 242 | 245 | 217 | 201 | 194 | 148 | 158 | 137 |
| 23 | 362 | 312 | 349 | 382 | 390 | 399 | 365 | 337 | 329 | 313 |
| 24 | 275 | 303 | 341 | 352 | 370 | 363 | 333 | 339 | 310 | 275 |
| 25 | 267 | 284 | 272 | 184 | 196 | 193 | 194 | 156 | 123 | 117 |
| 26 | 285 | 293 | 289 | 308 | 322 | 307 | 318 | 329 | 334 | 339 |
| 27 | 197 | 254 | 360 | 449 | 592 | 677 | 507 | 444 | 490 | 470 |

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Enrollment decline may not decrease revenue a great deal, but it always increases cost. The costs associated with maintaining facilities, a faculty that includes the range of disciplines that ministry education requires, and administrating a school do not vary significantly with the number of students. As enrollment decreases, the cost per student increases. If there are no students, of course, there is no "school"—no way to accomplish its primary mission, and that reality makes enrollment a significant issue for United Methodist schools as well as for most theological schools in the United States. Enrollment is an institutional issue even if it is not an educational issue. It is an expense issue, even if it is not primarily a revenue issue.

## Issues Related to Enrollment in Theological Education

Given the importance of enrollment, and the shifting fortunes of the official schools related to enrollment, some basic questions about enrollment deserve attention.

### *Why do students choose a particular theological school?*

Seminary students from 168 ATS schools in the fall of 2017 gave the highest ratings to four reasons for choosing their school: quality of faculty, academic reputation of school, curriculum, and comfort with the school's doctrinal position.[36] Of the relatively long list of possible choices in addition to these four, the others that come closest are: denominational affiliation; financial aid; and a sense of community. The same survey was completed by more than seven hundred students at eleven participating United Methodist schools, and the results were exactly the same—with two differences. The students in the

36 *The ATS Entering Student Questionnaire*, Table 19, based on responses of over five thousand entering students from 168 schools, Fall, 2017, https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/student-data/documents/total-school-profiles/esq-total-school-profile-2017-2018.pdf, accessed September, 2018.

UMC schools rated three of the top four choices of students in all schools as highly as the total group of students. The students in the Methodist schools rated the fourth (a school's theological position) only slightly lower, and rated good financial aid assistance and diverse/multicultural community as highly as they did good financial aid and comfort with the school's doctrinal position.[37]

The reason incoming students most often cite for their decision to pursue theological education is that they have felt a call from God. Perhaps God has stopped calling as many people as God used to call to ministry, but I don't think that is the case. Perhaps a call to ministry is harder to hear when religion has lower cultural standing than in the recent past, or when the church experiences conflict, or when potential candidates have experienced congregational decline, or have not been influenced by structures of youth and college ministry because they have declined. Theological schools are very good at helping persons who sense a call to some form of ministry understand why they should attend a particular school. Schools are not very good at helping individuals discover a call to ministry. In the end, cultivating congregational and denominational cultures of call in which individuals can discern a sense of leadership toward ministry is the work of congregations and denominations.

### *What contributes to enrollment decline?*

When enrollment began to decline across ATS member schools, ATS staff queried the data provided by schools to identify correlates that would help explain the decline. There were none. A majority of schools were experiencing enrollment decline while a minority were experiencing enrollment increases. Enrollment did not seem to be a function of institutional wealth, institutional type, or educational strategy. No variables emerged that would explain why, after decades of slow but steady enrollment growth, the overall enrollment in theological schools was declining.

In the absence of data related answers, some hunches may be useful. Denominational controversy may be a reason some potential students have not enrolled. The current controversy in The UMC regarding sexual orientation and ordination was certainly on the minds of many students who were interviewed in this study. One student had refused any financial support from a home conference because that student was unsure what the church's final decision would be and did not want to feel indebted in making a choice. Expense or life situation may be a factor in why students do not pursue theological education even if they sense a call to ministry. Most United Methodist schools are providing scholarship support for much if not all of the cost of tuition, but few are able to cover the living costs. If there is such a thing as "rational markets," it may be that students are aware of the declining number of fulltime ministry positions and are not seeking a theological education for that reason. In a connectional church like The UMC, a bishop's or district superintendent's counsel not to attend a particular seminary can surely influence the enrollment levels of certain schools.

### *What contributes to enrollment growth?*

While the ATS data do not provide answers as to why enrollment has declined in some schools and increased in others, three trends deserve comment. The first is the changing enrollment in MDiv and other masters' programs, the second is distance education programs, and the third is enrollment in denominational seminaries of students from other denominations.

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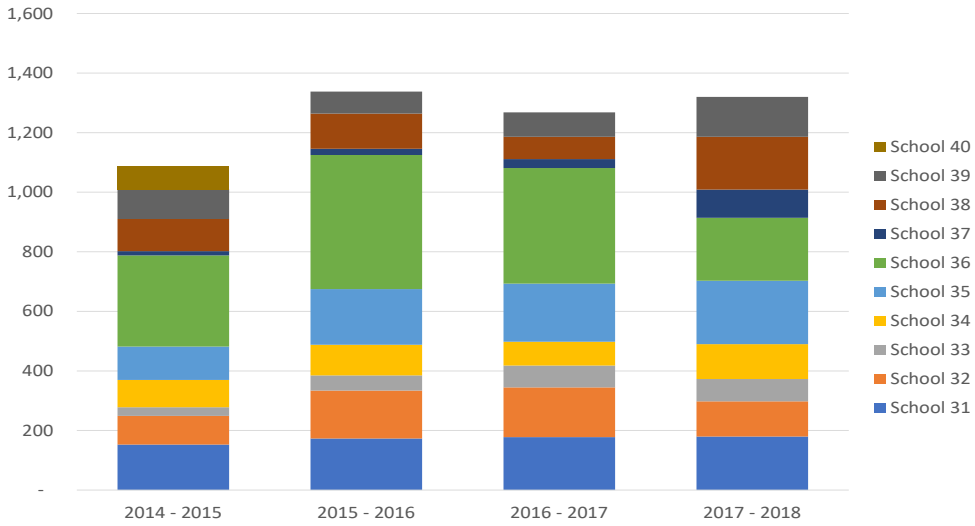
37 Total group profile of participating United Methodist schools, Fall 2017, Table 19, *ATS Entering Student Questionnaire.*

MDiv and Other Professional Master's Programs. Enrollment in the MDiv degree has been declining across ATS schools while enrollment in other masters' programs has been increasing. While overall MDiv enrollment had fallen 15 percent, the ATS reported that the MDiv enrollment declined 24 percent from fall 2007 to fall 2017 in mainline Protestant schools, fell 6 percent in evangelical Protestant schools, and grew 9 percent among Roman Catholic schools.[38] "By contrast, professional and academic MA programs have grown significantly over the last decade…During the last five years, for example, professional MA enrollment has grown by 10% and academic MA enrollment has grown by 15%. If present trends continue, MA enrollment will exceed MDiv enrollment by 2022."[39] Amid these broader changes, United Methodist schools have continued to focus on the MDiv program, often to the exclusion of other programs.

Distance Learning Programs. Programs that are internet based or assisted have been a major contributor to stabilizing enrollment and, in some cases, increasing enrollment for ATS member schools. United Methodists, however, have been cautious about distance learning as practiced in theological education. At first, no online education was permitted for candidates for elders orders, a policy subsequently revised for courses offered by one of the official United Methodist seminaries. The limitations for United Methodist ordination candidates are greater than the ones established by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools for the MDiv, and the COA/ATS standards are more conservative than those of the regional accrediting agencies. Even with this more cautious approach to distance learning, Figure 15 shows that more than 1300 students completed at least one course by distance learning in the

Figure 15 Number of Students Taking Distance Education Courses, Fall Semester, by Year




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

38 Eliza Brown and Chris Meinzer, "New data reveal stable enrollment but shifting trends at ATS member schools," *ATS Colloquy*, March 2017, https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/new-data-reveal-stable-enrollment.pdf , accessed August, 2018

39 Chris Meinzer and Tom Tanner, "What a difference a decade makes: As seminaries reverse a 10-year enrollment decline, what does the future hold?" *ATS Colloquy*, March 2016, https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/what-a-difference.pdf, accessed August 2018.

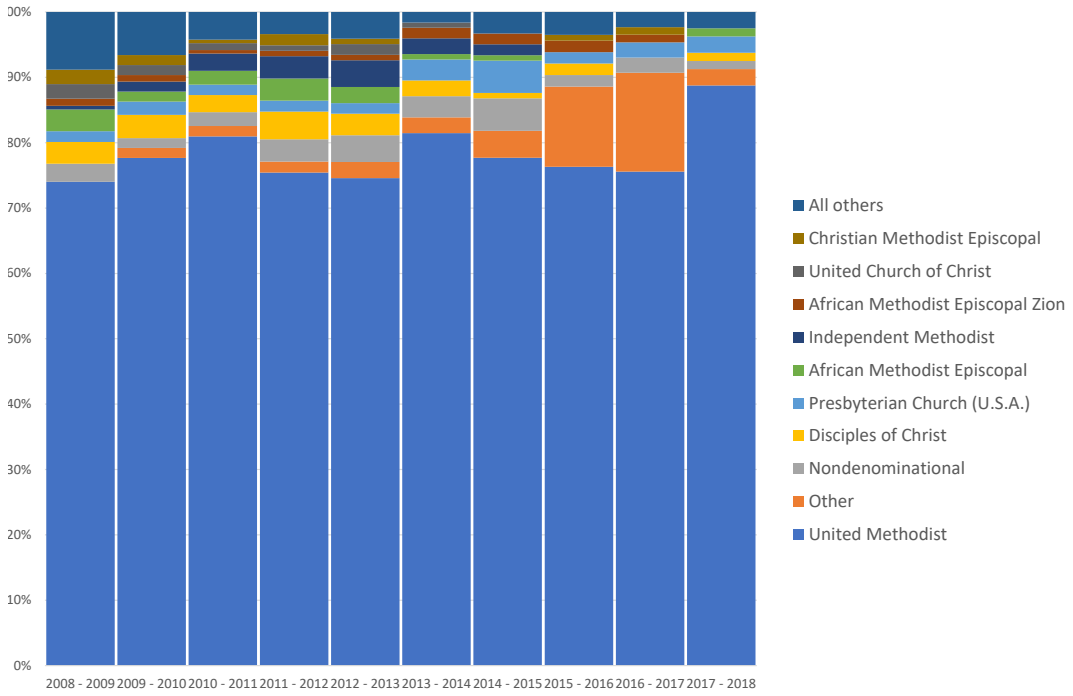
United Methodist schools last year. Three schools have developed hybrid online/on-campus intensive MDiv programs, and in the most recent year, it is these schools that have had the largest number of students taking online classes. These data indicate that about 30 percent of all students enrolled in United Methodist schools last academic year took at least one on-line course. Given the success of distance learning programs in other theological schools, the United Methodist restraint regarding distance learning may have contributed to some of the enrollment decline in these schools because many students are now assuming that they should be able to earn a significant part of higher education degrees online, as is the case in nursing, counseling, business, and other areas of professional education.

This restraint on distance learning is not without reason. A theological education program that is primarily online can have its problems. Distance/Hybrid program students at another school found it discouraging not "to feel part of the (school's) community" and another noted that, without the covenant group and students checking in with each other "I would feel isolated." Distance learning programs do have distinct advantages. A student in one school chose the school because "of the ability to do online classes" and a student from another denomination at the same school "was only looking at distance programs so he/she could keep working and not go into debt." Distance learning programs have made it possible for some local pastors to undertake the MDiv as a requirement for ordination as an elder. Others have noted the positive financial effect of not needing to leave current employment for seminary. Distance learning programs require new pedagogical skills for faculty, new information technology resources for schools, and new patterns of administrative support. Done well, these programs are expensive for schools to implement and maintain, even though they may make theological education less expensive for students because they do not need to relocate. Done poorly, this kind of theological education deserves the suspicion it has garnered.

Percentage of United Methodist Enrollment. Fifty years ago, the enrollment in denominational seminaries consisted almost exclusively of students from the denomination to which the seminary was related. The increase of students from other denominations provided a broader ecumenical context for education, and in the United Methodist schools, students seem to appreciate this multi-denominational context. One United Methodist student said that 'by being around others, it makes me appreciate things that I took for granted in the UMC, like grace as a distinguishing factor.' An Episcopal student at the same school, who hopes to enter chaplaincy, mentioned 'wanting the exposure to other denominations' and 'preparing to talk across spaces.' The inclusion of students from many denominations not only reflects the commitment of mainline denominations that have been active participants in ecumenical efforts but also has increased enrollment in some schools.

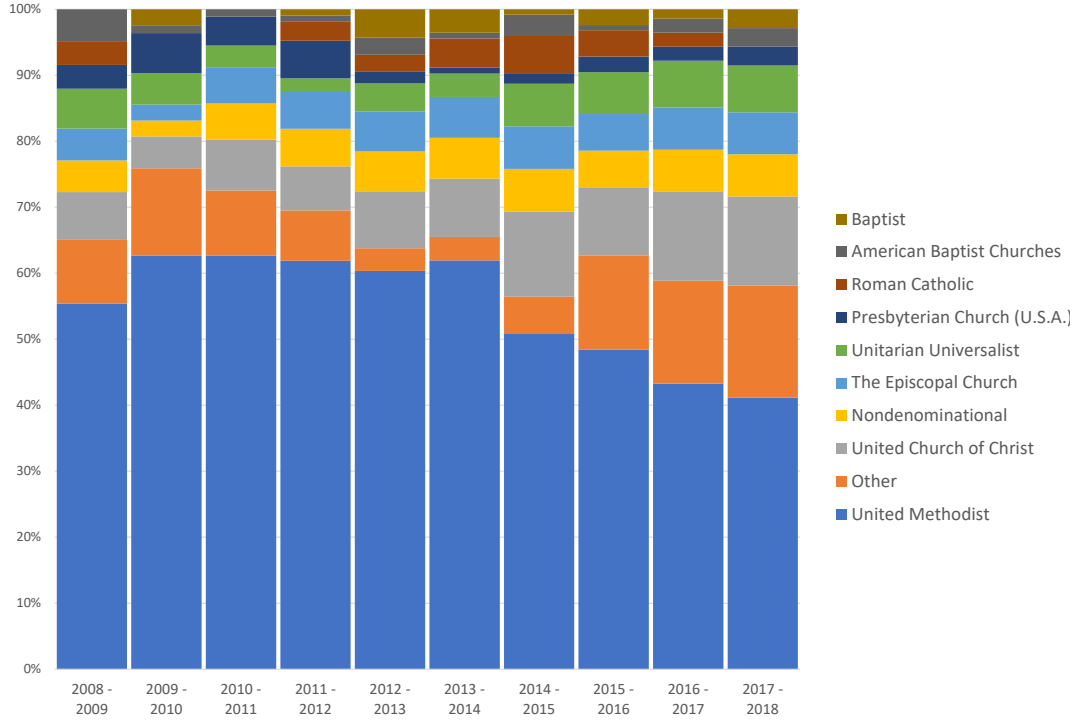
On the following page, Figure 16 shows the percentage of United Methodist students in the MDiv program of School A and Figure 17 shows the same information for School C. These two figures illustrate how the percentage of United Methodist MDiv students varies by school, even though the combined percentage is well over 50 percent. There are many reasons why the percentage of Methodist students might vary, and educationally, we do not know whether there is an ideal percentage of Methodist students for a Methodist seminary.

Figure 16 Denominational Proportions of MDiv Students - School A




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Figure 17 Denominational Proportions of MDiv Students - School C




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

## Diversity in Finances

While the United Methodist schools vary somewhat by enrollment, they vary even more in their financial capacity. Table 2 shows that schools had expenditures in the 2016–2017 academic year (the most recent for which data were available for this report in 2017–2018) that ranged from under $5 million to over $25 million. Five of the schools had expenditures between $13 and $15 million, which constitutes the median range for UMC schools. The revenue, of course, is not the definitive issue; the most critical financial indicator is the extent to which revenue is sufficient for expenses, and to which expenses are sufficient to implement a school's mission. Section II described the overall financial capacity of the United Methodist schools. Finances, however, are uniquely institutional. This part of the report looks at the range of individual institutions' financial capacity.

Table 2: Summary of Sources of Expenditures and Financial Capacity

| School | Total Expenditures FY 2017 (000) | Net Tuition as a Percent of Expenditures | Long Term Investment Draw as a Percent of Expenditures | MEF as a Percent of Expenditures | Primary Reserve Ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | $15,304 | 23.5% | 14% | 7.5% | 1.9 |
| 2 | $25,772 | 11.8% | 39% | 6.3% | |
| 3 | $5,300 | 19.1% | 44% | 16.6% | 1.3 |
| 4 | $15,432 | -0.6% | 30% | 4.6% | |
| 5 | $13,858 | 14.6% | 30% | 8.8% | 1.7 |
| 6 | $12,596 | 15.7% | 13% | 4.7% | (1.7) |
| 7 | $16,266 | 8.4% | 23% | 4.8% | |
| 8 | $7,912 | 9.2% | 23% | 11.0% | 5.8 |
| 9 | $17,564 | 61.7% | 41% | 12.1% | |
| 10 | $8,656 | 37.7% | 20% | 8.7% | 3.3 |
| 11 | $16,716 | 6.0% | 69% | 7.4% | |
| 12 | $6,915 | 62.7% | 5% | 14.3% | 0.0 |

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

### *Funding Expenditures*

Table 2 presents some summary financial information for each school. It identifies the expenditures for the most recent year and the percent of those expenditures that were provided by revenue from tuition, long term investments, and the Methodist Education Fund. In addition, the table includes the most recent primary reserve ratio for the freestanding theological schools.

