

Iliff seminary warned on diversity issues: Problems prompted resignation of Latino president

by [John Dart](#) in the [November 30, 2004](#) issue

The United Methodist Church has warned its Denver seminary that nearly \$1 million in support will be cut off if the school does not resolve internal racial and cultural issues that prompted its Latino president to resign suddenly last May.

David Maldonado Jr., who was president of Iliff School of Theology for four years before quitting, was not treated “with fairness, justice and care” by the school’s trustees, said a report issued this month by the denomination’s University Senate and Commission on Religion and Race.

Maldonado, the first Latino to lead a United Methodist seminary, had complained that he was pressured to leave by some faculty members and trustees who accused him of being too theologically conservative and said he did not “fit in.”

The report cited “the unwillingness of some faculty members to recognize and respect different leadership styles” as one factor contributing to the president’s resignation. The investigators said that institutional racism was “a major, significant factor leading to [his] retirement” and that “the current context must be changed.”

The report said the school, founded in 1892 and having an enrollment averaging between 300 and 350 students, has the potential “to be a model of inclusive theological education for the whole church.” The seminary, one of 23 with ties to the denomination, has a joint urban affairs program with the adjacent University of Denver.

Retired pastor J. Philip Wogaman, Iliff’s interim president, said that the board has already begun to implement a set of recommendations in the report, among them a variety of steps to increase racial sensitivity and cultural diversity.

“This is not a racist institution, but we do have to get on with the recommendations,” he said. Wogaman indicated that not all board members agreed with the team’s findings, but the trustees did agree to act on the recommendations.

A faculty member of Wesley Theological Seminary for 26 years, Wogaman was senior pastor for ten years at a Washington United Methodist church attended by Bill and Hillary Rodham Clinton until he reached the mandatory retirement age of 70 in 2002.

The public warning to Iliff from the denomination has no adverse effect on students preparing for ministry or the school’s accreditation.

But the University Senate served notice that “if the problems are not corrected, Iliff’s support from the United Methodist Ministerial Education Fund can be withdrawn.” The fund contributed \$900,000 to the seminary’s \$5.14 million budget last year, according to the United Methodist News Service.

The report said Maldonado came into a “difficult situation” amid existing campus divisions, but credited him with stabilizing Iliff’s finances, defining institutional mission and increasing the enrollment, including more Latino representation on campus. The board directed Wogaman to make plans to celebrate Maldanao’s presidency and encourage his continued service to the church, whether within the UMC or outside the denomination.

Thomas H. Troeger, Iliff vice president and dean of academic affairs, will leave that post in May, but Wogaman said Troeger’s plans were not a consequence of the controversies. “He’s a fine dean,” he said. The school has agreed to an external search for a new dean after a new president is appointed to replace Wogaman.

The Methodist investigative team is expected to return in six months to see if its recommendations have been implemented. However, Wogaman said, “My hope is that it will be before six months.”