

Anderson University School of Theology

“Anatomy of a Turnaround”

A Paper Researched and Delivered by Dr. David Sebastian, Dean, Anderson University School of Theology, Anderson, Indiana

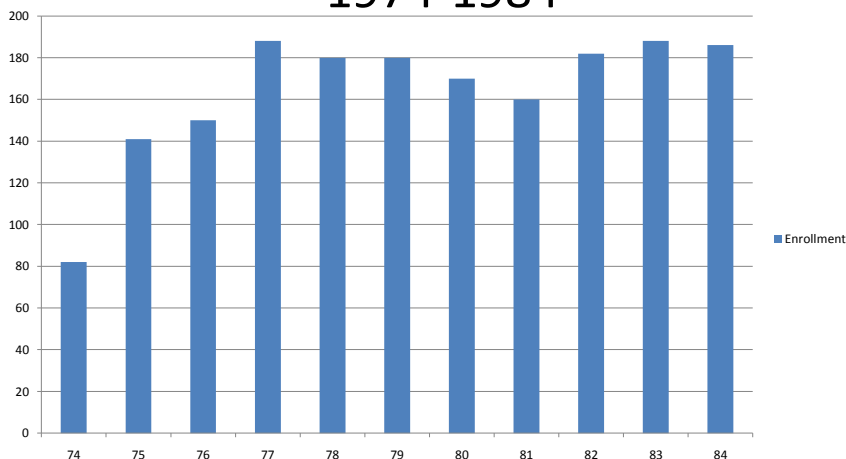
Delivered at the Church of God Theological Administrators ‘and Instructors’ Forum, March 15- 19 in Fritzlar, Germany.

Abstract: This paper deals with how Anderson University’s School of Theology is dealing with the trends in theological education in North America.

Anderson University School of Theology was born out of an extended conversation between the school's first President, John A. Morrison and a number of concerned Church of God educators and clergy. After World War II some Church of God ministers began attending denominational graduate schools to do their theological degrees. It seemed good to President Morrison and others to begin a seminary to prepare and retain leaders for the Church of God. Therefore in 1950 Anderson School of Theology was launched with thirty-five students and one full time faculty member.¹ The School of Theology was accredited in 1965 by the Association of Theological Schools and in fifteen years grew from thirty-five students to seventy students in 1972.

The decade from 1975-1985 saw the largest enrollments in the history of Anderson School of Theology. This enrollment was fueled by the end of the Vietnam War and the availability of the G.I. Bill, the increased financial support from the Church of God and a renewed interest in ministry as a byproduct of a national spiritual renewal of the seventies.

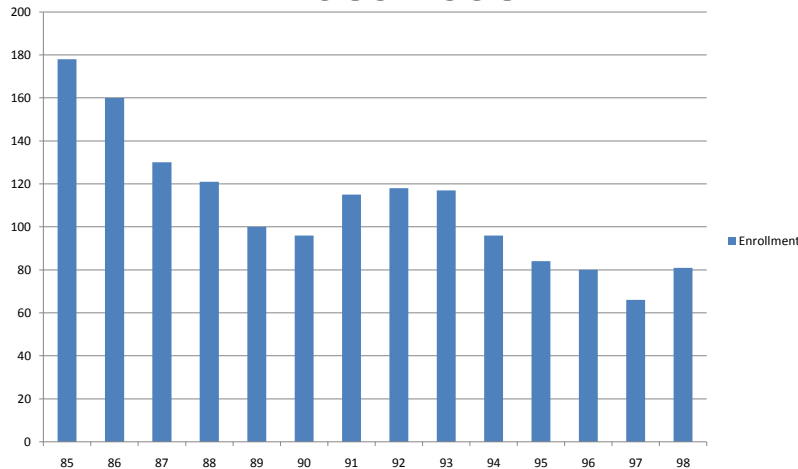
Anderson University School of Theology Headcount Enrollment 1974-1984



However over the next decade Anderson School of Theology enrollment began a dramatic decline.