The amount of expenditures funded by tuition revenue varies significantly across the schools. This variation is explained primarily by the amount of expenditures funded by long term investments or endowment. The school that derives 63 percent of funding for its expenses from tuition has the least amount of funding provided by its endowment (5 percent for this same school). Conversely, the school with only 6 percent of expenses funded by tuition revenue has 69 percent of its expenses funded by long term investments. The amount of expenditure funded by revenue from the Methodist Education Fund varies from less than 5 percent to more than 16 percent. Because the MEF distribution formula gives each school a basic allocation, the MEF funds the highest percentage of expenditure in schools with the lowest operating budgets. In terms of actual dollars, long term investments provide about $50 million to the schools and the MEF provides about $15 million.

### *Financial Operating Results*

The financial strength of theological schools is primarily a function of their ability to operate with balanced budgets over time and to accrue sufficient resources to weather difficult financial times.[40] And here again the variation among schools is noticeable. None of the freestanding schools made it through the past ten years without some years in which expenses were greater than revenue. Figures 18 and 19 show the revenue and expense summary for two schools. School E (Figure 18) has experienced significant deficits every year since 2013, and over time has acquired a sizeable cumulative deficit. School G (Figure 19) had deficits in some years, but it experienced revenue greater than expenditures in other years, and cumulatively its revenue has been much greater than its expenditures. The mission of a theological school is not to make money; it is to educate religious leaders and advance theological understanding. It is not possible to achieve these goals over time, however, if expenditures are greater than revenue. Schools do not have the capacity to make quick changes in their revenue structure; most of their expenditure is in personnel and most of the persons they employ as faculty and staff are not expendable. Not all deficits are significant. If a school has a dollar more of expenditure than revenue in a year, the operation for that year is in deficit, but that deficit does not mean much. Figures 18 and 19 show the amount of deficit; for School A, the deficits are sizeable compared to revenue, whereas for School B, they are relatively small.

### *Financial Capacity*

Revenues and expenses provide information about current financial operation but they do not tell much about financial capacity—meaning the resources necessary to undergird the ongoing operation of the school. If a school has a huge endowment, for example, even a major annual deficit might be accommodated without long term harm. Does a school have the resources to make it through the hard times that inevitably come? Does it have the reserves to use for short term issues so that month-to-month expenses can be met? One way to assess overall financial capacity is to ask a hypothetical question: If all revenue from all sources were to stop, how long could an institution continue its work before the money is all gone? The answer to this question is the *primary reserve ratio* and it is computed by taking the value of all the assets of the school (restricted, unrestricted, property, and plant) and dividing that total by the current year's annual expenditures.[41] If a school has a budget of $5 million and total assets of $25 million, it would have five years of funding if all the revenue stopped and all of the resources were expended. This way of understanding financial capacity is not entirely practical because not all the assets, such as property or restricted endowments, can be spent readily or at all. The United Methodist schools all participate in federally guaranteed loans and the US Department of Education requires a primary reserve ratio of at least 0.5 as one of its requirements to disburse money to schools for schools to disburse as student loans (without requiring the school to maintain a reserved line of credit for the amount of the loan funds).

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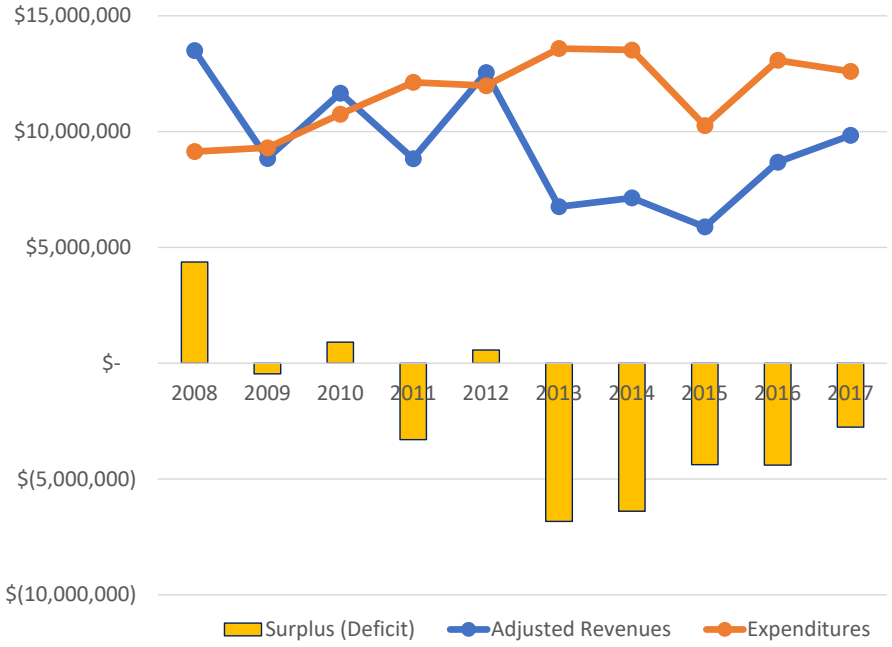
40 Because the four research university related and two embedded schools operate with different financial models, the analyses in this section are limited to the freestanding schools. The comparable data for the schools that are parts of larger educational institutions exist for the larger institution but not for the related theological school.

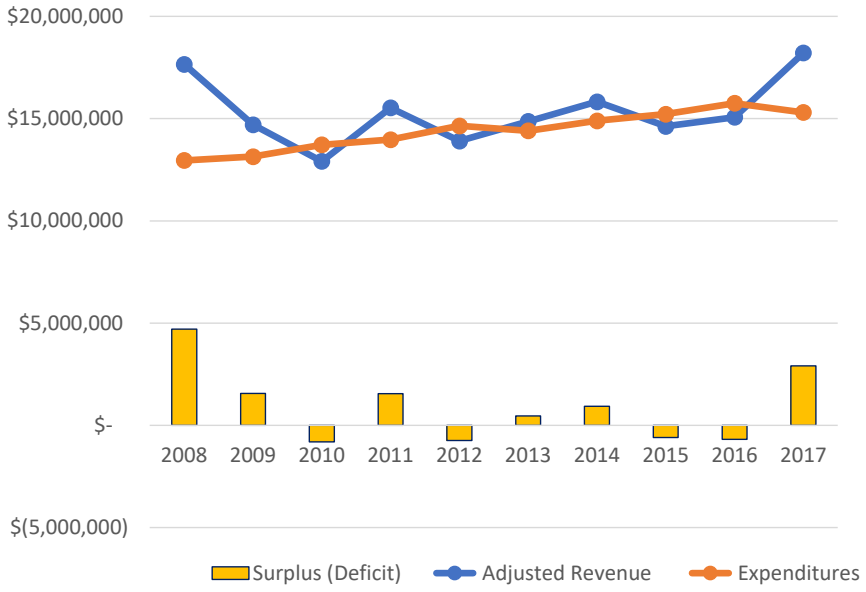
41 The primary reserve ratio is computed for freestanding schools, which is why Table 2 omits data for some schools. The larger institutions of which the other schools are a part have primary reserve ratios, but they are not applicable for the purposes of this study.

Figure 18 Adjusted Revenues, Expenditures, and Surplus (Deficit) for School E. Investment revenue calculated at 5% of long term investments.




Source: *Strategic Information Report* from the Association of Theological Schools

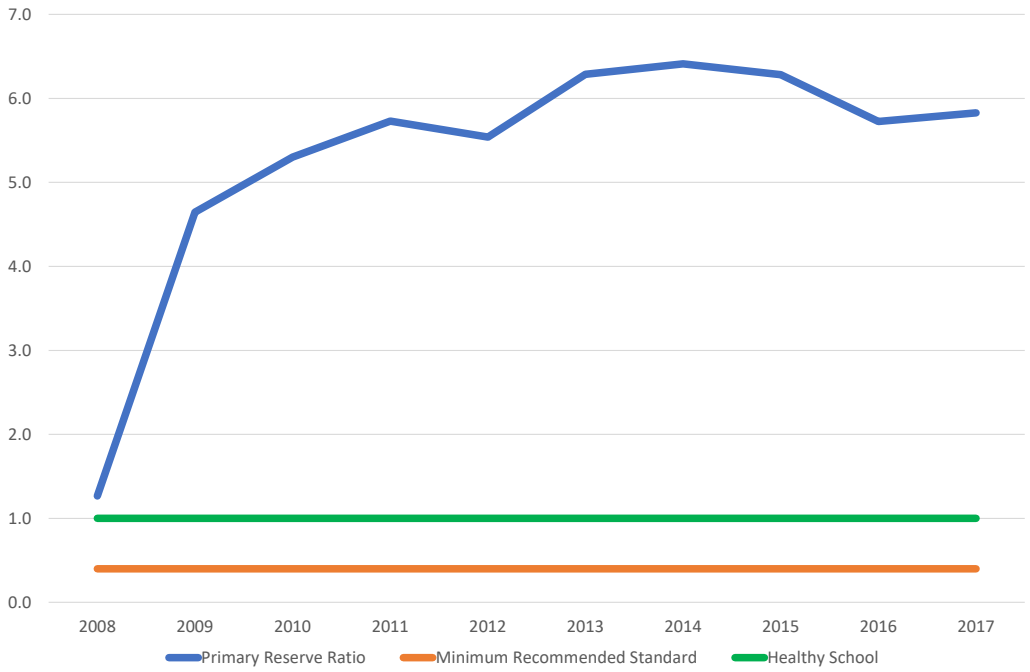
Figure 19 Adjusted Revenues, Expenditures, and Surplus (Deficit) for School G. Investment revenue calculated at 5% of long term investments.




Source: *Strategic Information Report* from the Association of Theological Schools

Figures 20 and 21 show the primary reserve ratio for two schools. School J has consistently had a ratio between 5.5 and 6.5 since 2010. If all its revenue stopped next month, it could continue doing its work for another six years. School H is in a very different position. It has a primary reserve ratio hovering around 0, which means that if all its revenue stopped this month, it would not have resources to make it to the end of the semester, at least hypothetically. It might find a way, but basically it has very few options.

Figure 20 Primary Reserve Ratio –School J




Source: Strategic Information Report from the Association of Theological Schools

Figure 21 Primary Reserve Ratio –School H


Source: *Strategic Information Report* from the Association of Theological Schools

The freestanding schools had the following average primary reserve ratios across the past five years 1.9, 0.9, 1.4, -1.3, 6.1, 3.2, 0.0 (Table 2).

*Summary observations from data.*

Most of the schools have experienced enrollment decline, though a few have growing enrollments. Half of the schools have failed to recover market value of the long term investments they had in 2008. All of the freestanding schools have had occasional or consistent deficits in the past decade. Five of seven freestanding schools have five-year average primary reserve ratios that indicate viable financial capacity, even though they had years when expenditures exceeded adjusted revenues. Two schools have average primary reserve ratios that indicate financial stress, but while stressed financially, they have had growing enrollments over the past four years—a sign of institutional strength. These data, as was the case with the schools as a group, paint a mixed picture. It has been a decade of stress, and the schools have responded in ways to address it, although the stressors have not evaporated. Some yellow lights are still flashing. The data inform understanding any school, but in and of themselves the data do not provide a basis for definitive decisions regarding a school's educational capacity or institutional viability.

## What is the overall viability of the individual United Methodist theological schools?

The answer to this question and the others that surround it lies with each of the schools and with The United Methodist Church, beginning with the diversity that they embody.

*Diversity and the Elephant in the Pew*

As noted earlier in this section, mentions of "diversity" occurred in conversations in almost every school, most typically from more than one group of interviewees at each school. It was typically mentioned positively, seldom negatively. Together, the schools have a diversity that none of them or no subset of them could otherwise have. To reduce the number of schools is to reduce the diversity of educational practices, locations, theological emphases, and constituencies who see in one school what they do not see in the others. Diversity is not a word limited to the schools. It characterizes The United Methodist Church—its congregations, conferences, and range of theological emphases. Diversity may even provide a perspective on the current tension in the church. While theological commitments are the headline under which competing sides frame their arguments about what is right and good for the church, the question about how much theological diversity the church will or can tolerate becomes part of the longer story. One of the proposals for "the way forward" would establish diversity of choice about ordination in annual conferences, which would formally extend diversity as a strategy for a multi-national church in a pluralistic age. Another of the proposals would require a continued and rarified homogeneity in criteria for ordination. While diversity typically has been celebrated in the church, it is not clear whether the formal expansion of diversity with regard to criteria for ordination will carry the day. If diversity does not win in the church, then diversity as a case for sustaining the thirteen schools will be less compelling. If diversity in the criteria for ordination does win, the diversity will likely not end at that point. It will extend to other criteria for ordination, including educational expectations and more specific recommendations as to which theological schools prospective ordinands should attend. The results of a move to greater diversity in ordination standards may be as difficult for some schools as a move to rarify current standards and insist on greater homogeneity of practice with regard to the implementation of ordination standards.

The question about whether thirteen schools should be continued as the official schools of the church would be more easily answered if the schools were like Starbucks outlets, each selling the same products

in the same way in the same environment. If they operated that way, a reasonable decision could be made on the basis of location, supply and demand, and financial capacity. The UMC schools, however, are deeply different from one another: they are not multiple locations of the same entity. They all claim their United Methodist identity, but the diversity of The United Methodist Church means that multiple UMC identities exist and few United Methodists can claim all of those identities. It is as if The UMC were a large elephant and while each school holds tightly to and finds its identity in part of the elephant, few of them ground their identity in all the parts of the elephant. An elephant is in the pew, and while every part of it is "elephant," it is all but impossible for one school or one United Methodist to embrace all the parts. The diversity of the schools is linked to the diversity of the church, and arguments about which schools should be eliminated or continued sometimes take on the sentiments of which parts of the United Methodist church should be sustained and which should be eliminated.

### *Criteria for Determining a Future Number of Schools, if Not the Present Number*

At least one group of interviewees during every school visit was asked about criteria that should be considered in determining the "right" number of UMC schools in the United States. Donors, board members, bishops, senior administrators, and faculty had ideas that ranged widely, but tended to concentrate in certain areas that warrant comment.

The most frequently named criterion for determining the number of UMC seminaries was the importance of effective education for the practice of ministry, especially a Wesleyan ministry. These comments most often related to pastoral ministry—"know how to be a pastor," "know how to do church in a Wesleyan way." Many commented about the importance of an education for Methodist ministry in which schools and students are well connected to conferences and immersed in Wesleyan values, commitments, and heritage. Whatever the "right' number of schools, the schools should reflect clarity about education for ministry practice as it exists and as it may emerge. If a school is not educating for a Wesleyan ministry, then it would be a candidate for elimination.

The second most frequently mentioned criterion was diversity. The word was used in reference to theological positions, to communities of color, to patterns of educational programing, and to understandings of expressions of ministry, among many others. The "right" number of schools must be one that embodies a diversity of schools and serves the diversity that exists in the church.

A third frequently mentioned criterion had to do with the number of students: Does the number of students correspond to the number of positions that will be available or needed? Are student bodies sufficiently Methodist and/or ecumenical? Are enrollments at schools large enough for meaningful communities of learning? The right number of schools should be related to the number and vocational intentions needed by the church.

Another criterion relates primarily to financial resources. Are the finances adequate to provide good education, keep students from undue amounts of debt, and be stable over time? By this criterion, the right number of schools will be the number that have adequate financial capacity.

Still another group of comments focused on the importance of diversity of geographic locations and educational accessibility. Neither one location nor one pattern of education will serve the church well. While United Methodist populations vary extensively across jurisdictional areas, The UMC is a national church. The church has a US membership that is twice as large as the next largest mainline Protestant

denomination (ELCA). The UMC is a large church. The national scope and overall size together require theological schools that are widely dispersed geographically and provide a wide range of educational opportunities. By this criterion, the right number of theological schools should provide sufficient geographic spread and educational choices.

If these criteria were to guide an entity in the church to determine the "right" number of theological schools, it would find that different schools contribute to different criteria. If, for example, a school had a low enrollment but adequate financial resources and was the only school in a major geographic area, it would be a candidate for elimination on one criterion but its elimination would be detrimental in terms of the other criteria. If two schools shared geographical proximity but had different educational visions and theological centers of gravity, they would meet one criterion for elimination but have compelling cases to be continued according to other criteria. The reasonable criteria identified in the interviews do not provide guidance about which schools should be discontinued as official schools of the denomination—not because they are not good criteria but because no school fails by the tests they would provide. The criteria are met by the current set of schools, but would be less well met if the number of schools were reduced.

### *Are Thirteen Schools too Many?*

If all thirteen official seminaries are sustainable, are they needed? While no right way exists to determine the correct right number of seminaries for a denomination, number of seminaries per member of the denomination might provide a reference point, if nothing else. Table 3 shows the number of members of several mainline denominations, number of affiliated theological schools, and computes a ratio of members to schools. The United Church of Christ, for example, has one (closely related) seminary for every 140,833 members, compared with the United Methodist ratio of one seminary for every 543,615 members. The UMC has the highest number of members per seminary of any of these mainline

Table 3 Mainline Denomination Membership and Number of Theological Schools

| Denomination | Membership* | Number of Affiliated Seminaries** | Members per Seminary |
|---|---|---|---|
| American Baptist Churches USA | 1,300,000 | 6 | 217,000 |
| Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) | 497,000 | 4*** | 124,250 |
| Episcopal Church, USA | 1,713,000 | 9 | 190,333 |
| Evangelical Lutheran Church in America | 3,500,000 | 8 | 437,500 |
| Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) | 1,483,000 | 9 | 164,778 |
| United Church of Christ | 854,000 | 6 | 142,333 |
| United Methodist Church (US Membership) | 6,950,000 | 13 | 534,615 |

*The total membership from denominations is approximate. Where possible, it was drawn from the official website of the denomination, but in other cases it was drawn from secondary sources. The most recent year of information was used.

