

Influential UMC bibliographer Kenneth Rowe dies at 84

by [Sam Hodges](#) in the [November 17, 2021](#) issue



(Photo courtesy of United Methodist General Commission on Archives and History)

Kenneth Rowe, a historian who was known as the leading United Methodist bibliographer, died on October 8. He was 84.

“He completely reshaped how we understand the narrative of Methodism in America, expanding it to include indigenous persons, women and LGBTQ+ persons,” said the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History in a remembrance.

Rowe was an ordained United Methodist elder, but after a brief period in local church and campus ministry, he found his calling in academia.

In 1970, he won a joint appointment at Drew University as professor of American religious history and Methodist librarian. He held the positions until retiring nearly three and a half decades later.

Rowe wrote or coauthored 14 books, including *The Methodist Experience in America*, a two-volume work. He also played a crucial role in advancing others’ scholarship on Methodism.

Most notably, he enlisted Drew’s president and university librarian in a successful effort to make Drew the new home for the archives of the United Methodist Church. He also founded the American Theological Library Association’s Bibliography Series for Methodist History.

“He not only assembled documents and protected them against loss or deterioration or neglect but also provided them to others in an orderly fashion, thereby making them accessible,” said William Lawrence, a church historian and former dean of Perkins School of Theology. “Ken’s work enabled the rest of us to retrieve our history.”

In 2014, Rowe and his longtime partner James Sawyer became one of the first same-sex couples to marry legally in North Carolina. —United Methodist News Service