¹ Barry Callen, *Enriching Mind and Spirit* (Anderson IN: Warner Press, 2007), 50.

Anderson University School of Theology Headcount Enrollment 1985-1998



In a national context ATS seminaries had growth periods from 1968-1983. However, ATS reported that in 1983-93 there was a noticeable decline in those degrees preparing people for congregational ministry. During this same period new MBA programs and other professional degrees began to explode. Some young people were being channeled by parents and pastors into non service oriented degrees. The decade of the eighties was known as the “me generation” and ministry and service occupations were feeling the impact.

In 1997 the Anderson University Board of Trustees requested a study on the current enrollment decline and how it would impact the sustainability of the seminary. It was reported (fall of 1997) to the Board that if the last decadal enrollment decline continued there would be 13 students attending Anderson School of Theology in the 2002-03 academic year. Also in 1997, the Association of Theological Schools, during their accreditation review, requested a seminary specific, strategic plan to address the critical issue of enrollment decline.

The following goals developed by the School of Theology administration and faculty were established and implemented to help turnaround a declining enrollment.

STRATEGIC GOALS

1. **Begin an intentional conversation with the Church of God around theological concerns.** The Dean, Associate Dean and Director of The Center for Christian Leadership traveled nationally and internationally to engage key leaders of the Church of God in doctrinal discussions². Based on those discussions Warner Press, Anderson University

² Doctrinal Issues raised were sanctification, eternal security, and ecclesiology, women in ministry, eschatology and unity.

Press and The Center for Christian Leadership produced theological resources in both English and Spanish to strengthen the Church of God. The School of Theology Faculty engaged the international feedback and produced, after 25 years, a new “We Believe” statement to help others know who we are and to give a fresh expression to our common witness. This new theological vision statement took an entire academic year to produce. Faculty and Staff developed the document word by word, sentence by sentence, and paragraph by paragraph. The process allowed the faculty and staff to share at a deep level those ideas we hold in common. The work while difficult had a great unifying effect among the faculty.

2. Employ an enrollment director to give day by day attention to seminary recruitment.

While Anderson University had an enrollment officer and full time recruiters their primary focus was on undergraduate enrollment. At the seminary the Dean, faculty and staff would communicate with potential students but no one person had the assignment to coordinate all the efforts. In order to call a person to focus on enrollment the fulltime Director for The Center for Pastoral Studies (continuing education program) was not replaced at his resignation. While this decision to reallocate was difficult the goal of increased enrollment became the immediate priority.

3. Assign a development person to increase financial support for theological education.

Anderson School of Theology according to the bi-laws holds “special standing” within the governance structure of Anderson University. While this special standing has always been difficult to define it has to do with the unique mission of the seminary within the University. In addition to the mission of developing ministers for the Church of God, the Dean was ratified by the General Assembly of the Church of God and is part of the President’s executive staff. Also unique to the School of Theology is that the Seminary Faculty reports directly to the Dean of the School of Theology. However, in regard to fund development the seminary had no one specifically advocating for the financial needs of the seminary. The new strategic plan called for one person on the Advancement team assigned to the seminary to raise funds for specific seminary needs. This person has been in place since 2008.

4. Build seminary housing to enhance the residential life of seminary students.

In a study of seminary housing in the state of Indiana it was discovered that Anderson School of Theology was the only seminary that did not provide a residential housing option for graduate students. School of Theology students were expected to find their own accommodations. This proved to be a special challenge for international students and those moving from distant parts of the United States. The Board of Trustees recognized this need and added seminary housing as a part of the new Dreams, Discovery and Direction capital fund campaign. Dr James and Elizabeth York donated over two million dollars to build twenty two apartments known as York Seminary Village. In 2011 phase III of the building project will be complete. The housing addition has had a positive

impact on building Christian community and student retention.