**The number of seminaries affiliated with a denomination was drawn from the ATS Membership Directory or from official denominational websites.

***In addition to four theological schools, the denomination has three houses of study or foundations that relate to other ATS accredited schools that are not counted in this number.

denominations. All of these denominations, like The UMC, have been dealing with membership decline and many of the other same issues that The UMC has confronted. The ELCA has worked with its seminaries in support of a merger of two of them and the affiliation of three others with Lutheran universities. Two seminaries of the Episcopal Church have merged, and one has become a house of study at another seminary rather than continue as a freestanding theological school. The numbers in the table include these changes in the ELCA and EC schools. Two of the Disciples of Christ schools have undergone significant change that has involved selling property and reinventing its educational program. Even with these changes, The UMC has a much higher ratio of members to schools. By this comparative metric, The United Methodist Church has too few seminaries, not too many!

### *Are Thirteen Schools Sustainable?*

Each official school makes a legitimate claim that it is serving The United Methodist Church.
Each has donors who support it, board members who are committed to its mission, students who are being well educated for ministry, and faculty who care about the church and contribute to its intellectual work, prophetic witness, and practical work. They assets provide reasons why they should be sustained—but reasons don't pay the expenses. In the end, the sustainability of each school rests primarily with the school. The schools themselves will have to ensure that they are financially and educationally sustainable. The diversity in the church will mean that some parts of The UMC will want to support some schools, other parts still other schools, but few will want to support all of them.

The individual school data suggest that most but perhaps not all are sustainable. Most have resources of finances, students, educational programs, and constituencies both to pave a way to the future, even with its many uncertainties, and to pay their way there. Two schools are seriously financially stressed. They have low primary reserve ratios and have struggled to balance budgets over many years, consuming reserves in the process. While they have continued to be educationally effective and have attracted growing enrollments, a number of things will need to go right for them over the next few years in order for them to have economically viable futures. They have no risk capital and limited room for an unfortunate decision. Another school has advanced its financial stability by effective fund raising and reductions in faculty and staff. Its reduced staffing is adequate because of low enrollment, but its enrollment is likely its most pressing problem. Each of these three schools is addressing critical questions posed by their accrediting agencies, but inadequate answers could result in accrediting sanctions. Some of the other schools have particular stresses, but not of the scale or delicacy of the three just mentioned. These three will be viable if they solve their problems, but the solution will need to come from the schools themselves.

The United Methodist Church's financial support for theological schools has declined both as a percentage of the schools' total revenue and as a percentage of expenses it funds, and will likely continue to decline because the denomination will have less financial capacity in the future. Even though the MEF support comprises less than 10 percent of total revenue, for several schools it is the difference between enough and not enough, between operating results that are balanced and results that are in deficit. The MEF support is crucial for two schools, in particular, but the MEF is not the only support that the schools enjoy from The United Methodist Church. These schools derive a benefit in enrollment because they are the official schools of The UMC and because the Discipline insists that ordination as Elder requires the MDiv, under most circumstances. If either of these two non-financial benefits were removed, the number of stressed schools would increase. The formal connection to The United Methodist Church is also a key resource for fundraising. Many donors interviewed as part of this study say they contribute because these are United Methodist schools.

# IV
# The Thirteen Official UMC Schools, other University Senate Approved Schools, and Mainline Protestant Schools

> "Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thine?" I ask no further question. "If it be, give me thy hand." For opinions or terms, let us not "destroy the work of God." Dost thou love and serve God? It is enough.
>
> —*John Wesley*

I am not sure that anyone has ever thought of a seminary as having a heart, although I have seen times when schools have acted with such care for students or faculty or donors that one could only assume they do. Wesley's ecumenical openness, his catholicity, is discussed in many ways, but seldom if ever with regard to theological schools. The United Methodist Church does have a way in which it takes the hands of non-Methodist theological schools and, through the Commission on Theological Education of the University Senate, approves schools for the education of United Methodist ordination candidates. No other mainline denomination has a comparable process. United Methodist theological education is centered in the thirteen official theological schools, but those schools exist in the context of the other approved seminaries, and more broadly in the context of Protestant theological education in the United States.

The previous two sections focused exclusively on the thirteen official seminaries, first as a group of schools that comprise a system, and then as individual schools that are members of that group. The questions in the commission for this study were also interested in the location of the United Methodist schools in the context of the non-United Methodist schools approved by the University Senate and the broader community of Protestant schools. The comparisons, however, need to be made with some caution. The official seminaries gave permission for all their data to be used in this study. The other schools did not, so the only information that can be used from the ATS data is what has been published in one way or the other, making it public information, or what has been shown as grouped data. There are limited ways to compare individual institutions. The grouped data, while instructive in many ways, combines into one group characteristics of individual schools that vary greatly from one another. The other approved schools, for example, include some schools that have the largest endowments of all North American theological schools as well as others with virtually no endowment. The resulting estimates of financial capacity for this group of schools are truthful, but confound abundant with miniscule resources. These limitations, however, do not make the comparisons invalid; they just necessitate cautious interpretation.

This section explores enrollment and financial variables of the official seminaries in relation to the other Senate approved schools, all mainline Protestant school, and all Protestant Schools—presenting most of the information in percentages rather than raw numbers because percentages make similarities and differences more obvious. It continues with a brief summary of issues that are present in the broader community of American higher education.

Before proceeding with these comparisons, however, it is appropriate to comment about the other approved schools. The current group of approved schools includes the following denominational connections: seven schools have a primary or historic connection with a Presbyterian denomination (Presbyterian Church, USA or Cumberland Presbyterian Church); five schools have historic connections

with the United Church of Christ; five schools are Wesleyan or related to a Wesleyan denomination; three schools are related to Disciples of Christ; two schools serve the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; seven are non-denominational or multidenominational schools; four schools have connections to Anabaptist, Mennonite, or Brethren denominations; four schools' primary identity is Baptist; and one other school is the only Moravian Seminary in the United States—whose approval no doubt would delight Mr. Wesley. These several schools have other identities: three are related to research intensive universities; three are historically Black theological schools; and, using the criteria by which ATS classifies schools in terms of ecclesial family, seven are evangelical Protestant. All of these schools are grouped as the "other approved schools" in the figures and tables in this section, even though they are exceptionally different from one another, more different than the official schools are from one another.

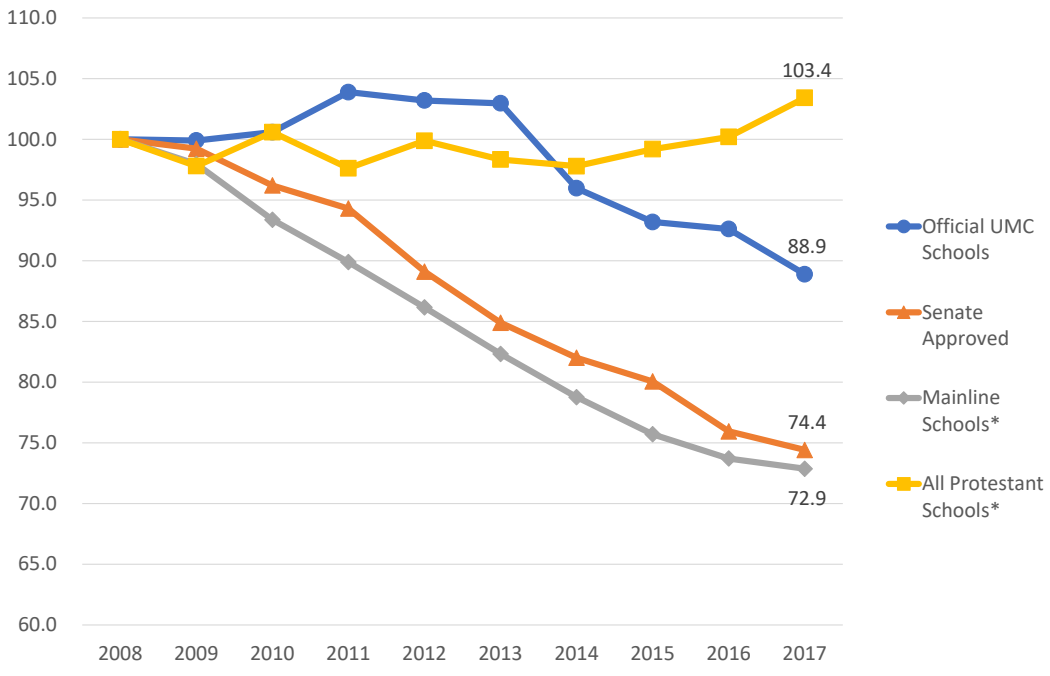
## Comparative Enrollment

Enrollment can be assessed in many ways. The following comparisons come from enrollment over the past decade, in degree programs, the percentage of students from the sponsoring denomination who are enrolled in the denomination's schools, the number of UMC ordination candidates from the official schools and the other Senate approved schools, and the ratio of students to faculty.

### *Enrollment across the Decade*

The data presented in Section II detailed the changing enrollment over the most recent decade for the official UMC schools. Figure 22 shows comparable data for the other approved schools, mainline Protestant schools, and all Protestant schools. Instead of showing this information in raw numbers, it is displayed in terms of percentage of change over the years. The first year, 2008, is set at 100 percent. When enrollment increases from the benchmark year, it is shown as more than 100 percent, and when it decreases, it is shown as less than 100 percent. Across the decade, the enrollment for all Protestant schools increased slightly, due in part to Evangelical schools in the All Protestant group, and in part because of some new ATS member schools became part of the total Protestant Schools group across the decade.

Figure 22 Percent Change in Enrollment by Group (2008=100)




* Excludes UMC and Senate Approved Schools

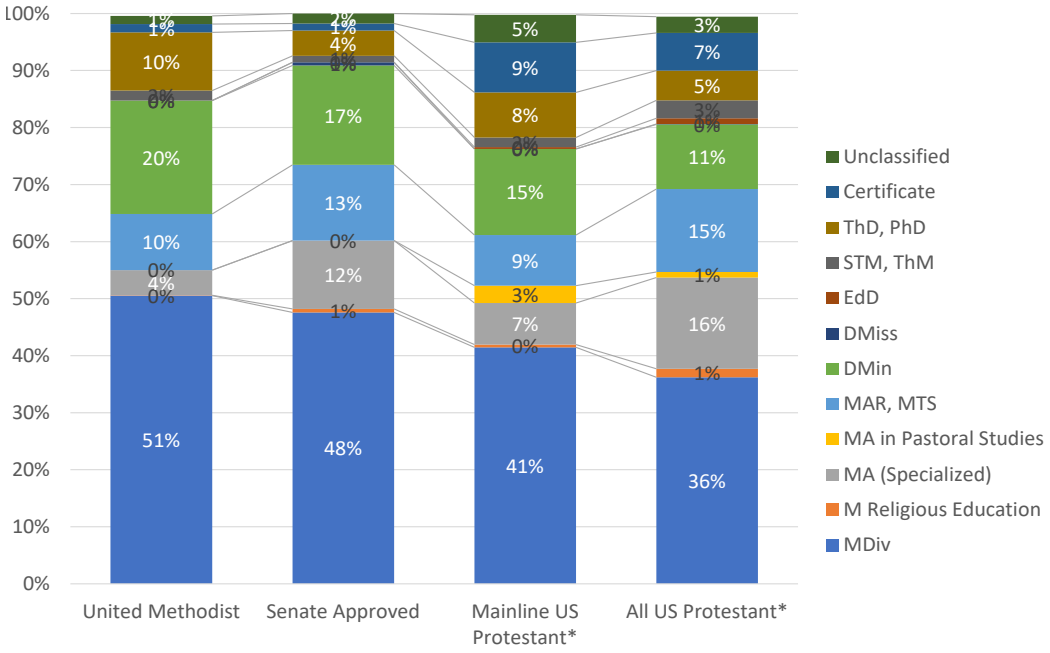
Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

It is obvious that it has not been a good decade for the Mainline Schools group. Their enrollment in 2017 was 72.9 percent of what it was in 2008—a 27 percent decline. The other schools approved by the University Senate did not fare much better. The official UMC schools, by comparison, enrolled about 90 percent of the students in 2017 that they had in 2008. While the argument that "I did not lose as much as you did" has limited theological value, the data show that the UMC schools fared significantly better than their closest peer schools in sustaining enrollment across the decade.

### *Enrollment in Degree Programs*

Figure 23 shows enrollment by degree program for the four groups.[42] The most striking difference in degree program enrollment is the percentage of students enrolled in the MDiv and DMin programs. Of these four groups, the United Methodist schools have the largest percentage of students enrolled in the MDiv (51 percent) and the largest percentage of students in the DMin (20 percent). Both of these degrees focus on the practice of ministry, and combined they comprise 71 percent of all students enrolled in the thirteen official schools. More particularly, the MDiv is the degree required for ordination in The UMC and the DMin is largely taken by persons who are ordained and serving in some form of ministry. This means that the ordained ministry focus is greater among the United Methodist schools than among the other three groups. The focus likely influences the way professors teach classes and the range of discussions that occur among students. Students in United Methodist schools, because of the large presence of persons in degrees either to qualify for ordination or to advance skills in some ministry area, are educated in contexts where the practice of ministry is an organizing principle.

Figure 23 Comparative Enrollment by Degree Categories




* Excludes UMC and Senate Approved Schools

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

42 In computing these percentages in Figure 22 and in some others, the United Methodist and other Senate Approved schools are not included in the mainline Protestant school totals (not all Senate approved schools are classified by ATS as mainline Protestant schools and they have already been shown in the other categories).

The majority of the official schools, or graduate schools to which their faculties relate, offer research-oriented PhD programs, including: Boston University School of Theology, Drew Theological School, Duke University Divinity School, Candler School of Theology, Perkins School of Theology, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (at one time through Northwestern University and now on its own), Iliff School of Theology (through University of Denver), and Claremont School of Theology (at one time with the Claremont Graduate University and now on its own). This is another area in which the official schools distinguish themselves from the other approved schools and mainline Protestant schools in general — 62 percent of the official schools offer the PhD compared to about 30 percent of the other approved schools. Of other mainline denominational schools, two of the PCUSA schools offer the PhD, two ELCA schools, two Disciples of Christ schools, and two of the Episcopal schools affiliated with other institutions, and three UCC schools (one freestanding, one affiliated with another institution, one affiliated with a research university).

### *Percentage of Students from Sponsoring Denomination*

Table 4 shows the percentage of MDiv students and all students who are the same denomination as the denominationally related seminary they are attending of seven mainline denominations: the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), American Baptist Churches, the Episcopal Church, and The United Methodist Church.[43] Of the many ways that mainline denominations can be grouped, one is Protestants that are more defined by their liturgy (i.e., Episcopalians and Lutherans) and others who are less liturgically defined. Of the group that could be considered "less liturgically defined," the official schools of The United Methodist Church have the highest percentage of students both in the MDiv and in total enrollment who are from the denomination that sponsors the school. The United Methodist schools are, in this way, more "United Methodist" than other most other Protestant seminaries are their

Table 4 Percentages of MDiv and All Students Who Are Members of the Schools' Sponsoring Denomination

| Denominational Groups of Schools | Percent of MDiv Students Who Are Members of the Schools' Affiliated Denomination | Percent of All Students Who are Members of the Schools' Affiliated Denomination |
|---|---|---|
| Denomination 1 | 13% | 9% |
| Denomination 2 | 35% | 32% |
| Denomination 3 | 38% | 33% |
| Denomination 4 | 43% | 38% |
| **United Methodist Church** | **55%** | **42%** |
| Denomination 5 | 79% | 64% |
| Denomination 6 | 80% | 69% |

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

43 As this report has consistently sought to do, the identity of schools or groups has been kept confidential. The sequence of denominations listed in Table 3 does not follow the sequence in the list that is presented in the text so that denominational schools that have not granted permission for their data to be presented by name cannot be indirectly identified.

"denomination." The information in Figure 23 and Table 3 demonstrates that United Methodists are both more MDiv- oriented than the other groups of schools, and more United Methodist student focused in the MDiv than most mainline Protestant schools are focused on students from the theological school's affiliated denomination. The United Methodist Church has the most connectional polity of any denomination represented in Table 3, and the argument can be made that both the heavier concentration of enrollment in the MDiv and larger representation of United Methodists as a percentage of total enrollment makes these schools a hospitable environment for educating persons who will serve in a connectional church.

### *UMC Ordinands*

Table 4 shows the percent of ordinands for the thirteen official UMC schools and the other schools approved by the University Senate. The average across the years has given a slight majority to the official schools, with the percentage of ordinands who graduated from those thirteen schools ranging from a low 53 percent one year to a high of 62 percent another year. Ordinations of graduates from the other approved schools, which includes Asbury, ranged from 43 percent to 47 percent. While the official schools have consistently had the majority of graduates in ordination classes, the total number of ordinands had declined across these years, from a high of 616 in 2011 to 394 in the most recent year. There have been some variations, but the downward trend of total ordinands is clear. The proportions of graduates ordained as deacons from the official schools roughly approximate the proportions of elders. The majority of both elders and deacons has been educated in one of the official schools.

