

Global Methodist Church recommends Truett Seminary

March 23, 2023

WASHINGTON (RNS)—How does one become a pastor in the new Global Methodist Church?

The fledgling Methodist denomination, a home for congregations and clergy that have broken away from the United Methodist Church amid ongoing debate over LGBTQ issues, announced a list of recommended educational institutions for candidates seeking ordination as a deacon or elder.

They include Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary in Waco and Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

"None of these schools are Global Methodist schools," said Keith Boyette, who heads the denomination as its transitional connectional officer. "They serve diverse constituencies, diverse student bodies.

"We don't expect them to be exclusively for the Global Methodist Church, but we're looking at are they as an institution aligned with who we are and our mission and our doctrine and our practices as a church?"

In addition to Truett Seminary and Beeson Divinity School, the first six schools approved as recommended educational institutions of the Global Methodist Church are:

- Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky.
- Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio.
- United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.
- Wesley Biblical Seminary in Ridgeland, Miss.

All of the institutions applied for the recommended status with the Global Methodist Church.

United is the only school on the list owned and operated by the United Methodist Church. The others turn out clergy of various Protestant denominations, though Wesley focuses on small, historic Methodist denominations such as Congregational Methodists.

On March 22, the Global Methodist Church added a second alternative pathway toward completing the educational requirements for ordained ministry outlined in its Transitional Book of Doctrines and Disciplines.

Those pathways include online, hybrid and in-person courses, as well as a certificate program, providing flexibility for students who are unable to take the more traditional route of going to seminary and earning a Master of Divinity degree.

The alternative pathways will be offered through Wesley and United.

Boyette said he can relate, having pursued ordination in his late 30s with a wife, three children and a career as an attorney.

"This is especially important for persons who may not have as much economic means to pursue theological education, or whose life circumstances don't permit them to agree to move to a physical site or a seminary and be there for an extended period of time completing their degree," he said.

Only accredited schools accepted

The Global Methodist Church only accepted schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States or comparable groups in other countries, he said. The schools also were asked about alignment with the theological and ethical principles of the Global

Methodist Church, according to the denomination.

Candidates seeking ordination in the new denomination, which launched last May, still can meet its educational requirements at any accredited seminary, Boyette said, but those who attend a recommended institution can be confident “they’re going to have a greater likelihood that they’ll be adequately prepared.”

Wesley’s program includes a course of study for Global Methodist ordination tailored to the new denomination, according to Matt Ayars, president of Wesley Biblical Seminary. It’s focused on what makes Methodism unique as a historical movement, including topics such as church polity, John Wesley’s theology and the history of Methodism.

“This is a first for us, having a specific course of study for a specific denomination,” Ayars said.

That’s not unusual for many seminaries, he said, but Wesley is a relatively small school serving historic Methodist denominations.

Last month, Bishop Scott Jones, one of two active bishops in the Global Methodist Church, joined Truett’s Wesley House of Studies as an affiliate professor and pastor-theologian in residence.

Ashland, too, has a number of faculty and staff who are United Methodist and may become Global Methodist, according to John Byron, dean of its seminary and professor of New Testament.

Ashland is approved to train United Methodist candidates for ordination and counts as many as 32 different denominations among its students and faculty, Byron said. The school applied for recommended status last summer because, he said, “with the coming schism in the church” it recognized Global Methodist students would be looking for a seminary education, too.

“While everybody’s focusing on this particular schism in the United Methodist Church … the church is just going through a tremendous time of change, and that’s impacting not just the congregations, but it’s impacting us as seminaries, how we deliver and what we deliver,” Byron said.

He added, “The truth is, what we’re doing now probably will not look the same way in 10 years or even less.”

Asked whether the Global Methodist Church planned to launch any educational institutions of its own or attract United Methodist schools to join alongside clergy and congregations disaffiliating from the older, mainline denomination, Boyette said “probably not,” but noted those were decisions for others to make in the future.

“Part of our DNA is we believe that we can work cooperatively with other institutions to advance the mission of the Global Methodist Church, so we don’t have to duplicate what others are doing in order to achieve it,” he said.