5. **Create a residential academic course schedule to accommodate working students.** Dan Aleshire said within 25 years there will still be places doing residential theological education, but a school that does most of its instruction between 9a.m. and 3:30 p.m. on weekdays won't be typical"³ In the mid eighties an experiment took place at the School of Theology to offer select classes on Mondays only. This effort was embraced by clergy who desired to continue their studies but could not give two-three days a week away from their churches. The Monday program was such a successful model that eventually all classes were schedule one day a week, morning, afternoon and evening. Both faculty and students welcomed the change allowing residential students more accessibility to classes while allowing them to retain full and part-time employment.

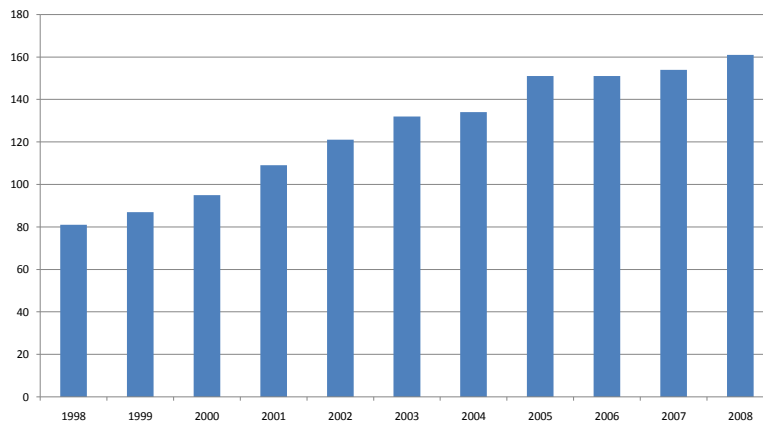
6. **Develop new degree programs that will attract students.** During the enrollment growth period of the eighties several two year Master of Arts degrees were offered. For whatever reason these two year professional degrees were dropped from the catalog in the early nineties and students were encouraged to enroll in the three year MDIV. Degree. However, since the Church of God did/does not have an MDIV requirement for ordination many students simply did not make the commitment to enroll in a 90 hour degree program. Research conducted by Church of God Ministries and the School of Theology discovered that only 20% of Church of God pastors registered in the Church of

³ Holly Miller, "Theological Education at the Crossroads", In Trust, (Autumn 2008), 9.

God directory had Master's level degrees. A survey among Church of God pastors was conducted by the Falls School of Business and the results indicated that pastor's would like to have an online degree. So in 2004 a new online degree was launched with a resulting online enrollment of 24 students. In addition a two year Master of Arts in Intercultural Service and a two Master of Theological Studies degrees were added with 35 enrolled. The new two year master's degree programs nearly doubled the School of Theology enrollment in five years.

These six goals resulted in a 137 percent increase in enrollment between 1998 and 2008.

Anderson University Headcount Enrollment 1998-2008



Also, since 2005, despite challenging economic times, the seminary's endowment for student scholarships has increased by approximately \$2 million dollars. The online degree program has broadened the seminaries service of full time pastors continuing education needs beyond Anderson, Indiana. The York Seminary Village has strengthened the residential program.

As we begin a new decade Anderson School of Theology will face new challenges.

- Declining student scholarship support from our sponsoring church.
- Declining job openings for graduates.
- Declining churches able to support a full time minister.
- Declining student interest in congregational ministry
- Declining budgets to sustain existing programs,

However there will be new opportunities to explore such as developing...

- Opportunities for Bi-vocational graduates
- Opportunities for Apostolic-Entrepreneurial missional leaders
- Opportunities for Partnerships in theological education

- Opportunities for Placement of graduates
- Opportunities for Discovery of new financial resources

Bibliography

Callen, Barry Callen, *Enriching Mind and Spirit*, Anderson IN: Warner Press, 2007.

Miller, Holly, "Theological Education at the Crossroads", In Trust, (autumn 2008).