### *Student Faculty Ratio*

Still another way to think about enrollment is the ratio of students to faculty. The most accurate way to consider this ratio is to compare the fulltime equivalent (FTE) number of faculty with the FTE of students. Figure 23 shows that ratio for each of the official theological schools (each bar represents one school) and the other approved schools (United Methodist schools are shown in orange). A ratio of five means that a school has one FTE faculty for every five FTE students. On this measure, the official schools are distributed across the range defined by the official and other approved schools; the official schools do not distinguish themselves from the other approved schools. Both the smallest and the largest ratios are held by the other approved schools, and between them the official schools have ratios from five to seventeen, with a median or middle slightly under ten. There are many variables that influence these ratios, and no absolute ratio is the most desired. In general, little difference is discernable between the official schools and the other approved schools as regards student-faculty ratio.

## Comparative Finances

The information on finance shown in Figures 25, 26, 27, and Table 5 includes a variety of ways of comparing finances across the official schools, the other schools approved by the University Senate, mainline Protestants schools, and all Protestant schools. While these data identify several differences, they show only a few trends that differentiate the official schools from the other groups of schools.

Table 5 Elders and Deacons Educated at Official Schools and Other Approved Schools

| | **Elders** | | | | | **Deacons** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Headcount | | | Percentage | | Headcount | | | Percentage | |
| Year | UMC Official | Other Approved Schools | Total | UMC Official | Other Approved Schools | UMC Official | Other Approved Schools | Total | UMC Official | Other Approved Schools |
| 2011 | 345 | 271 | 616 | 56% | 44% | 52 | 36 | 88 | 59% | 41% |
| 2012 | 318 | 219 | 537 | 59% | 41% | 47 | 35 | 82 | 57% | 43% |
| 2013 | 232 | 182 | 414 | 56% | 44% | 30 | 21 | 51 | 59% | 41% |
| 2014 | 259 | 185 | 444 | 58% | 42% | 37 | 31 | 68 | 54% | 46% |
| 2015 | 271 | 167 | 438 | 62% | 38% | 36 | 33 | 69 | 52% | 48% |
| 2016 | 239 | 215 | 454 | 53% | 47% | 39 | 49 | 88 | 44% | 56% |
| 2017 | 225 | 169 | 394 | 57% | 43% | 44 | 24 | 68 | 65% | 35% |

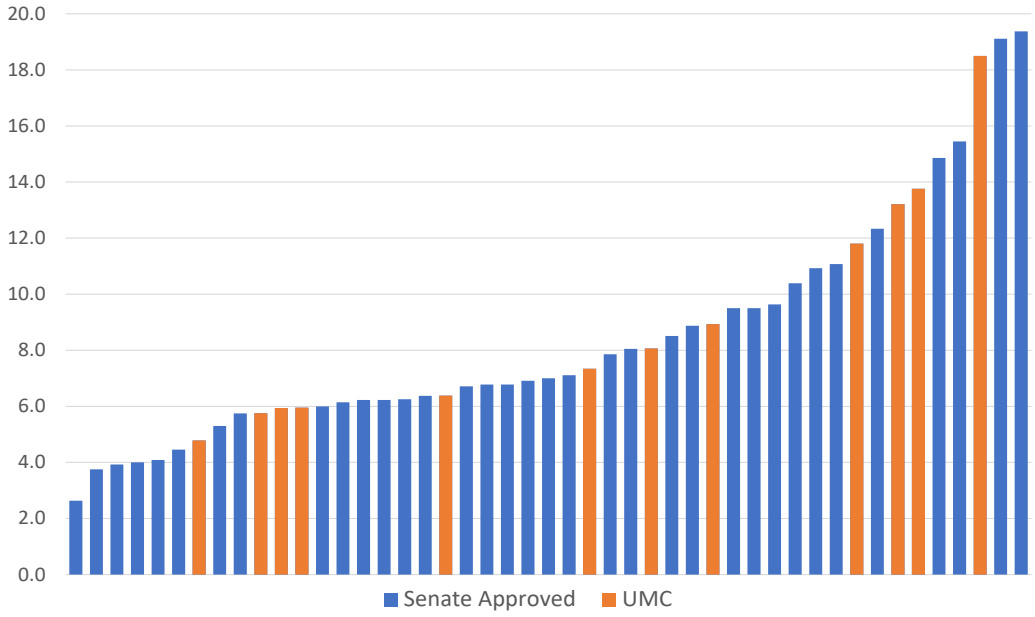
Source: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

### *Revenue*

The official schools vary from the other approved schools as shown in Figure 24 (columns one and two) in three ways: the official schools derived (1) more revenue from tuition; (2) much more revenue from religious organizations (primarily MEF); and (3) less revenue from long term investments (one of the other approved schools has an endowment that equals the total of all endowments held by the official schools and that significantly raises the average shown for the other approved schools). The official schools also vary from mainline Protestant schools in two ways (columns one and three): a larger percentage of the official schools' revenue is derived from tuition than is the case for mainline schools, and substantially less revenue is derived from what ATS data categorize as "other sources." Other than these two differences, the revenue structure of the official schools is very similar to the revenue structure of mainline Protestant schools.

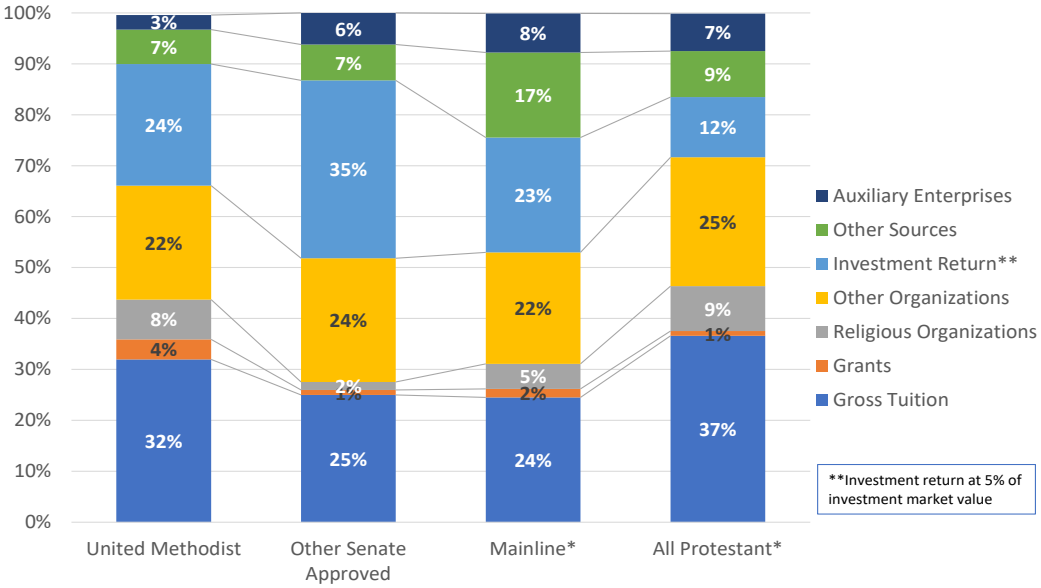
The comparison of the official schools with all Protestant schools, which includes all evangelical schools (columns one and four), shows two primary differences. The official schools derive somewhat less revenue from tuition than Protestant schools as a whole, and more than twice the amount of revenue from long term investments. The percentages of revenue from the other categories are strikingly similar with one exception. While it is not much of total revenue, the official schools derived 4 percent of their income from grants, compared to 1 percent or 2 percent for the other three groups. Because many grants are awarded on a competitive basis, the official UMC schools have been chosen more often to receive grant revenue, an external indicator of their relative value.

Figure 24 FTE Student/FTE Faculty Ratio, UMC and Senate Approved Schools, Fall 2017




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

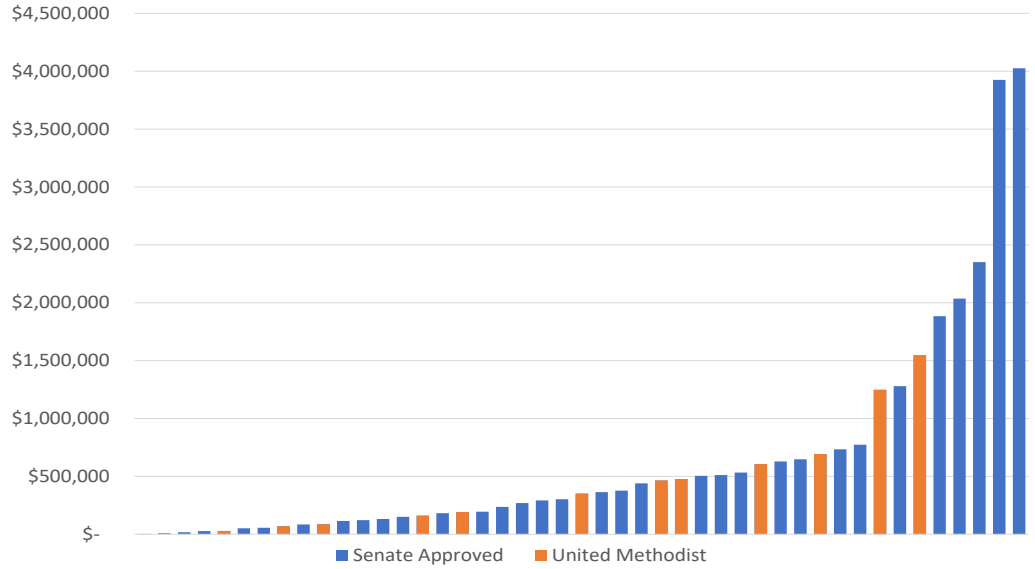
Figure 25 Revenue by Percent of Source: United Methodist, Other Senate Approved Schools, Mainline Protestant Schools, and All US Protestant Schools. Fiscal Year Ended 2017




*Excludes UMC and Senate Approved Schools

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

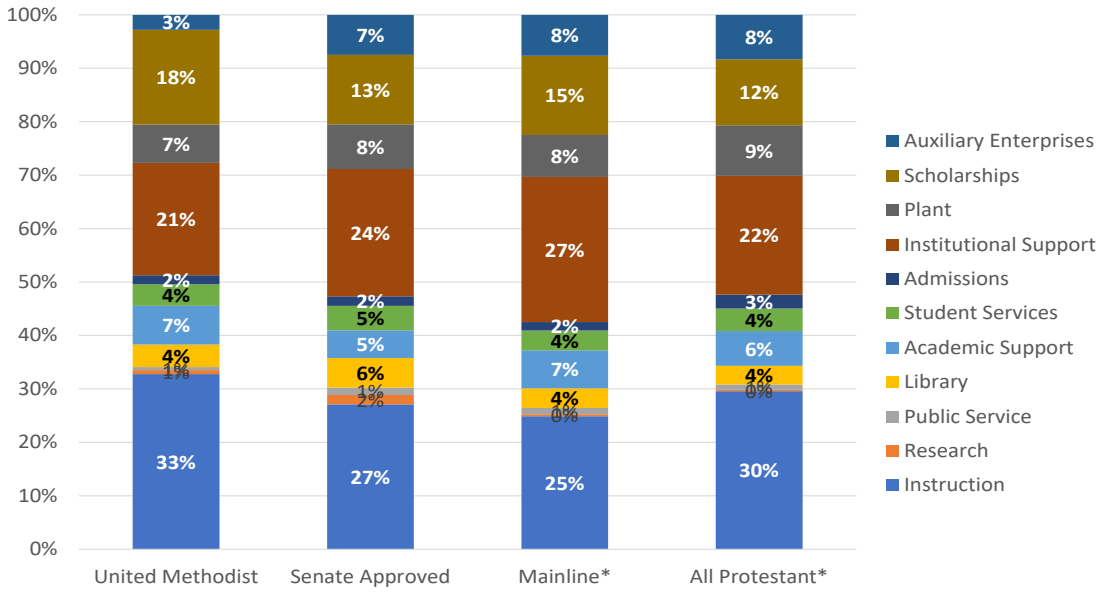
Figure 26 Long Term Investments per FTE Student. (Investments as of fiscal year end 2017; enrollment as of fall 2017.)




Excludes Gammon/ITC due to lack of data.

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

Figure 27 Expenditure by Category; United Methodist, Other Senate Approved Schools, Mainline Protestant Schools, and all US Protestant Schools. Fiscal Year Ended 2017




*Excludes UMC and Senate Approved Schools

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

*Long Term Investments*

For more than half of the official schools, long term investments or endowment make an important contribution to revenue. Figure 26 shows the long term investment per FTE student for the official and other Senate approved schools. As with the faculty student ratio (Figure 24), the official schools fall between the schools with most or least endowment per student. The five schools with the largest endowment per FTE student are not only the five highest schools in this figure, they are among the highest in all of American theological education. At a prudent rate of 5 percent consumption of endowment annually, the official school with the largest endowment per student would have $75,000 per year for each FTE student. Long term investments are a theological school's best hope for a secure financial future. They accrue slowly—too slowly to provide much help in the short term--but they are the surest way to provide needed support for the future.

*Expenditures*

The pattern of expenditures for the official schools varies from the other approved schools, mainline Protestant schools, and all Protestant schools in three ways: First, a larger percentage of expenditures of the official schools is devoted to instruction and scholarship than is the case for any of the three other groups. Second, the comparatively higher revenue from tuition for the official schools (Figure 25) is offset by their comparatively higher expenditures for scholarships (Figure 27). Third, the official schools spend a slightly smaller percentage on institutional support than either the other approved schools or the mainline Protestant schools. Other than these differences, expenditures follow similar patterns across the four groups.

In addition to the overall differences and similarities in expenditure by category, the official United Methodist schools differ from other mainline denominations in terms of the amount of overall expense that is funded by grants from the denomination.

Table 6 shows that 4.5 percent of the combined expenses of almost $740 million of all mainline schools was funded by denominational grants of one form or another. Of the six mainline denominations shown, the

Table 6 Percentage of Theological Expense Funded by Mainline Protestant Denominations Fiscal Year Ended 2017

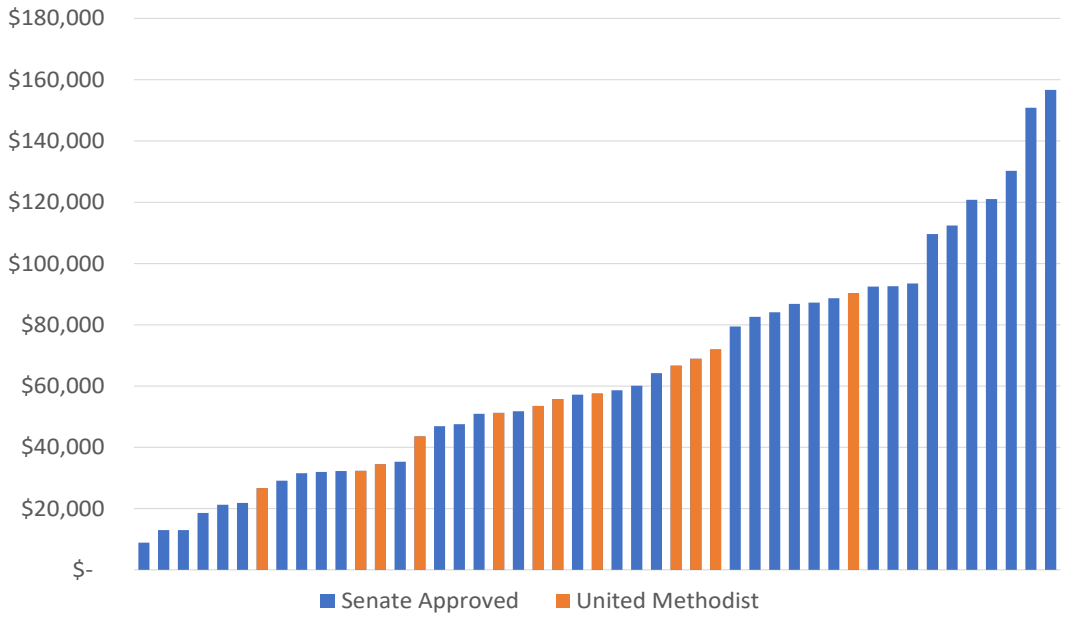
| | Current Operating Support From Religious Organizations | Total Operating Expenditures | Percentage of Expenses Funded by Denomination |
|---|---|---|---|
| Denomination 1 | $1,790,398 | $163,465,881 | 1.1% |
| Denomination 2 | $703,533 | $29,228,144 | 2.4% |
| Denomination 3 | $1,658,286 | $67,819,731 | 2.4% |
| Denomination 4 | $943,976 | $29,476,352 | 3.2% |
| **United Methodist Church** | **$14,703,540** | **$162,292,231** | **9.1%** |
| Denomination 5 | $8,998,176 | $66,894,098 | 13.5% |
| | | | |
| All Mainline Schools | $33,371,308 | $737,957,419 | 4.5% |

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

United Methodist schools had 9.1 percent of their total expenses funded by the MEF—more than all but one other denomination. The MEF continues to be a pattern of denominational support that differs significantly from the support that other mainline theological schools receive from their denominations.

