



PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH

LEARN. LEAD. LIBERATE.

PAYNE

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

APPLICATION PROCESS

Opening Date

10 March 2026

Final Due Date

10 April 2026

For More Information

paynesearchcommittee@gmail.com

To Apply

hlsearch.org/paynepresident

About Payne Theological Seminary

Payne Theological Seminary invites applications and nominations for the position of President. Founded in 1894 by the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, Payne is recognized as the oldest free-standing African American seminary in the United States

Located in Wilberforce, Ohio, the purpose of Payne Theological Seminary has always been to prepare men and women of faith to be spiritual leaders, intellectual leaders and agents of constructive social change rooted in liberation, reconciliation, social justice, and the affirmation of the dignity of all humankind in the church and the world.

The Opportunity

Payne Theological Seminary desires a visionary leader who is informed and deeply rooted in our Africentric perspective. This leader must be a skilled institution-builder, capable of strengthening Payne's academic reputation, financial sustainability, and enrollment in an increasingly competitive landscape for theological education. Above all, Payne needs a prophetic voice who can honor nearly two centuries of heritage while boldly equipping the next generation of ordained and lay leaders, pastors, scholars, clinically trained counselors, chaplains, spiritual directors, and community leaders for the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Appointed by the Board of Trustees, the President serves as the chief executive officer of the institution and is responsible for all aspects of the seminary, including academic affairs, alumni relations, financial management, fundraising, recruitment and admission of students, and interaction with the community, the broader church, and the world. The successful candidate will bring integrity, a prescient strategist, compelling communicator, and a relationship builder. Additionally, the candidate must be innovative and adaptive, able to balance the reverence for Payne's 180-year legacy with a willingness to innovate, understanding the changing landscape of ministry and theological education.

A leader with wisdom and courage to guide Payne Theological Seminary into a bold sustainable future.

Mission, Vision, and Core Values

To prepare leaders for ministry in the African American tradition of liberation, reconciliation, social justice, and the dignity of all humankind.

Mission Statement

To prepare leaders for ministry in the African-American tradition of liberation, reconciliation, social justice, and the dignity of all humankind.

Vision Statement

To be recognized as a global leader in distance theological education.

Core Values

Our values guide all areas of the infrastructure, operations and academics of the institution.

The Role of the President

The President of Payne Theological Seminary is the chief executive officer of the institution and is responsible for all aspects of seminary life, including academic affairs, alumni relations, financial management, fundraising, recruitment and admission of students, and interaction with the community, the broader church, and the world.

The President also works closely with the seminary's board of trustees, which establishes policies and ensures the institution's alignment with its mission. In addition to the core administrative and academic duties of the role, the President also leads the Seminary's engagement in the work of realizing the beloved community locally and acting for justice and human dignity beyond campus. The President models integrity, visionary leadership for theological education in the AME Church, and a passionate commitment to institutional innovation, sustainability, and thriving.

Key Relationships

Reports to

Board of Trustees

Direct Reports

Director of Finance
Academic Dean
Director of Institutional Advancement
Registrar
Director of Communications
Administrative Assistant to the President

Chaired Committees

President's Cabinet

Key Opportunities and Challenges

As Payne Theological Seminary looks to its future, the President will address the following interrelated opportunities and challenges as key priorities.

Serve as a standard-bearer for Payne's core values and founding vision as a "seminary for the whole church."

Payne Theological Seminary is a strong and resilient community united in a shared mission. Warmth, kindness, hospitality, connection, a spirit of mutual support, and abiding commitments to anti-racism, inclusion, belonging, and justice is core to the Seminary's identity. The next President will proactively build trust internally and externally across all constituent groups and prioritize institutional stability, spiritual and communal vitality, and a welcoming and nurturing institutional culture.

Develop a compelling and imaginative vision for the future of Payne Theological Seminary.

Payne Theological Seminary's founding vision has never been more relevant. As contemporary culture and the needs of the church and society evolve rapidly, the next President will oversee the spiritual health and wellness of Payne and lead the Seminary in preparing graduates to be advocates for justice and hope in the communities they will call to serve. Through the Seminary's Master of Divinity program and the Iona Collaborative, Payne remains deeply committed to its core mission of theological formation for current and future clergy and lay leaders in the AME Church.

The Seminary's program in clinical mental health counseling, which has experienced rapid growth, reflects the Seminary's commitment to the spiritually informed work of healing and justice in the world more broadly. The President will carefully attend to the distinctive natures of these unique programs as well as opportunities for mutually enriching collaborations. The successful candidate will build on the Seminary's tradition of innovation to lead the development of a new strategic plan that conveys a cohesive, forward-looking vision for the next chapter of the Seminary.

Sustain and build upon academic excellence.

