

Princeton Theological Seminary removes slaveholder name from chapel

by [Kathryn Post](#) in the [February 23, 2022](#) issue



Miller Chapel at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, will now be known as Seminary Chapel. (Photo by Ricardo Barros, courtesy of Princeton Theological Seminary)

Princeton Theological Seminary's board has unanimously voted to dissociate the name of slaveholder and anti-abolitionist Samuel Miller from the school's chapel.

The decision on January 25 follows actions by the seminary's Association of Black Seminarians and allies, who wrote a petition and held demonstrations asking the board to rename the chapel.

"The board has made a heroic and historic decision that they came to after prayerful and careful deliberation," PTS president M. Craig Barnes said in an interview. He

added that the ABS played a “leading role” in the board’s decision by rallying the student body.

“We are happy that the board of trustees made the decision to honor the request of the students right away, and we are elated that they are working with the timeline that we have given them,” said Tamesha Mills, a third-year master of divinity student at PTS and president of the school’s ABS.

“However, we want to make sure that the public knows that the board of trustees did not just come up with this on their own. . . . This was not on their agenda, and it really was the efforts of the students coming together and letting the board of trustees know that this is urgent.”

Going forward, the chapel will be known as simply the Seminary Chapel. The board also announced it will establish a task force made up of students, faculty, and alumni that will be charged with developing a rubric for future names and honors assigned to seminary spaces.

On December 1, 2021, the ABS and allied groups issued an official request with nearly 300 signatures asking that Miller’s name be removed from the chapel. Members of ABS and allies participated in a demonstration outside the chapel on January 18, hosted a time of fasting and prayer, and proclaimed they would not worship in the chapel if Miller’s name was not removed by January 30.

After the board’s decision, ABS hosted another demonstration outside the chapel, this time to officially remove the “Miller” sign there.

Miller was the second professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. He joined the seminary in 1813, and according to a 2018 report on the seminary’s early ties to slavery, Miller employed slave labor, including while he was at Princeton. The findings indicate that Miller did not consider slaveholding a sin and that he was a member of the American Colonization Society, which believed freed slaves should be sent to Africa.

In fall 2019, Princeton Theological Seminary pledged to spend \$27 million toward addressing its ties to slavery via scholarships and other initiatives. At the time, ABS said the pledge fell short of the reparations that should be set aside from the school’s \$1 billion endowment.

Since then, the seminary has named its library for Theodore Sedgwick Wright, the seminary's first African American graduate, and its Black church studies center for Betsey Stockton, a missionary and educator who was enslaved by a Princeton president.

The seminary has also dedicated 30 scholarships to the descendants of those who were enslaved and other historically underrepresented groups, and it has appointed a full-time director of the Stockton Center for the first time.

ABS says it will continue to push for transparency and accountability as the seminary works to address its historic ties to slavery.

"We hope that this decision serves as a catalyst for more action steps in the seminary's journey of repentance and reconciliation," the group said in a January 26 press release. "The student body remains unified and will continue in these efforts until their promises are fulfilled and Princeton Theological Seminary becomes a true 'covenant community.'" —Religion News Service