Figure 28 shows total expenditure per FTE student. (Each bar represents one school and United Methodist official schools are shown in orange.) This is a frequently used measure of educational cost –and it varies widely among the official and other approved schools—from a low of about $10,000 per FTE to a high of almost $160,000. As with most of these comparisons, the official schools fall between the highest and lowest, with about half of them in the middle of the range. The median expense per FTE student is about $58,000, which is almost exactly the median for all ATS member schools in the 2017 fiscal year. As with most educational statistics, there is no right or wrong expenditure per student. Some ATS member schools are likely spending too little, and the faculty and staffs at those schools have very low salaries and students likely are not receiving the best benefits of graduate theological education. Other schools have research, service, and special focus programs that incur expenses not directly related to course work, but figure into the overall expense from which this statistic is derived. A school can have a large expense per student because enrollment is small and the school must continue to take care of facilities and other indirect costs, and it can be small because a school has limited institutional structure and support for its students.

Figure 28: Total Expense per Fulltime Equivalent Student. 2016/17 expenditures, fall 2017 enrollment.




Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

## Theological Schools and American Higher Education

As noted earlier, theological schools are hybrid institutions in that they find part of their identity in the church, with its need for educating leaders and advancing theological scholarship, and another part of their identity in higher education, with its patterns and practices of advanced education. This hybrid identity is present in all of the official schools, but nowhere more evident than in the university related schools where all the demands of the church's need meet all the expectations of the finest higher education institutions in America. Theological schools in general find themselves in the interesting moment when both sources of their identity are undergoing fundamental change and in some cases, significant stress.

The broadest differentiation in American higher education is between public and private institutions, and all of theological education is located in the private sector, which has several components: research universities, which include all levels of higher education with a particular emphasis on research and graduate programs (four of the official UMC schools are in this category); masters' level schools, which have baccalaureate programs and some or many master's level programs (one UMC school is in this category); baccalaureate level institutions which, for the most part, are traditional liberal arts colleges, (no UMC school is in this category); and special focus institutions, which would include a wide range of schools from music conservatories to theological schools that operate at the baccalaureate or graduate levels or both (eight of the UMC schools are in this category). In contemporary American private higher education, the most stable institutions are research universities and any schools in the other categories that have significant endowments, high academic standards, and have cultivated a constituency of donors and advocates. The most stressed schools are traditional liberal arts colleges with small enrollments, especially if they are not well endowed, not highly selective in their admissions and must discount tuition significantly in order to attract students, and any institutions that have small enrollments, which includes most free-standing theological schools.

The stress in higher education has to do with changing information technology, the exploding amount of information, changing patterns of pedagogy, but is most evident in financial stress. A recent survey[44] of chief business officers across the spectrum of American higher education documents several perceptions of the people who are the most informed about their institutions' finances. The business officers of doctoral granting institutions are more confident of the financial stability of their institutions (78 percent agreed or agreed strongly that "I am confident my institution will be financially stable over the next five years") than business officers in baccalaureate institutions (54 percent agreed strongly or agreed with the same statement). Of the baccalaureate institutions, business officers at 24 percent of schools indicated that their schools were considering mergers or consolidating programs with other institutions; 57 percent thought that their institutions should merge administrative functions with other schools primarily to reduce administrative costs; and only 22 percent thought that their schools could make additional spending cuts without hurting quality. This survey did not include business officers of theological schools, but there are striking parallels. The most financially stable official theological schools are the four that are related to research intensive universities. The next most stable are three that have strong endowments relative to enrollment. One that is related to a larger institution has financial stress because the larger

44 *The 2018 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College and University Officers*, was commissioned by Inside Higher Ed and conducted by Gallup. The data were collected between May and June, 2018 in an online survey with invitations sent to 4,162 chief business or financial officers and yielded a 10 percent response rate. The survey did not include business officers of theological schools.

institution is experiencing financial stress. The two most financially stressed schools have low endowments or have consumed much of the unrestricted endowment that they have. Theological schools were not included in the survey, but they parallel these perceptions of the current financial realities in the broader higher education community.

Enrollment in all of theological education, as noted earlier, went through a period of decline followed in the most recent few years by stable or slightly increasing enrollment. Legal education has experienced a greater percentage decline in total enrollment, but other forms of graduate education appear to be stable. The Council of Graduate Schools conducts an annual assessment of applications and enrollment in graduate programs in the United States.[45] The CGS study does not include first level graduate professional degrees, such as the MDiv, or MD, or JD, but does include most other forms of graduate education. It reports that total enrollment in graduate arts and humanities decreased about 2.4 percent from 2016 to 2017 and the total of all graduates students decreased about 0.7 percent for these same years. Graduate education in general did not experience the decline across the decade that United Methodist schools did, but the most closely aligned academic areas of study—arts and humanities—did experience some of the greatest declines of any broad areas of study that the survey tracks. The gains in enrollment from 2016 to 2017 were in Health Sciences (almost 5 percent), Mathematics and Computer Science (about 3 percent), and Engineering (about 2.4 percent). Over the past five years, these have been the fields with the overall greatest enrollment increases, and the press release that accompanied the publication of the survey noted that "According to the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data on employment projections, many of the fastest growing fields are in mathematics and computer sciences and the health sciences."[46]

## The Thirteen Official Schools and Other Approved Schools

These data provide the setting for interpreting these schools as institutions in the context of other groups of theological schools, but data do not answer a deeper and perhaps more important question: What are the perceptible differences between the official schools and the thirty eight other schools that are approved for the education of United Methodist ordinands?

### *Differences of Graduates*

The bishops and graduates of schools were asked about this in the interviews at twelve of the schools: "How do you think the graduates of this school (an official seminary) differ from graduates of the other approved schools?"

One group of responses to that question reflected ambivalence about the differences among graduates. Some said that the differences they observed seemed to be as great among graduates of the official schools and among graduates of the other approved schools as they were between the graduates of one group of schools or the other. One bishop proposed that different schools attract differing kinds of students, so it is never clear whether differences in graduates are a function of individuals or the education they received from the school they chose to attend. Still another bishop commented that 'different kinds

45 Heronao Okahana and Enyu Zhou, *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2007–2017*, Council of Graduate Schools and Graduate Record Exam, October 2018, Tables C21, C22.

46 "First-Time Enrollment Holds Steady, Application Counts Slightly Decline at US Graduate Schools," Council of Graduate Schools, cgsnet.org/first-time-enrollment-holds-steady-application-counts-slightly-decline-us-graduate-schools (accessed August, 2018)

of candidates are coming into the system—they want church endorsement but not to be tethered to the church—they seem to have a more personal sense of understanding God's leadership than a corporate sense.' One bishop reviewed the schools that had provided the most elders in the conferences and identified strengths and weaknesses in performance from each of them.

Many responses, however, did identify differences that can be grouped into four broad categories. The first category related to the ability to lead a United Methodist congregation. 'In a United Methodist school,' one graduate said, you 'talk polity and how to run a church.' A bishop thought that, perhaps, graduates of the other approved schools 'had a harder time getting the technology of running a UMC church' One interviewee commented that graduates of the official schools were 'more prepared to serve as pastors of local churches,' and another thought that 'non UMC graduates did not have the same depth of [knowledge of] Methodist polity.'

A second category concerned engagement with boards of ministry and moving through the commissioning and ordination processes. For the most part, people perceived that graduates of the official seminaries moved through these processes more readily than graduates of the other schools. This may be because graduates of the other approved schools had 'more difficulty articulating a Wesleyan theological vision' or 'difficulty with polity.' There were other explanations about difficulties with Boards of Ministry. One graduate thought that some board members could be prejudiced toward graduates of the other approved schools and that contributed to some of the difficulty. The comment did not identify the possible root of the prejudice, only suggested that it might exist. Possible roots might be a loyalty to UMC schools or, because several of the approved schools are more conservative theologically than most of the official schools, a theological suspicion about more conservative schools. Another possible reason is that faculty and program administrators understand the process and know how to coach students more effectively in moving through it.

The third category involved Wesleyan identity, loyalty, and engagement in Wesleyan theology. One bishop said that graduates of the official schools seemed to have more 'understanding of [the] Wesleyan sense of grace as reflected in teaching, preaching, and pastoral care,' another said that graduates of the official seminaries had a 'deeper sense of Wesleyan theology and [were] more deeply concerned about doing ministry in a Methodist way.

The fourth category was perhaps the most notable. Many interviewees identified as a difference the ability of graduates of official schools to engage social issues. One graduate said that the conference had an 'influx of (official school) trained clergy and there had been a change in community involvement—more church beyond the walls.' Another alum said that graduates of the other approved seminaries 'were prepared academically' but the official seminary graduates 'were prepared both academically and to deal with social issues,' and still another interviewee commented that graduates of the official seminary had 'an appreciation for justice issues not seen in graduates of the other schools.'

The other approved schools had significant support in many conversations. One bishop named one of the other approved schools that provided many graduates to a conference he had previously served and said that they 'were well educated across the board.' Another bishop said that 'pastors who graduated from the other schools did great work' and that 'their theological competence was just as great.' Still another noted that graduates of the other approved schools may not be 'where we want them to be theologically, but they are teachable.'

What can be concluded from these comments? Generally, there was agreement that graduates of the official schools were more steeped in Wesleyan theology, United Methodist polity, and Methodist congregational practices. These characteristics contributed to a less troublesome path through commissioning and ordination processes for them. Graduates of the official seminaries, for the most part, are perceived as more social justice/community engagement oriented in their ministry. Bishops and graduates, the two groups of persons interviewed with the most direct contact with ministers in practice, did not associate performance failure or success either with graduates of the official schools or of the other approved schools.

### *Constituent Hopes for the Outcomes of United Methodist Theological Study*

It is one thing to ask if there is a difference between the graduates of the official schools and other approved schools, but it is another to ask what constituents think or hope to be the outcomes of theological education at the official schools. This study invited faculty, donors, bishops, students, graduates and administrators to identify what they thought or hoped would characterize the graduates of the official schools, and their responses reflected several different themes.

Theologically and Biblically Articulate. The most frequently mentioned hoped for outcome of theological education was that graduates would be theologically articulate and biblically thoughtful. This theological and biblical ability was almost always tethered to some other quality or directed toward an outcome—e.g., 'ability to articulate theology sensitively, and comfortable with diversity;' 'value deep and broad theological tradition and real commitment to local church;' 'grounded in scripture, theology, and tradition which leads to a concern for social justice;' or 'provide theological perspective on difficult issues….' Interviewees did not perceive this biblical and theological grounding as fixed in a certain mold. They talked about it being 'grounded and with courage to address difficult issues' and the 'hope [that] they are theologically nimble' or 'grounded in tradition, know that the life of faith requires structures, but not afraid of the Holy Spirit. This general theological and biblical capacity was also accompanied by hope for more academic capacities. As one bishop put it, he wants graduates who are 'intellectually bright with the ability to think critically and constructively,' or a donor at another school who wants graduates who are 'academically well trained.'

Contextual Competency and Imaginative Ministry. Two themes that also occurred frequently related to what might be called contextual competency and an imaginative understanding of ministry. The concept of contextual competency emerges from statements like the one made by a Methodist faculty member, 'attention to contextual particularities, faithful to tradition, taking seriously innovation' or one made by a donor at another school, 'ability to see the big picture, understand the obstacles of reaching people who are new, and the ability to grasp the complexity of the situation.' The category of imaginative ministry is reflected in comments like this one from a board member: 'impressed with range of (graduates') sense of ministry—traditional ministry, spiritual leadership for non-church organizations,' or a Methodist faculty member who hoped graduates would have a 'certain kind of imaginative capacity; know how to listen carefully to people and settings, and how to use a variety of disciplines in service to the church' or another board member who hoped 'that (graduates) are able to think into the future; to be innovative in ministry because the world is changing so quickly—they need to lead into what is hoped will be.' In this kind of world, the comment of an administrator at one school is worth noting, that graduates 'need solid grounding and [to be] prepared to think on their feet; ministry is not a paint-by-the-numbers task.' I have been asking questions about what people think should characterize ministers and priests since the 1970s, and in this career-long effort, these kinds of perceptions have never been as broadly suggested as

they were in this study. It is no doubt a sign of the times that effective ministry increasingly requires the ability to work with limited knowledge about what future forms ministry will take but having enough faith that it holds something worth discerning and implementing.

Leadership Ability and Inclination. Interviewees were also concerned that graduates both have leadership skills and be willing to lead. One faculty member said that they need 'real leadership skills and the ability to navigate multiple worlds,' and a donor at another school wanted graduates to have the 'ability to work with congregations and develop leadership in them,' to 'know what to do, [be] apt to do it, and able to reflect theologically about it—public leadership out of a deep theological position.' The hope for effective leadership included a focus on leadership at this time in The United Methodist Church. Graduates need to be 'prepared for the frailties of church—what to do with declining communities, what to do with congregation in decline,' 'prepared for ecclesial complexity,' 'someone…who can administer a congregation, who will understand tasks and take responsibility,' and will 'lead with a sense of gravity of a historic tradition and ability to carry it forward.'

Personal Characteristics. Expectations about personal qualities have been intermingled with expectations about authentic religion since the New Testament counsel of the Pastoral Epistles, and the interviews for this study continued that tradition. One person hoped graduates would exhibit a 'convicted humility—holding onto convictions with humility' and another hoped graduates would 'be caring and compassionate. One senior leader noted that 'spiritual formation is much more important than before' and a donor said that he hoped graduates would have a 'deep sense of wanting God in their lives and sharing faith experience with others.' A bishop said that he hoped graduates would be 'spiritually sensitive, value relationships, have a common touch, preach from a deep sense of call, and be able to sense what is worth fighting over and what to let go.'

Social Justice and Ecumenism. Comments related to social holiness occurred in several forms. A donor at one school spoke of wanting graduates to have 'a passion for social justice; [be] interested in new forms of ministry and new ways to bring God into peoples' lives;' an administrator at another school wanted graduates 'committed to faith development and justice;' and a faculty member at still another school hoped that graduates would leave with 'a passion for social justice and change.' Other responses addressed issues of ecumenical and inter-faith capacity. One faculty person, for example, hoped graduates 'would strive for diversity in theological understanding—no one has a monopoly on truth;' a donor hoped graduates 'would be able to deal with The UMC and work with others in the community;' an alum at still another school hoped for 'a rigorous, broad ecumenism;' and a faculty member wanted graduates who are 'ready to lead a UMC congregation and have background of the multi-religious world.'

While a composite of these hoped for outcomes is not definitive, it is instructive. Methodists hope for a ministry that is theologically and biblically literate in service to guiding pastoral action, interpreting the world, and identifying ways in which communities of faith should engage individuals and communities. Of all the skills that are necessary for pastoral work at this moment in American Christianity, the ability to read contexts and communities is especially important, as is both the ability and the willingness to exercise leadership. The days of a pastoral chaplaincy of a culturally privileged church have passed. Leadership has many definitions, and one that can be drawn from these responses is that it is taking responsibility, providing critical guidance, developing lay leaders, and offering the biblical and theological reflection that provides the purpose and goals for individual lives and communities of faith. Other unmentioned skills remain important, but capacity to interpret contexts and exercise leadership rise to

the top of the list of those that were mentioned. And, as has been true throughout Christian history, the minister's authentic faith, passion for the Gospel, and capacity to relate honestly and well with others is not optional. These are central characteristics without which ministry does not have integrity. In addition to these, Methodist ministry must understand the genius of the Wesleyan way, as well as its burdens and tendencies to fail. Methodist identity is crucial, but to be truly Wesleyan, it needs to be held humbly, ready to engage with other Christians and with others in a multi-religious world. It is not a complete list of hoped for outcomes, but it is certainly a good start.

### *Competing Educational Values in Theological Education*

Theological education may attract as many competing ideas about educational practices as it does about hoped-for characteristics of graduates. Two deserve comment in considering the education provided by the official schools and other approved schools.

One enduring educational contest is the value of dislocation versus the value of cultural immersion. The dislocation theory argues that theological education should extract students from the home contexts so that they can see issues and the world from another angle of vision, and in the process be broadened in their understanding. The contextual theory argues that some of the best education for ministry takes place in the middle of the culture in which they will serve. United Methodists are the most "local" of any mainline denomination. Elders are ordained into a conference in which they will generally serve for the entire course of their ministry careers. The churches they will serve are part of a culture and context, and ministers need to understand that culture and context intimately. This study does not have the data, but one can hypothesize that, with a few exceptions for truly national schools that are approved by the University Senate (Harvard, for example), most students attending other approved schools are doing so in their home region, and in or near the conference they hope to serve. The official schools likely contribute to theological education that dislocates in order to relocate the students theologically and culturally. The other approved schools likely contribute to theological education that is culturally emerged in the contexts that students will serve, or have already begun to serve as local pastors.

The second enduring contest is between theological education in which students are immersed in the ethos, habitus, and theological vision of their own tradition versus theological education that occurs in the context of broad theological diversity. One of the great benefits of education in the official schools, as evidenced in the interviews, is the deep sense of Wesleyan theology and ethos that pervades these schools. They include the abundant presence of other denominations and even world religions among students and faculty, but these schools are Wesleyan in their bones, and Methodists and Catholics who study or teach in them can bear witness to the depth of that identity. In an era when fewer candidates for ordination have been deeply formed in their own denominational identity, immersion education may be invaluable. The other argument is that one learns his or her tradition best in the context of active engagement with others. Nineteenth-century philologist and Orientalist Max Müller has fallen off the maps in this century, but one of his comments has endured in quotation ubiquity: 'He who knows one [religion], knows none.' Several ATS schools, most famously Harvard Divinity School, have used this sentiment in building a theological curriculum. The educational idea is that only as one is exposed to lived religious alternatives to his or her own religious commitment is the individual truly able to engage a theological identity. In a religiously plural world, and perhaps in a world that is religiously "nothing," this kind of education may be more advantageous than ever. Many of the other approved schools have identifiable theological centers that force a Wesleyan student to study theology in an oppositional context.

