

Andover Newton to move, partner with Yale

by [G. Jeffrey MacDonald](#) in the [June 8, 2016](#) issue

The nation's oldest graduate school of theology plans to relocate from Newton Centre, Massachusetts, to New Haven, Connecticut, where a remnant of the faculty will teach on the campus of Yale Divinity School.

Martin Copenhaver, president of Andover Newton Theological School, said that he and the dean of Yale Divinity School have forged a partnership that, if finalized, will phase out the Massachusetts campus and phase in a presence at Yale in 2018.

In its new location, Andover Newton will function as a school within a school, to be known as Andover Newton at Yale. The school will shrink to a fraction of its current size as students take most of their courses with Yale professors.

Over the past ten years, more than ten independent theological schools have sought financial stability by teaming up with larger educational institutions, according to Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools.

As part of the move, 29 of Andover Newton's 32 teaching positions, including tenured and short-term faculty, visiting professors, and adjuncts, will be phased out. Andover Newton at Yale expects to employ four administrators, two professors, and one temporary faculty member whose appointment will expire within four years.

"We would be getting smaller in any case because frankly, the demand is less," Copenhaver said. "We have to be more focused . . . not just because of the finances, but more focused in order to fulfill our founding mission."

The move to Yale clears a path for Andover Newton to complete the sale of its coveted hilltop campus, which is assessed at \$43 million. The school is selling the campus for an undisclosed amount that will retire its debt and allow Andover Newton at Yale to operate on endowment income, Copenhaver said.

Money from the sale will also help Yale Divinity School reach a 2022 goal of offering tuition-free education to all students who qualify, which is more than 90 percent of the student body, according to Gregory Sterling, the school's dean. Yale aims to

raise \$40 million in endowment funds to create the tuition-support program.

As fewer congregations can afford to hire full-time pastors, prospective seminarians are reluctant to take on debt by enrolling, according to Aleshire. Enrollments have dropped nearly 24 percent over the past decade at mainline seminaries, and lower tuition revenue can't cover rising costs for building maintenance and personnel.

Founded in 1807 by Congregationalists who feared a theologically liberal drift in ministerial training at Harvard, the Massachusetts seminary has occupied campuses in Andover, Cambridge, and Newton over its 209-year history. Over the centuries, it evolved away from its conservative theological roots. Both Andover Newton and Yale are known today for embracing social justice causes while preparing students for ministry and activism, among other vocations.

"The ethos and the culture is much the same" at the two schools, Sterling said.

For Yale, the Andover Newton deal builds on a similar partnership with Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, a training ground for Episcopal priests since 1971.

With a mission to train students for ministry in congregational church traditions, such as the United Church of Christ, American Baptist Churches USA, and Unitarian Universalism, Andover Newton will deliver what Sterling calls "an ecumenical complement" to Berkeley's formation of Episcopal priests.

Andover Newton is expected to bring resources to enhance specialized programming at Yale. Meanwhile, Sterling hopes more cash-strapped freestanding seminaries will explore the prospects of joining with universities.

"One of the things I hope this can do is be a model for others to think about," Sterling said. "How could they affiliate with another institution to make themselves stronger?" —Religion News Service

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