

M e m p h i s T h e o l o g i c a l S e m i n a r y
Brief History of School and Grant

Memphis Theological Seminary is an ecumenical ministry of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The seminary, formerly known as the Cumberland Presbyterian Theological Seminary, was originally located on the campus of Bethel College in McKenzie, Tennessee. It moved to Memphis in 1964, with 49 students enrolled. The first graduating class had eight students.

From 1852 until now, the seminary can celebrate a rich heritage that includes outreach and partnerships with other denominations, especially the United Methodist Church. Since its move to Memphis, the seminary has intentionally attempted to serve the church universal. As a result of its outreach effort, most notably have been the inclusion and influx of African Americans, women and international students. The present faculty, staff and student body reflect the diversity of a graduate school of religion that is ecumenical in format and mission.

The present student body is made up of 51% Caucasians, 47% African American and 1% internationals. 41% are women. Thirty-six denominational affiliations are reflected.

For over 150 years, caring about, training and fostering the growth of pastors has been a part of the mission of Memphis Theological Seminary. Presently there are over 300 students and fifteen faculty members who come in and out of the doors of the seminary. Not only is there classroom study but several classes in which there is partnering with community institutions and lay/clergy people of congregations who help to train pastors. Growing pastors are given a chance to get firsthand knowledge about various church parish settings and institutions that care for children, elderly, the sick and disenfranchised.

Some of the most motivational and inspirational times are the frequent chapel services where city-wide clergy leaders and faculty come to share their preaching and teaching gifts with the seminary community. At least two lecture series per year introduce students to gifted national and international theologians and preachers.

Many of the contacts that are made among students and between students and faculty become lasting relationships that are meaningful and important as clergy persons either start or reshape their ministry life stories. The seminary has a variety of ways that it serves leaders of the faith community. One way is the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program (SPE).

In 2002, Memphis Theological Seminary was originally awarded an SPE grant of \$1.9 million to support sixty-eight excellent pastoral leaders in Protestant churches and other ministry contexts across the Mid-south area. The focus of the grant was to help clergypersons to develop and maintain a balance in life and ministry through scholarship, piety, justice and health. The work accomplished in that Eli Lilly grant was so meaningful and helpful to those initially served that MTS was then awarded an additional \$960,000 to continue the work that had been done.

SPE Goals and Signs of Success include:

- Authentic friendships—supportive relationships between pastors and other clergy of different gender, race and denomination
- Accountability covenants that encourage wholeness and deepen commitment to scholarship, piety, justice and health
- Healthier pastors
- Improved sense of well-being (relational, spiritual, emotional and physical) for clergy spouses
- Ongoing and improved support plans for pastors on the part of their congregations
- Strengthened plans for lifelong pastoral renewal leaves