In the end, dichotomies don't hold, at least in post-modern versions of reality. But these two theories of theological education have advocates and critics, and most schools seek to embody some or all four of these dimensions. These educational contests can be used to make the case both for the mission and work of the official schools and for the potential contribution of the other approved schools.

### *Wesleyan Ecumenism*

A part of Wesleyan ethos is its embrace of persons who construct Christian and religious life differently. While Wesleyan ethos requires a critical mass of Methodists, it also likely means that not all the faculty or students should be Methodist, because a part of being Methodist is to ask Wesley's question: "Dost thou love and serve God? It is enough." This ecumenism is a swinging door. It opens the way for Methodists to study in other approved schools and it requires that Methodist schools include persons and voices who are not Wesleyans. A Methodist faculty member at one school affirmed as Wesleyan 'a value that everyone be heard…we don't see ourselves as arbiters of truth, and that is different than some.' A faculty member at another school talked about ecumenical engagement as 'a gift that involves Wesleyan values and takes them to broader communities.' The same impulse that works toward ecumenical inclusion in the official schools affirms the education of United Methodists in schools who welcome Methodists but whose center of gravity is not Wesleyan. A part of their ecumenical work involves the fraternal connections to historically Black Methodist church bodies. The United Methodist seminaries have provided doctoral education for many pastors and leaders in the AME. AMEZ, and CME churches whose seminaries have few doctoral programs. One leader in one of these denominations was in an interview with graduates, and asked specifically for me to mention the importance of United Methodist schools for the broader community of Methodist denominations.

### *Theological Homogeneity and Diversity*

During most visits, I asked one or more groups of interviewees, typically faculty and administrators, to locate the theological center of their school in the context of the theological center of the annual conferences they serve the most. It was a question resisted by many. They didn't want to use terms like "liberal" or "conservative" or "to the left" or "to the right." They did, with reluctance, use them and when they did, most placed the theological center of their school to the left of the theological center of the conferences they served. My observation is that most theological schools are somewhat to the theological left of the constituency they serve—no matter how conservative or liberal their constituency may be. The official schools, diverse as they are in many areas, are less diverse in their theological center of gravity. One school self-defines as more conservatives. Another school emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach. Some of the other approved schools would, I think, see themselves to the left of the official schools and of most of the UMC, and other of the approved schools would see themselves as more conservative than the Methodist schools. In my judgment, the other approved schools reflect greater diversity in their theological center than the UMC schools do. This is not a data-based assessment, but a general assertion on the basis of my work with the UMC official schools and the other schools approved by the University Senate. This is not an unusual situation. The schools of any main line denomination would be more theologically homogeneous than the group of schools that comprise the other approved schools. The United Methodist church has a greater theological range across the span of all approved schools than it would otherwise have with only the official schools.

# V
# The Contributions of the Official Theological Schools

A thing that tends to be forgotten in all of this
is that [Hillary] Clinton is a Methodist…
If Clinton were as notoriously corrupt as—
I struggle and fail to think of a notoriously corrupt Methodist.[47]

*—Novelist and essayist Marilynne Robinson,*
*commenting on contemporary American life and slander*

I once learned a poem about Baptists: "Mary had a little lamb/it would have been a sheep/but it was a Baptist/ and died for lack of sleep." I think, however, that the attribution was mistaken. The sheep's problem was undoubtedly that it was a Methodist—frenetic doers of good from the beginning, activists for holiness, contributors from the beginning: Methodists are not Methodists unless they are busy doing good of one kind or another. I was struck by Marilynne Robinson's comment about Hillary Clinton and her politically alleged corruption. This Pulitzer Prize-winning author just couldn't finish a sentence about a corrupt Methodist without interrupting it—as if it were inconceivable! A Wesleyan way of being Christian entails personal piety and a compulsion that results in acts of mercy, care, justice, and change.

Because the official schools are Methodist, it is fair to ask what contributions they make, and I did just that in the context of interviews on most campuses. The responses were many and varied. This section, first of all, (1) summarizes the responses to that question, then goes on to explore three specific forms of contributions that the official schools make to (2) The United Methodist Church, (3) to the understanding of Wesleyan theology, history, and polity, and (4) to the broader academic community and to theological scholarship.

## A Broad Range of Contributions

A number of responses identified contributions about understanding culture. The bishop at one school said that the school to which he was related 'provides a window on a world that has changed and prepares graduates for a truly post-modern world—diverse, secular, multi-faith.' A board member at that same school talked about the contribution to the church of 'culturally competent pastors.' A board member at another school said that a contribution being made by the school was that it 'provides a setting for exploring what it means to be Christian in today's world.' Others commented on contributions that are being made specifically by their school, so in this case I need to name the school accurately to summarize what participants said. At Methodist Theological School in Ohio, for example, people talked about Seminary Hill Farm and the contribution that it is making both to understanding and to addressing issues of food justice in a very practical way. At Wesley, many mentioned the contribution of its efforts to address public theology in the nation's capital and the value of the Luce Center for the Arts. At Boston, Duke, and Emory, people commented on the efforts that all three schools are making to provide houses of study for Baptist, Anglican/Episcopal, and UCC students. At Emory, more than a few mentioned what it meant for the school to be engaged with incarcerated persons, and at Duke, people

47 Marilynne Robinson, *What are We Doing Here? Essays* (New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2017), 308.

mentioned its Center of Reconciliation. Interviewees at United mentioned the school's long-standing DMin program for African American pastors with its noteworthy graduates, as well as the annual Holy Spirit Seminar. At Gammon, the contribution was seen most readily in the school's ability to work with students of color, and to provide African American pastors and episcopal leaders for the church. Folks at Perkins mentioned efforts to address the needs of Hispanic/Latino/a churches. And for most of the schools, interviewees perceived an important contribution to be an emphasis on social holiness, a prophetic voice, and, in the words of one administrator, a school that 'understands social holiness in ways that touch both UMC and non-UMC constituencies.'

## Contributions to The United Methodist Church

The thirteen official schools make contributions to their denomination in several ways: including good students who will be pastors, deacons, and congregational leaders; financial support that serves students and the denomination; supporting the course of study; and graduates who serve as bishops and agency leaders.

### *Contribution of Good Students*

Respondents saw the most central contribution of the schools as the formation and education of pastors and leaders for The United Methodist Church. This response was so ubiquitous that I needed to push interviewees even to mention anything else! The respondents were right, of course: the primary contribution of the theological schools is educating pastors and leaders, and one way to assess the quality of pastoral and congregational leaders is to talk with students. They have come to a theological school because they have discerned a call to ministry, or some inclination in that direction, or at least a holy curiosity about theological study. If students are rightly educated, they become a theological school's greatest contribution. My conversations with students were among the most heartening and disheartening of my conversations at these thirteen schools.

Heartening and Disheartening Conversations. They were heartening because of students' commitment to ministry, overall ability, desire to make the world better, and willingness to give themselves to a good not yet envisioned. I surrendered my role as investigator at the conclusion of a group interview at one school and told the group that, in forty years of working in theological education, they embodied everything that I had been hoping for in theological education. They were smart, for starters, and the Gospel needs intellectual service; they were committed, and the Gospel is best served by commitment; they had a comprehensive moral vision, and the Gospel is too often hampered by a truncated moral vision; they were aware of the risks inherent in ministry, the Gospel is, after all, about a cross; and they were personable, the Word was made flesh, and it is still communicated convincingly by people who can engage others and readily care for them. There were other groups like this one, but this one especially attracted my respect and bolstered my hope for the future.

The conversation became disheartening at another school as a student began to tell her story. She and her husband had moved halfway across the country for her to attend this seminary. She was appreciative of the education she was receiving, the financial support she was granted from the school, and what she was learning. She had been a little frustrated finding a congregation that melded the contemporary worship music that nourished her soul with the theology that nourished her way of being Christian. She was a cradle United Methodist from a conservative part of the country, sensed a call to ministry and was seeking to respond to it, but unsure of a church that would exclude from ministry gay and lesbian persons

who were married or in committed relationships. As she continued to talk, her story stilled the room. I would like to quote what she said, but the moment became sacred, and it would have been unseemly for me to take notes. I put my pen down and we all listened to a person of genuine faith, genuine commitment, genuine love for a church, and genuine readiness to serve—who was not sure that she could.

The current controversy in the church was on this student's mind, as it was with many of the United Methodist faculty with whom I talked. I asked them what they were going to do, as many were approaching the last part of their seminary education. Responses tended to fall into four different categories. First, some had slowed or stopped their ordination process and taken a wait-and-see attitude. One student said 'I have put a pause on candidacy—I am a Wesleyan and UM, but wouldn't consider a job that is not open and affirming, so am discerning what my affiliation will be.' Second, others had decided never to start the process—they did not assume that ordination was necessary for them to do what they hoped to do in ministry, and the controversy simply made that strategy all the more reasonable. Third, still others (and this may have been the most frequent kind of response) had decided to pursue the process and work within the structures of the church. One student affirmed what she had heard from Bishop Carter that people were 'not going to sleep one night and it all blow up—[that we] have to trust the process.' A United Methodist faculty member at another school was 'surprised at the number of students who say that they are committed to The UMC—even in the midst of the conflict' and noted that 'in an earlier day, many students left The UMC for UCC, but that does not seem to be happening now.' A fourth response was a kind of unknowing. One student said that it is 'discouraging—I am being formed in theology and am unsure, don't know what my role is, or what the future will look like.' One decidedly Wesleyan student commented 'If people knew Wesley's covenant—love of God and neighbor—it would be okay. I hate that this is going to be a stumbling block. Everyone needs to read Wesley's Teaching, Vol. 1 and 2.'

Students Perceptions of Strengths and Weaknesses in their Theological Studies. Students talked with me about what they most valued about their theological education and what they found frustrating. The way I asked the question required them to say something about both. Students were overwhelmingly positive of their seminary. One student said 'I love everything about this school,' which prompted a fellow student to say, 'I couldn't imagine going anywhere else.'

Students found many aspects of their schools pleasing. High on their list was faculty—who knew their stuff and were accomplished scholars, cared about individual students, were accessible, and provided relational learning contexts. Students appreciated the efforts of schools to provide persons or offices to help with vocational discernment, opportunities to be with bishops in residence. They valued the diversity of students and ideas to which they were exposed, and their schools' commitments to social justice (one said that her school was a great place to be a person of color). Many commented appreciably about the academic rigor and intellectual life of their schools.

Some of the negative and positive perspectives were linked, like the student who was frustrated by how much 'beliefs were challenged,' but celebrated that the process 'opened me up so much to love more and look at people differently.' Some students thought that their theological education was too heady and cerebral, others had come expressly for that kind of education. Theological schools have a perennial issue about academic theology and practical ministry training. Students come for both but often think that one (usually theology) is valued or taught more comprehensively than the other. One student said that the school 'is great with theology but theology does not provide all that you need.' Still another said, 'we have deconstructed everywhere. Now how do we construct a resolution and deal with very practical

issues.' Or they came for academic learning and to grow spiritually but got more of the former than the latter. One student said that 'formation is not as good as it could be,' and another that there was 'not enough institutional attention to covenant groups.'

Several of the comments about frustrating aspects of theological education are important issues for ministry and for the attention of the schools. For example, some talked about the frustration of attending to academic study, family, work at church, and work for living expenses. The tension among multiple demands and sources of love and meaning is a ministry issue, not just a theological education issue: what burdens the best of students continues to burden the best of pastors. Another related issue was that the busyness of academic study left little time to process or have open spaces to attend to spiritual life. Pastors talk about the same issues. Other frustrations reflected the pressures the schools are facing. Some students were aware of and worried about their school's financial stress. Others were grateful for new programs, like distance education models, but thought that there were insufficient resources for online education to be done well. Others found it frustrating to change degree programs, or to encounter changing requirements. Many of these schools have been innovating new programs or strategies, and students often suffer the disruption. One student said that his school was very innovative but 'sometimes programs are launched before all the wheels are on.'

Student Debt. However great the contribution that schools make by providing well-educated candidates for ministry, if students' debt is so great that they cannot work for minimum salary in an annual conference, that contribution is significantly diminished. Debt was on the minds of several students with whom I talked, but not all of them. Students at well-endowed schools –which typically means resources for significant scholarship support for students—did not express a great deal of worry. Many had full scholarships for tuition. Students at schools with fewer resources received fewer scholarships and talked more about the cost of tuition and the debt they would incur with their degrees. The GBHEM Office of Research and Evaluation conducted a comprehensive study of students from the thirteen official schools for the 2014–2015 academic year, and Table 12[48] of that report demonstrated that schools with more endowment provided more scholarship support than schools with limited endowment. Student interviews that were part of this study supported the findings of that study. Methodist students received more scholarship support than non-Methodist students—at least that was the perception of the non-Methodist students. Other findings of the GBHEM study continue to hold true in theological schools in the ensuing years: that racial ethnic students tend to borrow more than white students that older students borrow more than younger ones, and that single persons with one or more dependents borrow more than students with spouses or no dependents. In many ways, the amount of borrowing is associated with, although not determined by, the amount of wealth a person or person's family may have.

The Association of Theological Schools has been coordinating a project on student debt involving sixty-seven participating schools,[49] including several of the official United Methodist schools. The schools have developed programs and strategies to work with students in efforts to reduce debt. The learning they

48 Mark McCormack and Joel Cummings, "The United Methodist Church Seminary Debt Report: 2014–2015 Academic Year," General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. This study noted that embedded schools provided better scholarship support than the free-standing schools. I think that the determining factor was endowment and that the embedded schools (mostly university related) had higher endowments than free-standing schools.

49 The Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers Project. Its findings and resources can be found at https://www.ats.edu/resources/current-initiatives/economic-challenges-facing-future-ministers (accessed August, 2018)

have accumulated includes: the value of programs that enhance students' overall financial literacy; providing financial counsel and coaching; keeping students aware of the exact amount of their monthly repayment for every semester they take out student loans; the importance of not "debt-shaming" students; and helping students understand the two sources of educational debt—educational expenses and living expenses. The school has primary control on the first kind of expense and the student has primary control on the second.

Graduating students report the amount of educational debt they understand that they have in the ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire. All of the official schools participate in this program and Table 7 shows the estimated debt of 2017 graduates of all the official schools. While 823 graduates, including both United Methodists and all others, completed the survey, Table 7 does not include all of them. The table has two axes: the vertical one shows how much debt they brought with them to seminary, and the horizontal one how much debt they incurred during seminary. The top left cell, for example, shows that 252 persons brought no educational debt to their theological studies and incurred no debt at seminary. The bottom right cell shows that 37 people brought more than $60,000 of debt and incurred more than $60,000 at seminary, making their estimated debt at graduation more than $120,000. (The percentages sum across rows, for example, shows that 4.8 percent of students who came with no debt incurred $10,000–19,999 of educational debt while in seminary). The top right cell shows that fifty people who came with no debt left with more than $60,000 of debt. Each individual occurs in only one cell.

Table 7 Educational Debt Brought and Incurred by 2017 Graduates at United Methodist Schools

| | Educational Debt Incurred | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Educational Debt Brought | None | | Less than $10,000 | | $10,000 to $19,999 | | $20,000 to $29,999 | | $30,000 to $39,999 | | $40,000 to $59,999 | | $60,000 or more | |
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| None | 252 | 60.7% | 25 | 6.0% | 20 | 4.8% | 24 | 5.8% | 17 | 4.1% | 27 | 6.5% | 50 | 12.0% |
| Less than $10,000 | 9 | 13.4% | 12 | 17.9% | 3 | 4.5% | 6 | 9.0% | 7 | 10.4% | 14 | 20.9% | 16 | 23.9% |
| $10,000 to $19,999 | 12 | 19.7% | 5 | 8.2% | 11 | 18.0% | 7 | 11.5% | 5 | 8.2% | 14 | 23.0% | 7 | 11.5% |
| $20,000 to $29,999 | 20 | 30.3% | 5 | 7.6% | 6 | 9.1% | 3 | 4.5% | 5 | 7.6% | 9 | 13.6% | 18 | 27.3% |
| $30,000 to $39,999 | 12 | 19.7% | 4 | 6.6% | 3 | 4.9% | 6 | 9.8% | 11 | 18.0% | 12 | 19.7% | 13 | 21.3% |
| $40,000 to $59,999 | 6 | 10.3% | 2 | 3.4% | 9 | 15.5% | 6 | 10.3% | 10 | 17.2% | 12 | 20.7% | 13 | 22.4% |
| $60,000 or more | 6 | 7.0% | 1 | 1.2% | 2 | 2.3% | 12 | 14.0% | 13 | 15.1% | 15 | 17.4% | 37 | 43.0% |

Source: ATS Graduating Student Survey

Debt is a complex issue for schools as well as students. One of the official schools actually has negative net tuition, meaning that it gave away more in aid than it received in tuition. Some students at that school still acquired educational debt—obviously for living expenses. If students have enough personal or family resources to amortize student debt, then the amount is not a particular issue. A graduate with $100,000 will have a monthly repayment of over $1000. If that person wants to be a pastor starting with a minimum salary in most conferences, that repayment amount will significantly affect quality of life. If the person's spouse is a systems analyst or physician, that amount will not be problematic—depending, of course, on whether the spouse also has educational debt. Some people with no resources feel a deep sense of call to ministry and see debt as the price they have to pay to follow the call. Others feel a call to ministry but are not as disciplined as they should be with lifestyle issues, and run up debt to pay for

a lifestyle that couldn't be sustained on a ministerial salary. Schools need to provide information and counseling as debt is incurred and conferences need to understand why candidates have the debt that they have and discern whether the debt reflects tendencies that could be problematic in ministry. Debt is the kind of issue that requires individual counsel from schools, individual decisions by students, as well as discernment and reasonable support from the denomination.

