



The Columns *Online*

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Theological schools report continued drop in master of divinity degrees

Enrollment at theological schools has remained stable, but the two-year M.A. degree is appealing to more students.

By Kathryn Post, *Religion News Service*. Professional degrees are gaining traction at theological schools across the U.S. and Canada, while the traditional ministerial degree, the master of divinity, is faltering, according to new data released late last month. Chris Meinzer, senior director and chief operation officer of The Association of Theological Schools, noted that overall enrollment at ATS schools has remained stable, an impressive feat amid changing religious trends and demographic challenges in higher education. Still, 57% of ATS schools reported declining enrollment, a sharp increase from 2020, when 46% of ATS schools showed enrollment decreases. And enrollment in M.A. programs is now on par with enrollment in master of divinity programs for the first time in ATS history, according to fall 2022 projections.

The Master of Arts degree, a two-year program that trains students for a wide range of professions, including doctoral studies, nonprofit work and lay ministry, has seen a subtle increase of 1% since fall 2021, and 5% since fall 2018, according to fall 2022 projections.

The master of divinity degree — a three-year program typically chosen by students pursuing ordination — continues to decline. The projected enrollment for fall 2022 is 28,000 master of divinity students, a 4% decrease from fall 2021 and 9% decline since fall 2018. While master of divinity programs still constitute 35% of enrollment at theological schools overall, that's a significant decline from the 43% of total enrollment for master of divinity degrees a decade ago.



Meinzer said several factors steer students toward Master of Arts programs. In some Christian contexts, he said, the master of divinity is no longer required for ordination. The two-year degree may also entice students over the typically three-year master of divinity degree because it requires less time and less of a financial investment. Others might be attracted to specific master's degree programs.

Continued

Theological Schools, continued.



Chris Meinzer speaks at a conference in 2018.

“There is lots of creativity happening within our schools,” Meinzer pointed out. Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, for instance, added a fully online Master of Arts in Justice and Advocacy program in fall 2021.

The new ATS data is evidence of broader changes in North America’s religious landscape. Many theological schools are adapting to meet the needs of students claiming spiritual identities apart from religious institutions. This spring, Graduate Theological Union, a 60-year-old consortium of California seminaries and religious study centers, launched a new online learning

hub for interreligious activism in which students can study online and pay little or no tuition. In October 2021, Hartford Seminary in Connecticut rebranded as Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, a name that better reflects the school’s offerings. The school does not offer a master of divinity program and hasn’t ordained clergy since the 1970s.

As theological institutions look to the future, Meinzer urged schools to continue to innovate to meet the needs of today’s evolving religious scene.

“The world is changing, and we need leaders who can serve that changing world.”

WORSHIP THIS WEEK:

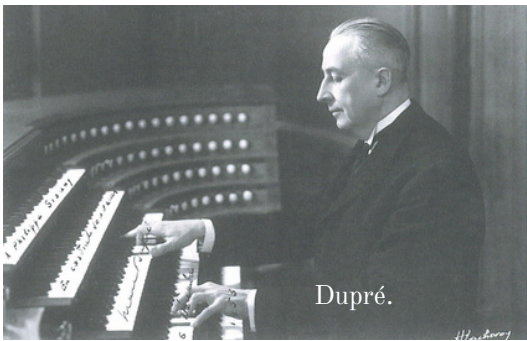
LIGHTING THE CANDLE OF JOY: ZEPHANIAH 3: 14-16

Unfortunately, Rev Pettit
has tested POSITIVE for COVID-19 again
and will be unable to lead worship this week.
Please keep him in your prayers.



MUSIC NOTES FOR DECEMBER 11

The third Sunday of Advent traditionally celebrates Mary's joyous response to hearing that she will bear the Son of God. Fortunately, a plethora of music has been written to Mary's exclamatory text. The prelude, anthem and postlude all reflect her exuberant declaration.



The prelude is one of six organ pieces composed by **Marcel Dupré** (1886-1971) that are dedicated to Mary's text. The French organist was one of the foremost organists of his time. Among other things, Dupré followed in the footsteps of his teacher, Charles-Marie Widor, who retired in 1934 as head organist at Saint-Sulpice in Paris. Dupré served in that position until the day he died – Pentecost in 1971.

The anthem is part of **Johann Sebastian Bach's** setting of the *Magnificat* for chorus, orchestra, and soloists. Bach composed the work for his first Christmas as Kapellmeister at St. Thomas Kirche in Leipzig, Germany, in 1723. *Quia Fecit Mihi Magna* is written for two bass lines – a bass voice and, in this case, the organ. Bach shows, yet again, his mastery of musical counterpoint in the way he weaves the two parts around one another and how he sets the text, particularly *Sanctum Nomen* (Holy Name).

Our final *Magnificat* was composed by **Dieterich Buxtehude** (1637-1707), whom Bach greatly admired. Buxtehude, like Bach and Dupré, was also one of the finest organists of his era. His *Magnificat* is filled with the jubilant energy that leaps out of Mary.

OUR WORSHIP CHANNELS



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Whose idea was it to *start* with the Hallelujah Chorus??

This Week in History.



The premier issue of *The Observer* appears in London, England. The world's first Sunday newspaper, publisher W.S. Bourne believed it would be the source of great wealth; instead found himself facing debts of nearly £1,600. It continues this day as the Sunday edition of *The Guardian*.
December 4, 1791



The Norwegian ship *Imo* collides with the French munitions ship *Mont Blanc* in the harbor of Halifax, Nova Scotia, resulting in an explosion that kills more than 1,500 persons and injures 8,000. A tidal wave caused by the explosion would destroy much of the city
December 6, 1917



Musician John Lennon is murdered in New York City
December 8, 1980,



The 21st Amendment to the Constitution nullifies the 18th Amendment, once again legalizing the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages in the U.S.
December 5, 1933



Marie Tussaud is born in Bern, Switzerland. Learning to sculpt wax at an early age, her woulds entertained pre-revolutionary Paris. She would establish Madame Tussaud's waxworks in London in 1802 where it remains a popular tourist attraction.
December 7, 1761



Dr. Ralph Bunche becomes the first African American awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, for his mediation between Israel and the Arab states following the 1948 War.
December 10, 1950