Payne Theological Seminary is distinctive in its approach to theological and counselor education and formation. Exceptional faculty and staff lead curricula rooted in practical ministry to form ordained and lay leaders grounded in AME sacramental life while addressing contemporary questions in their home communities and across the church. Similarly, the Seminary's clinical mental health counseling program is unique in its spiritually informed and justice-centered framework. The next President will continue to prioritize the recruitment and retention of the most talented, committed, and values-aligned faculty and staff across its programs. The President will continue to expand these investments and lead the Iona Collaborative to address the needs of local formation and small churches throughout The AME Church.

Champion a culture of innovation, strategic growth, and constructive collaboration across the Seminary and its portfolio of programs.

The Seminary's increased national visibility and reach, the growth and popularity of the Counseling Program, expanded and renewed facilities, and the integration of the Iona Collaborative's local formation programs reflect Payne's culture of innovation and commitment to strategic, mission-aligned growth in scope and impact. The President will lead the Payne's healthy continued growth consistent with the Seminary's mission. The successful candidate will work with the board, faculty, and staff to support a cohesive institutional identity that honors the distinctiveness of the Seminary's program offerings while also facilitating and encouraging mutually enriching interactions across program areas. Undergirding these efforts must be a compelling marketing, recruitment and enrollment strategy that excites potential students and clearly differentiates the Seminary's positions as a leader in theological and counselor education as well as local formation for ministry and continuing education.

Qualifications and Characteristics

The successful candidate will embody most, if not all, of the following professional qualifications and personal qualities:

- Experience as a leader in the AME Church with a demonstrated commitment to the church's mission and theological traditions; a commitment to and alignment with the Seminary's mission and core values.
- A commitment to excellence in scholarship and quality graduate-level education and formation of the highest caliber.
- Demonstrated experience leading academic, financial, and operational functions within a shared governance model, including experience reporting to a board of trustees.
- Demonstrated ability to guide the development and execution of a compelling and comprehensive strategic plan for the Seminary.
- Exceptional written and oral communication, and interpersonal skills; the ability to inspire and engage diverse constituents, facilitate buy-in, and represent the Seminary effectively in various settings.
- An unwavering commitment to and demonstrated leadership expertise with issues related to diversity, equity, access, inclusion, and justice institutionally and in the broader society.
- Enthusiasm for and quantifiable success as a fundraiser; a willingness to be actively involved in donor cultivation, and the aptitude to develop and sustain durable relationships with donors and other stakeholders for the benefit of the institution.
- An appreciation for counselor education and the importance of spiritually informed mental health providers and resources in the communities served by our graduates.
- Demonstrated experience recruiting, motivating, supporting, and retaining talented staff and faculty.

The Ideal Candidate for President

The Board of Trustees seeks a transformational leader who is:

Deeply Rooted in the AME Church

- An active member in good standing with the AME Church
- Committed to Wesleyan-Arminian theology and AME doctrine, polity, and tradition
- Well-connected within the denomination, with strong relationships across AME districts
- Able to articulate Payne's distinctive role as the oldest AME theological center
- Experienced in navigating denominational structures and governance

An Experienced Academic and Institutional Leader

- A terminal degree (Ph.D., Th.D., D.Min., Ed.D., or equivalent) in theology, religion, education, or related field
- Significant higher education leadership experience (professor, dean, provost, vice president, or president)
- Understanding of theological education, accreditation standards (ATS, HLC), and seminary governance
- Proven ability to manage complex organizations, budgets, and diverse teams
- Experience leading faculty and fostering academic excellence

A Visionary Strategist and Fundraiser

- Strategic planning skills to address enrollment, financial sustainability, and programmatic innovation
- Proven fundraising success, including major gifts, planned giving, and grant writing
- Ability to build relationships with donors, foundations, and denominational funding sources
- Entrepreneurial thinking about new revenue streams and partnership models
- The ability or track record of turning around enrollment or financial challenges
-

A Compelling Communicator and Relationship Builder

We need a President who:

- Preaches and teaches with power and authenticity in AME Church contexts
- Inspires trust and confidence among bishops, pastors, students, faculty, and laity
- Who will represent the seminary effectively to external constituencies (church, academy, community)
- Listens deeply to diverse perspectives and builds consensus
- Has a personal warmth and pastoral presence that connects across generations

Committed to the Mission of the Black Church

- Understand the unique calling and context of theological education in the Black church traditions
- Champion womanist, liberationist, and prophetic theological scholarship
- Advocate for social justice, community engagement, and ministry to marginalized communities
- Support the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional formation of Black clergy (men and women)
- Be passionate about equipping leaders for the transformation of Black communities

Innovative and Adaptive

We seek a leader who:

- Embraces educational technology and new learning modalities (hybrid, online, intensive)
- Think creatively about partnerships with other seminaries, universities, and church organizations
- Balances reverence for Payne's 180-year legacy with willingness to innovate
- Understands the changing landscape of ministry and theological education
- Can lead organizational change with wisdom and courage

Application Requirements

Interested candidates should submit a complete application packet containing the following materials:

Letter of Interest (3–5 pages)

Address the following:

- Your calling to theological education and leadership in the AME Church
- Your vision for the future of Payne Theological Seminary
- How your experience prepares you to address the current challenges outlined above
- Your understanding of the role of seminaries in forming 21st-century Black church leaders
- Why you are drawn to serve at this moment in Payne's history

Curriculum Vitae

Include:

- Educational background (institutions, degrees, years, fields of study)
- Complete professional history with dates and reporting structures
- Academic publications, presentations, and scholarly contributions
- Church leadership roles and denominational service
- Leadership positions in higher education or comparable organizations
- Fundraising accomplishments (with specific dollar amounts raised, if possible)
- Board service, community engagement, and professional memberships
- Honors, awards, and recognition

Statement of Faith and Denominational Commitment

Address:

- Your current AME congregation and membership status
- Your journey to and within the AME Church
- Church roles and leadership positions you have held (local, district, connectional)
- Your understanding of and commitment to Wesleyan-Arminian theology and AME doctrine
- How your faith informs your leadership philosophy and decision-making
- Your vision for strengthening Payne's relationship with the denomination

Leadership Philosophy Statement

Describe your approach to:

- Academic leadership and faculty governance
- Strategic planning and organizational change
- Enrollment growth and student success
- Financial management and fundraising
- Building partnerships within the church and academy
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion in theological education
- Spiritual formation and community life

Responses to Three Strategic Questions (2 pages total)

Please provide brief responses (1/2 to 3/4 page each) to the following:

a) Enrollment Strategy:

Payne's enrollment has declined from approximately 300+ students five years ago to 120 today. What specific strategies would you implement in your first two years to reverse this trend and recruit the next generation of AME clergy?

- b) Fundraising and Financial Sustainability:** Small seminaries face significant financial pressures. How would you approach fundraising within the AME Church connection, and what alternative revenue models would you explore to ensure long-term sustainability?
- c) Denominational Partnership:** What concrete steps would you take to strengthen Payne's visibility and partnership with the Council of Bishops, presiding elders, and local pastors across all AME districts?

References

Provide contact information for five references who can speak to different dimensions of your qualifications:

- **Denominational Reference:** A bishop, presiding elder, or senior AME Church leader who can attest to your standing, character, and service in the denomination
- **Academic/Supervisory Reference:** A supervisor, board chair, or senior academic colleague who can assess your leadership and administrative capabilities
- **Faculty/Peer Reference:** A faculty colleague or academic peer who can evaluate your scholarship and relationship with faculty
- **Direct Report Reference:** Someone you have supervised who can speak to your management style and leadership effectiveness
- **Community/Fundraising Reference:** A community partner, donor, or development professional who can assess your external relationship-building and fundraising abilities

Please provide name, title, organization, phone number, and email address for each reference. References will be contacted only for final candidates and with the candidate's consent.

Selection Process and Timeline

The Presidential Search Committee will follow this process:

1. **Initial Screening (Week 1):** Review all applications for denominational eligibility and minimum qualifications
 2. **Long-List Interviews (Week 2):** Virtual interviews with 6–8 candidates
 3. **Semi-Finalist Review (Week 4):** Reference checks, background verification, and second interviews with 3–4 candidates
 4. **Finalist Campus Visits (Week 5-6):** 2–3 finalists invited to meet with Board, faculty and staff, and alumni
 5. **Board Decision (Weeks 7-9):** Final interviews and appointment
-

Compensation and Benefits

Payne Theological Seminary offers a competitive compensation package appropriate to theological education, including:

- Base salary commensurate with experience and qualifications
- Housing allowance or on-campus residence
- Health, dental, and vision insurance
- Retirement plan contributions
- Professional development and travel budget
- Denominational connection and ministry expenses

Specific details will be discussed with finalists.

Application Deadline and Submission

Application Deadline: April 10, 2026

Submit all materials electronically to:

Application Portal

Applicants are encouraged to **submit their materials through the Presidential Search Application Portal: hlsearch.org/paynepresident**

Because the portal allows secure document uploads, Google requires applicants to sign in to a Google account. A Gmail address is not required. Applicants may create a Google account using any existing email address at: <https://accounts.google.com/signup>

Email Submission (Alternative)

Applicants who prefer may submit materials via email to:
paynerearchcommittee@gmail.com

Presidential Search Committee

Payne Theological Seminary
P.O. Box 474
Wilberforce, OH 45384

Confidentiality

All applications will be held with strict confidence. Only finalists invited to campus will be publicly identified. The Search Committee is committed to a process that honors the dignity and privacy of all candidates.

Payne Theological Seminary's Commitment

Payne Theological Seminary is committed to diversity in its faculty, staff, and student body. We seek leaders who understand and embrace the rich diversity of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the broader Black diaspora. The seminary does not discriminate based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, sex, age, or disability in the administration of its educational policies, admission policies, scholarship and loan programs, or other school-administered programs.

Payne Theological Seminary invites applications from candidates who share our passion for forming transformative leaders for ministry in the Black church and beyond. This is a sacred trust and a historic opportunity to lead one of the nation's oldest and most significant centers of African American theological education into a new season of vitality and impact.