### *Financial Support for Students and Denominational Programs*

This report has examined seminary finance in a number of ways, but one important way that it has not addressed the issue is in terms of the financial support the schools provide for the denomination. At a time when many in the denomination are raising questions about denominational money that goes to the schools, the answer to that question is informed by a consideration of the financial support that the schools provide for United Methodist students and the overall cost of providing theological education. The United Methodist Church provided about $15 million in support for the schools in 2017. What did the schools provide? The answer to that question takes three forms.

Endowment. The first is the endowments that have been raised over years and stewarded to support the work of the schools. In 2017, the combined endowments of the official schools totaled about $900 million. At a prudent rate of consumption of not more than five percent, that combined endowment provided $45 million for the work of the schools, which typically provides salaries for endowed positions, scholarship support for students, maintenance of facilities (in some cases), and support for ongoing programs. These long term investments reflect primarily the gifts of United Methodists or members of predecessor church bodies over decades, and in some cases, centuries. They reflect the commitments that donors have expressed with their gifts and hopes for the future expressed in their bequests. They often comprise gifts that honored parents or persons who left a legacy of good ministerial work, or a hope for an educated ministry that will meet the challenges of communities of faith in the future. This past year, each dollar that has come from the current funds of The United Methodist Church has been matched by three dollars of endowment revenue. The schools need both sources of income—endowments do not alleviate the need for current support—but questions about current denominational support are best pursued with an understanding of the resources that the schools bring to their work.

Fundraising. The official United Methodist schools, like all theological schools, have necessarily become effective fundraisers. Tuition, grants from denominations, and endowments simply are not enough to support theological schools. Section Three of this report identified the amount of grants and gifts for current operations for these schools. David McAllister-Wilson notes that "Through our fundraising, grant-writing, and marketing efforts, the 13 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 we provide the second largest source of funds for the preparation of United Methodist clergy outside the U.S." He goes on to ask: "What other United Methodist organization is producing such a large net return on investment?"[50]

Financial Aid. The third form of the answer is the direct support for United Methodist students who are studying at the official theological schools. I asked each school how much aid it provided to United

50 David McAllister-Wilson, *A New Church and a New Seminary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2018), 24.

Methodist students in terms of scholarships, tuition remission, grants, or other forms of aid that directly reduce students' cost of attendance, but excluding loans.

Table 8 shows the responses for each school of the total amount of support for United Methodist students in 2017-2018 and the percentage that amount represents of targeted apportioned Methodist Educational Fund for 2017. The percentages vary from a low of 42 percent—slightly less than half the amount received from the MEF—to a high of more than 500 percent—more than five times the amount of funds received from the MEF. Other schools fell between these two extremes. The percentages vary as a function of the amount of endowment and current gifts that schools have, the number of United Methodist students enrolled, and other sources of support that are designated for students at a particular school, such as from endowment resources not owned by the school or from a university budget not under the direct control of the school. The total amount of aid for United Methodist students at the thirteen official schools is almost $21 million, which is $6 million more than the schools received in their MEF apportionment. The net effect of the schools' efforts is that, across the thirteen schools as a group, all of the MEF revenue is passed on to United Methodist students to reduce the cost of their theological education. These efforts provide a disproportionate benefit to United Methodist students, and indirectly, to The United Methodist Church.

Table 8 Financial Support for United Methodist Students as Percentage of MEF Revenue

| School | Amount $ | Percent of Targeted MEF Revenue* |
|---|---|---|
| School 1 | 3,627,920 | 511% |
| School 2 | 2,682,456 | 163% |
| School 3 | 4,879,897 | 225% |
| School 4 | 2,039,100 | 166% |
| School 5 | 664,361 | 113% |
| School 6 | 1,570,000 | 200% |
| School 7 | 1,413,371 | 115% |
| School 8 | 1,226,555 | 137% |
| School 9 | 308,000 | 42% |
| School 10 | 1,016,370 | 86% |
| School 11 | 714,946 | 49% |
| School 12 | 470,000 | 52% |
| School 13 | 635,785 | 62% |

*The apportioned amount from the MEF is typically more than the amount they actually received because actual receipts are based on giving from congregations forwarded by conferences. In many cases, where schools estimated some of these expenditures, they did so conservatively. The combination of using apportioned funds (which likely overstate actual revenue from MEF) and conservative estimates of expenditures means that these percentages are conservative estimates of true expense to MEF funds actually received.

Source: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and AUMTS Member Institutions

## *Support for Course of Study Programs*

Course of Study is one of the oldest forms of education for Methodist ministers in the United States. It was the first pattern of organized study, and whatever other forms of education have developed, the Course of Study has continued alongside those other forms. Virtually all of the Course of Study Schools are programs of the official schools. Table 9 shows the enrollment in these programs across the past ten years—the same years that degree program enrollment was tracked in earlier sections of this report.

| Table 9 Enrollment in Course of Study by Year and Providing Institution | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
| Duke | 278 | 281 | 268 | 252 | 227 | 221 | 218 | 235 | 198 | 197 |
| Candler | 875 | 896 | 926 | 867 | 830 | 782 | 732 | 698 | 696 | 703 |
| Garrett-Eva | 270 | 266 | 52 | 201 | 261 | 286 | 297 | 297 | 296 | 330 |
| Ohio | 216 | 257 | 317 | 370 | 441 | 423 | 443 | 527 | 577 | 480 |
| Perkins | 382 | 383 | 353 | 366 | 333 | 330 | 342 | 310 | 304 | 313 |
| Saint Paul | 246 | 269 | 262 | 248 | 241 | 214 | 236 | 221 | 223 | 280 |
| Wesley | 322 | 307 | 307 | 273 | 278 | 291 | 284 | 227 | 277 | 299 |
| Western Jur | 2 | 1 | 7 | 52 | 54 | 56 | 46 | 49 | 52 | 45 |
| Total | 2,591 | 2,660 | 2,492 | 2,629 | 2,665 | 2,603 | 2,598 | 2,564 | 2,623 | 2,647 |

Source: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

In the same timeframe that MDiv enrollment declined about fifteen percent, the enrollment in Course of Study schools increased about five percent.[51] The official schools have about as many students in their Course of Study Schools as they have MDiv students. While most mainline Protestant denominations have shorter term non-degree programs for alternatively credentialed pastoral leaders, the United Methodist Course of Study may be the most extensive. It is a five-year program that involves twenty courses, and in many cases instruction is provided by the same faculty who teach MDiv students. Subjects parallel the MDiv curriculum although taught in shorter terms. The program is administered through the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, which also provides an online option, but the Course of Study schools are provided by the official theological schools, either on the campus of the school or on any of several extension sites, both in English and in several other languages.

While Course of Study students pay tuition, it is not enough to cover the cost of the program. Data from several schools suggest that theological schools cover approximately $350, on average, of the expense for each Course of Study student each year. For example, for Candler School of Theology at Emory University, which has the largest single Course of Study school, that amounts to more than a quarter of a million dollars. The theological schools operating Course of Studies schools serve the ministry needs of The United Methodist Church both by providing these programs and by subsidizing their cost.

### *Episcopal and Denominational Leaders and Leaders in the Broader Methodist Family*

No one goes to seminary to become a bishop or agency leader. Senior leadership capacities accrue over time. Theological education, however, provides a kind of formation that continues to nourish good leaders long after they have graduated. The official schools queried their files of graduates, and identified more than 125 graduates who are currently active or retired United Methodist bishops. Many reasons could account for this high number, ranging from the most suspicious—the schools are a cartel that influences the people and processes for episcopal election and agency leader appointments—to the more generous—that these schools have attracted able students, immersed them in a nuanced understanding of a Wesleyan way that served and supported them as they stewarded their gifts and opportunities in service to the church. I think that the more generous reason is more likely. Not only have these schools graduated a number of current episcopal leaders in The United Methodist Church, they have graduated persons serving as bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, and several church

51 The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry also administers and online version of the Course of Study program that in 2017 enrolled 98 students. Table 9 shows only the enrollment in programs run by the AUMTS schools.

bodies outside the United States. Three of the four presidents of theological schools related to historically Black Methodist church bodies—Payne (AME), Hood (AMEZ), Turner at ITC (AME) and Phillips at ITC (CME)—earned advanced degrees at one of the official United Methodist schools. This study involved conversations with more than twenty bishops who are related to the official schools in one way or another, and their support for the schools to which they were related was both informed and thoughtful. They knew their schools, understood their strengths and weaknesses, and were confident about their work.

## Wesleyan Theology, History, and Polity

The faculty of the official schools are very Methodist. According to the ATS data shown in Table 10, almost half of all the faculty in these thirteen schools are United Methodist and almost half of all the faculty members in ATS member institutions who identify as United Methodist are teaching in the official schools. This high percentage of United Methodist faculty not only contributes to the Methodist ethos, but also means that much of the scholarship on Wesleyan theology, history, and polity occurs in these schools, even though not all faculty work in disciplines that contribute to these areas. Every one of the thirteen official schools does have some faculty who do, and those faculty members have addressed a wide range of issues.

Table 10 United Methodist Full-Time Faculty Members in ATS Schools

| | Total Number of UMC Facuty | Total Number of Faculty | UMC Faculty as Percentage of Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| UMC Official Schools | 128 | 278 | 46.0% |
| Other Approved Schools | 43 | 461 | 9.3% |
| All other ATS Schools | 76 | 2,901 | 2.6% |
| Total | 247 | 3,640 | 6.8% |

Source: Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools

To explore this contribution, I asked Wesleyan scholar Ted Campbell to identify the scholarly work of faculty in the thirteen official schools that contributes to an understanding of Wesleyan thought and United Methodist ministry and polity. He identified over two hundred titles of articles, books, book chapters, or encyclopedia entries of more than fifty faculty members in these schools. These hundreds of titles do not include the work that Methodists have done in the last decades on books such as *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, and many others. They do not include titles of works by people who have retired from these schools, or who were not included on faculty members' lists of publications on the schools' websites. In short, this listing under-represents that total amount scholarship related to Wesleyan and Methodist issues that has been produced by faculty members in the official seminaries. Even with its omissions, the list is impressive.

It includes academic works like: Kevin Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness: The Band Meeting in Wesley's Thought and Popular Methodist Practice;* Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*; Russell Richey, *Methodism in the American Forest*; Edgardo Colón-Emeric, *Wesley, Aquinas, and Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue*; Laceye Warner, *The Method of Our Mission: United Methodist Polity and Organization*; Edward P. Wimberly, *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel: A Twenty-First Century Pastoral Theology*; William Abraham, *Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief*; Ted Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*; and Rebekah Miles, *Georgia Harkness: The Remaking of a Liberal*

*Theologian, Collected Essays from 1929–1942*. The list includes many other academic books and journal articles.

The list also includes works oriented to the work and witness of Methodist ministers and congregations such as: Robin Wallace, *The Christian Year: Guide for Worship and Preaching*; Karen Westerfield Tucker, "United Methodist Worship: Back to the Future;" Jack Jackson, "Early Methodism's Four Doors of Evangelism;" E. Byron Anderson, *The Meaning of Holy Communion in The United Methodist Church*; Henry Knight, *Transforming Community: The Wesleyan Way to Missional Congregations*; Scott Kisker, *The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community*; and Mark W. Stamm, *Sacraments and Discipleship, Understanding Baptism and the Lord's Supper in a United Methodist Context.*

In addition to these kinds of publications, these faculty members have written numerous entries for dictionaries and encyclopedias, such as *Global Dictionary of Wesleyan Theology, Grove Dictionary of American Music, Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology, The Encyclopedia of Christianity in the United States, the Encyclopedia of Protestantism, The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies, The Oxford Guide to The Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey, The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, and *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*. These dictionary and encyclopedia articles are often difficult to write in the parameters in which they must be written, and don't always count as much as they should in professorial evaluations, but they describe Methodist and Wesleyan issues to audiences that may not read a whole book or article, and most of these are online or indexed online so that researchers and others can find them readily. They are an important contribution on behalf of Methodists, even if they are not necessarily an important contribution to the Methodists who will search out the books or articles.

The entire list provides evidence that the Methodist faculty members have attended to an important scholarly effort for denominationally related seminaries: to give both a scholarly account of the theology, history, polity, and Christian practices of a denominational family and provide guidance to pastors and lay people in more readily accessible formats.

## Contribution to the Broader Academic Community

As the thirteen official schools have served The United Methodist Church, they have also been making significant contributions to the broader community of theological schools. This is evident both in the doctoral degree programs that they offer and their leadership in theological scholarship and research.

### *Research Doctorates*

The previous section noted the high percentage of official schools that offer the PhD. In addition to the PhD, some official schools offer the ThD, DMA, and all of them also offer the highest professional degree, the Doctor of Ministry. While the presence of these degree programs reflects a Wesleyan commitment to the intellectual life, their primary benefit is a contribution to the broader community of theological education. Almost 11 percent of all faculty teaching in ATS member schools in 2017 had their highest degree from one of the eight doctoral granting official schools. A total of 374 faculty earned doctorates at: Boston, 35; Claremont/Claremont Graduate School, 40; Drew, 60; Duke, 80; Emory/Candler, 90; Garrett-Evangelical/Northwestern, 38; Iliff/University of Denver 13; SMU/Perkins 22.[52]

52 All schools report the source of highest degrees earned annually to the ATS Commission on Accrediting, and these data are drawn from the Commission's data base as of fall 2017.

The teaching areas in all ATS schools that have the largest number of faculty include graduates of these eight PhD programs: 10 percent of faculty teaching biblical languages; 14 percent of all faculty teaching Old Testament/Hebrew Scripture; 9 percent of all faculty teaching systematic theology; and 14 percent of all faculty in church history. Theological schools include many teaching areas in addition to these that have the largest number of faculty, and some reflect the particularly strong presence of these eight schools. For example, 33 percent of all ATS faculty who hold appointments in religion and society are graduates of one of these eight schools, 33 percent of all faculty who teach urban studies, and 33 percent of all faculty who teach Black church studies have degrees from one of the eight doctoral granting official schools, as do 23 percent of all ATS faculty in religious/Christian education. The presence of graduates of these schools is thus wide ranging in terms of teaching areas—Bible, theology, history, and pastoral arts—but uniquely present in areas where United Methodists have shown interest over the years, such as race, religion and society, Christian Education, and Black Church studies.

### *Theological Research and Intellectual Voice*

Over the course of the past three decades, The Association of Theological Schools has sponsored two competitive grant programs for theological research: the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology and the Lilly Theological Research Grants programs. The Luce Fellows program has been regarded by many as the most elite fellowship program available to theological scholars. It was awarded annually to five to seven scholars, and the acceptance rate of proposals has hovered around 10 to 15 percent of all submissions. Over the years, thirty-five faculty members from eight of the thirteen official schools received such a fellowship, for a total of 22 percent of all the Henry Luce III Fellowships granted. The Lilly Theological Research Grants encompassed a range of grants that were intended to be less competitive than the Luce awards, and to provide research support for more faculty, especially faculty newer in their teaching careers. Over the years of this program, 20 percent of these grants went to faculty members teaching in one of the thirteen official schools. In both of these programs, faculty in the United Methodist official schools were dramatically over-represented among grant recipients, in terms of their percentage of all schools and faculty members. This contribution was certainly influenced by the four research intensive institutions, but grants went to faculty in most of the schools over the decades that the two programs were in place.

Faculty members in these schools have provided intellectual leadership not only to the community of theological scholars but also to the broader intellectual community, as is most evident in the four research intensive universities. The provost at one of these universities said the theological school related to that university 'provided the fundamental intellectual fabric of (name of university).' Another provost said that the theological school faculty 'besides training ministers, has a significant ability to bring insights to the rest of the university.' Another provost said that the presence of the theological school 'has allowed (the university) to have important conversations about ethics and moral issues' and that it was 'hard to think about a serious conversation without (name of theological school).' Still another said that the theological school 'provides an important dialogue partner [on] issues of justice, racism, and meaning in life.' All four of these provosts talked about the importance of the theological school in the founding of their institutions and in meeting the school's contemporary missions. None of these universities would consider the theological schools this important without their faculties making significant contributions to the intellectual life and research productivity of the institutions. In many ways, these schools and their faculties provide a Christian witness in the context of universities that understand their task, as one provost put it, as 'creating and translating new knowledge for the good of society.'

# Conclusions and Final Thoughts

Unite the two so long disjoined,
Knowledge and vital piety;
Learning and holiness combined.[53]

*—From a hymn composed by Charles Wesley*
*for the opening of the Kingswood School for Children, June, 1748*

This study has sought to provide a comprehensive description of the thirteen official theological schools of The United Methodist Church with particular attention to 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 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 of The United Methodist Church?*, and *(3) What is the contribution that UMC seminaries make to the witness and ministry of The United Methodist Church?* This section summarizes the answers that have been provided in the report and concludes with thoughts about the official schools and The United Methodist Church.

## Concluding Answers and Reflections Related to the Focus 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 schools recognized by the University Senate for the education of United Methodist ministers?*

The official schools are both different from and similar to other Protestant theological schools in the United States. They are different in many ways. The official schools are more diverse in institutional form and structure than systems of schools related to other denominations—evangelical or mainline. No other denomination, for example, has some of its theological schools located in research intensive universities. As a group, the official schools have far more students than any other set of mainline denominational schools, which corresponds to the much larger membership of The United Methodist Church compared to membership of other mainline denominations. They also differ in the percentage of enrollment that is United Methodist, which is greater than the percentage of enrollment from the related denomination of other mainline schools. The thirteen schools also have a higher percentage of their enrollment in the MDiv program than most other mainline schools, and a higher percentage of the official schools offer PhD programs than the schools related to other mainline denominations. The official schools are similar to mainline Protestant schools in that they have experienced declining enrollment across the past decade, both in the MDiv and in total enrollment, although the UMC decline has been less than the decline in other mainline schools. Like most Protestant theological schools, the official schools have experienced some to considerable financial stress, as also has been the case with many smaller American colleges and universities. The educational innovations the official schools have undertaken are, for the most part, similar to those undertaken by other Protestant schools.

53 W. Stephen Gunter, *The Quotable Mr. Wesley* (Candler School of Theology, 1999).

The official schools also share similarities and differences with the other schools approved for the ordination of candidates in The United Methodist Church. The official schools are similar in that they fall within the range of all official and other approved schools on a number of variables: they are neither the largest nor the smallest in enrollment; they have neither the highest nor lowest student faculty ratio, they have neither the highest nor lowest endowment per student; they have neither the highest nor lowest expenditure per student, they are neither the most liberal or the most conservative—the official schools simply do not anchor the extreme polls on any of these variables. While the official schools also vary among themselves on these dimensions, they consistently fit within the range of all approved schools. The official schools vary from the other approved schools most noticeably in terms of how truly Methodist they are. The official schools are neither nominally or minimally Methodist—they are pervasively United Methodist. Almost half of all faculty of the faculty members of these schools are United Methodist and the United Methodist faculty teaching in the official schools comprise almost half of all United Methodist faculty members in all ATS member schools. The United Methodist ethos in these schools includes many aspects: a high percentage if not majority of students in these schools are United Methodists, most of whom are enrolled in degree programs oriented toward pastoral or diaconal ministry; they are studying with United Methodist faculty who teach Bible and Theology, Church History and Christian Ethics, Preaching and Worship, as well as Methodist polity and practices; they attend chapel worship that reflects the range of United Methodist liturgical practices, and are engaged in a variety of Methodist contexts for their field education. They are exposed in many ways to United Methodist values of diversity, inclusion, racial/ethnic awareness and engagement. None of the other approved schools have the wide array of factors that contribute to Methodist ethos. The official schools may not be Methodist hot houses, but they have an ethos that makes it possible for hearts and heads to be warmed.

*(2) What is the sustainability of a system of thirteen institutions with official support from the Ministerial Education Fund of The United Methodist Church?*

The thirteen official schools, with their geographical, programmatic, institutional, and theological diversity, provide a resource that the denomination has inherited and could not invent now if it wanted to do so. Can thirteen schools be sustained?

The issue that will determine their sustainability is not the number of schools. Thirteen schools would be too many if the church needed to pay the majority of their expenses. Last year, their combined expenses were $160 million and the MEF provided $15 million of that. The church is funding only a small share of their expenses, so denominational funding is not the defining issue for their sustainability. Thirteen schools would be too many if they represented more schools per member than peer denominations, which would constitute a presumption of excess capacity. The UMC, however, has the fewest number of schools per member of any mainline denomination, so that is not a defining factor. The defining issue is two-pronged: Will The United Methodist Church sustain its present commitments about theological education, and will the schools raise sufficient funds and recruit sufficient students to sustain their missions?

The United Methodist Church influences the sustainability of these schools in three different but related ways. The first is whether the denomination will continue to require theological education of its ordinands. If the church decides its pastors do not need advanced theological education, the schools will be deeply wounded in their ability to attract the United Methodist students who comprise the majority of their enrollment. The second is the willingness of the Church to privilege these schools as the official

schools among all the other schools that are approved to educate United Methodist candidates. If the UMC were to remove the special status of the official schools, and these schools were forced to compete as one of many in a large pool of approved schools, their capacity to raise funds and enrollment would be compromised. The removal of this special status designation would also frustrate the schools' strong sense of identity as Methodist schools. Some of the schools would likely find a new identity—they are schools with a mission, an institutional calling, that compels them to move in new directions if abandoned by The UMC—but for several of them, not being Methodist would create a severe crisis in how they understand themselves and their missions. The third is how much financial support The UMC will continue to provide. If and as UMC resources decline in the future, the church will need to choose between abandoning some of the schools and concentrating its remaining resources on fewer institutions or continuing its commitment to the current set of thirteen but allowing what already has been happening—a declining amount of their expenses being funded by the MEF—to continue. The nine to ten percent of revenue provided by the MEF has made the difference between balanced and deficit budgets for some schools, and has been the only reason why a few schools have survived. 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.

Sustainability will also require the schools to raise sufficient funds and enrollment to sustain their missions. The individual school data suggest that most of the schools have resources of finances, students, educational programs, creativity, and constituencies both to pave a way to the future, even with its many uncertainties, and to pay their way there. Some schools, however, are seriously financially stressed. They have low average primary reserve ratios and have struggled to balance budgets over many years, consuming spendable reserves or borrowing from endowed funds. While they have continued to be educationally effective, a number of things will need to go right for them to have economically viable futures. They have little risk capital and limited capacity to accommodate a decision that proves to be wrong. Across the decade, several schools have struggled with enrollment decline—some schools with more decline than average for the official schools. A school cannot sustain its mission without resources, but without students, a school doesn't have a mission. A variety of factors have influenced enrollment declines, and while all these schools are responding in appropriate ways, some continue to struggle with lower than optimal enrollments. Some of the official schools have been addressing critical questions posed by their accrediting agencies, and continued appropriate actions will deter potential accrediting sanctions and strengthen the schools in the process.

Sustainability will require the church to value the contribution of theological education, continuing to encourage knowledge as well as piety for its leaders; and it will also require the schools to ensure their own financial future and to find sufficient enrollment for viable communities of learning that educate persons who will be "faithful and fruitful Christian leaders who make disciples of Jesus Christ."

*(3) What is the contribution that UMC theological schools make to the witness and ministry of The UMC?*

Most theological schools have two central purposes: educating religious leaders and pursuing theological scholarship that advances new knowledge or reconfigures old knowledge to fit new intellectual paradigms. In addition, a denominational seminary attends to the intellectual heritage of its ecclesial community, advances scholarship that may have particular value to that community, and has a responsibility

to serve its denomination. The official theological schools of The United Methodist Church have been responsive in all these areas.

They have educated pastors and leaders for the church in a Wesleyan way that understands both the value of a particular ecclesial vision and the need to engage that vision with the larger community of Christians and persons of other faiths. The thirteen official schools provide more candidates for ordination than the thirty-eight other schools combined. They have financially supported United Methodist students with funds that decrease their cost of attendance far in excess of the amount of revenue from the Methodist Education Fund. The official schools also provide Course of Study schools that serve the church, and subsidize the cost of providing these programs.

The faculties of the official schools have been engaged in theological scholarship –in fact they have been disproportionately engaged in terms of grants and fellowships received across North American theological education. They have provided a large amount of the scholarship that serves the Wesleyan tradition and The United Methodist Church. The faculties of schools that are related to research intensive universities have exercised a religious and moral voice to some of the finest educational institutions in the country. These schools have been faithful to their missions and to the broader mission of theological education.

In addition to the contributions they have been making and continue to make, schools might consider other contributions that would support the church's work at this time in American life.

The first involves balancing the prophetic and priestly work of a theological school. In multiple interviews for this project, people identified good ministry both with a concern for social justice and the ability to make a church work. These recent conversations confirm an ancient perception of ministry: it is about both prophetic witness and priestly capacity. Sometimes, theological schools can value prophetic witness more than priestly care. Theological schools, including the official UMC schools, sometimes struggle with balancing these two fundamentally necessary tasks. This world needs prophetic witness, to be sure, and the need is increasing, not decreasing. The United Methodist Church, however strong it is in many ways, is wounded in other ways and in need of priestly attention as much as prophetic guidance. Congregations have been weakened across the past several decades, and their struggles require pastoral attention to their wellbeing in addition to the witness for social justice. The official schools might consider how they balance and educate toward these two important roles. The brief descriptions of ministry that introduce and conclude this report reflect moments of both prophetic witness and wise pastoral practice, and one might hope that their theological schools contributed to their skill, sensitivity, courage, and wisdom.

A second potential contribution is intellectual work that addresses the practical needs of the community of faith. The social location of the congregations, conferences, and national agencies of The United Methodist Church has undergone a huge cultural shift. The change from an era of dominance and cultural status to marginalization and cultural apathy has occurred in only a matter of decades. It requires intellectual energy not only to assess what has happened but to envision how to respond and be faithful in a new cultural moment. Congregations are closest to this change, and the most able of them have found ways to accommodate the change so that their missions thrive. Theological schools are, perhaps, the church-related entity that is furthest from the frontline. It can use the distance to avoid the critical "how" questions that need answers, but that avoidance can be a dereliction of duty. While "how to" and

"improvement" issues do not bear the intellectual prestige of abstract and theoretical questions, these issues require commensurate amount of intellectual ability and effort. The official schools of The United Methodist Church might consider what configuration of faculty might best provide the research capacity that informs the fundamental issues Christian churches face at this time in this culture. More than once during interviews for this study I heard people talk about the need for new ways to understand pastoral ministry focused on communities, not just congregations. The task of a theological school does not end with discerning and analyzing a new reality but continues by providing the knowledge resources necessary to accomplish repositioned patterns of religious work.

A third potential contribution involves understanding that the intellectual resources the church needs are located in many places. The mission of a theological school is not to think on behalf of its communities of faith but to explore multiple locations of wisdom, including its own, and aggregate them for the sake of student learning and service to communities of faith. Faculty routinely do this by their attention to other disciplines that inform their own (pastoral care, for example, has benefited from findings in neuroscience), but more attention might be given to the knowledge and wisdom that can be found in pastoral practices, congregational patterns of work, and denominational efforts. These exist at some distance to the research horizons of many faculty, and perhaps the current issues invite expanding those horizons. The issues being faced by Christian communities at this time may be more complex than any one kind of intellectual effort can inform, and there may well be the need for a new kind of effort that attends carefully to many sources of knowledge and understanding –from pastors, from the work of other denominations, from the work of other human service providers, from best practices in non-profit organizations—and this new kind of effort will entail analyzing and assembling this range of information into the knowledge base for ministry. This task would best be performed in theological schools.

## Final Thoughts

If these schools are basically doing what they were invented to do and, with some exceptions, are as financially stable as most mainline schools; if they are educating students with a focus on United Methodist ministry; if faculty members are undertaking scholarship that serves the Wesleyan tradition and represents that tradition in a broader intellectual world, then why are these schools experiencing the pressure to research the questions addressed in this study? My perception is that there are several reasons.

First, and perhaps foremost, is the current contest among United Methodists. On the surface, it is about sexual orientation and ordination, but it is no doubt deeper than a single issue. Sexual orientation and ordination become proxies for what is true and faithful for authentic Christian life. Opposing sides have opposing answers to this question and because each side perceives that its vision is truly true and genuinely faithful, it cannot abide the other side. The result appears to be that many United Methodists see the only acceptable outcome of the current controversy as resolving it one way or the other, either way leading to the withdrawal or exclusion of United Methodists who cannot support the outcome. What is true for the church is true of its seminaries: if they support the view that is rejected, then, no matter how good they are at the core tasks of their mission, they are unacceptable bearers of the imprimatur as the official seminaries of the church or as deserving to receive a portion of the church's Ministerial Education Fund.

Second, as The United Methodist Church has dealt with membership decline and the implications of that decline in the mergers of districts and conferences and closures of congregations, a logical assumption is

that it should affect the seminaries in the same way; some of them should closed or merged. The seminaries, however, are different from the other entities of the church in two ways. The first is that conferences are virtually exclusively funded by United Methodist current operating income while current United Methodist funds provide about 10 percent of the seminary income—a 90 percent difference in consumption of current United Methodist funds. The second is that conferences include only United Methodist clergy and congregations. The seminaries, while a majority of students are United Methodist, include persons from other denominations that contribute to the support of these schools through the tuition they pay and sometimes through gifts of donors who are not United Methodist. The seminaries derive significant amounts of their income from non-United Methodists, which makes them different economic entities than congregations or conferences

Third, as the membership has decreased, the number of schools has been increasingly questioned. As the data show, United Methodists have about one seminary for every half-million United Methodists. There simply is no metric that suggests this is either too high or too low a ratio of schools to members. If the issue is money, then the church can decide to decrease funding for all the schools as its funding decreases, or identify criteria by which it chooses to eliminate some schools in order to sustain the same amount of funding for the remaining institutions.

In the end, the definitive factor is the combination of theological fit of the schools with the theological commitments of The United Methodist Church and a centralized pattern of funding that, in effect, requires all United Methodists to participate in a portion of their funding. To eliminate schools for the first reason is to redefine the church and to decentralize funding is to alter the connectional fabric of the denomination.

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It is hard to imagine a more difficult Sunday. One of the most egregious cases of sexual abuse of minors in Pennsylvania had taken place at Pennsylvania State University, where a long term but then retired assistant football coach, Jerry Sandusky, had molested ten boys, some of them in Penn State athletic facilities as well as other locations. He was arrested in 2011 and convicted in 2012 on 42 counts. The Sunday after the conviction, the former president of United Seminary in Dayton and then senior pastor at St Paul's United Methodist Church mounted the pulpit. Jerry Sandusky was a friend of Ed Zeiders, the pastor, and Jerry and his wife were members of St. Paul's. Ed asked church members, many in shock about the whole episode, to "pray for all of those who are victims and for all of those who are predators." He then preached: "If ever a local congregation has been given a moment to…..reveal what it means to be Christian,…this is that congregation in this moment in history." He went on to talk about the transformative power and saving grace of God, making a connection between faith and ethical behavior. "If we are to claim Jesus as savior," he said, "we must, without fail, come face-to-face with our own morality." The text for the day had been the stilling of the waves, and Zeiders concluded, "Sure, the darkness is deep and the waves are powerful, but this is the time to engage the world, not run from it…This is the day of our saving. God always speaks the loudest when the waves are the highest. Peace! Be still!"[54]

If nothing bad ever happened, I suppose theological education could be a combination of devotional moments and an occasional "how-to" conference to increase skills. Evil, however, stalks pleasant

54 http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/25/sanduskys-pastor-addresses-his-conviction-from-pulpit/, accessed November 2018.

communities and faithful families and good congregations and innocent bystanders. It may not come to a pastor personally, but it will come to someone, and in that moment, pastors need to know when to pray, what to preach, and perhaps most importantly, when to be silent. Good theological education crunches souls, moves hearts, and informs minds, and that process prepares ministers for the horrible holy moments when they will need everything they have learned and then some.

After the terrible shooting at Sutherland Springs First Baptist Church in Texas, Stephen Curry, the pastor at La Vernia United Methodist Church located seven miles from the Baptist church, wrote about the shared response from the churches and community to the shooting and concluded his OpEd in the *New York Times* by reminding readers of the non-tragedy-laced life of most pastors: "A church in Wilson County is a community center where good people strive to do good for fellow human beings. A church in Wilson County is a home for extended family to share their lives. A church in Wilson County is a place where we come to mourn losses, grieve the death of a friend or relative, celebrate the joys of life and love. A church in Wilson County is a place where we connect with the God who loves us, watches over us, and, in the end, welcomes us home."[55] Theological education also prepares people for ordinary Sundays and lackluster moments of the holy.

55 https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/07/opinion/shooting-texas-church.html, accessed October, 2018.

# Acknowledgments

This study benefitted from the efforts of many.

Visits to the thirteen official theological schools of the United Methodist Church involved interviews with students, faculty, senior administrators, donors, board members, and many others, and these extensive interviews were scheduled by the presidents and deans of the schools, along with help from even more administrative staff members. The collection of the interview data would not have been possible without the efforts of the senior officers of the schools, who also extended considerable hospitality to me and eased the burden of compressed visit schedules.

The databases from which data for this study were drawn are compiled on an ongoing basis by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, and ATS staff members Deborah H. C. Gin, Chris Meinzer, Jo Ann Deasy provided help in selecting and segmenting data from the Commission on Accrediting database. Greg Bergquist, Shannon Conklin-Miller, and Jean Knox, staff members at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, helped assemble the data drawn from the GBHEM databases.

Most of the data analysis was conducted by Anthony Ruger, who has given a career to the study of seminary finance and other data-related issues in North American theological education—most of those years as a senior fellow at the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education. He has served scores of theological schools as consultant and conducted data analysis and coauthored scores of research projects over several decades.

Laceye Warner and Russ Richey—both versed in United Methodist history, polity, and theological education—reviewed drafts of the report, and the deans and presidents of the thirteen official schools discussed an earlier draft of this report at their November 2017 meeting.

The production of the report has been assisted by Ulrike Guthrie, who provided editorial support, and Lisa Kern, who designed the final version of the report.

Gratitude is expressed to all these persons, as well as to the hundreds of individuals interviewed in person or by phone who spoke about the schools with which they were associated.

*—Daniel Aleshire*