

# Alban Institute closes

by [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) in the [April 16, 2014](#) issue

One of the main institutions providing continuing education and advice to mainline Protestant leaders has announced that it will shut its doors.

Since it was founded four decades ago, the Alban Institute has assisted mostly mainline congregations through its consulting and publishing programs. Founder and former president Loren Mead became well known for his speaking and writing about the future of U.S. denominations and was one of the first to predict denominational decline.

“When I started as a parish pastor, I found there wasn’t much help or continuing education,” said Mead, a retired Episcopal priest. “I am glad I have been able to contribute to the church, but I have not been able to solve its turnaround.”

Many mainline churches looked to Alban, based in Virginia, to provide literature and consultants on everything from finding a new pastor to strategies for growth and financial health.

But as more publishers and consultants got into the business that Alban pioneered, the institution found it difficult to maintain its niche. Like other nonprofits, it also lost revenue during the recent recession.

“The Alban Institute went through the great recession just like everyone else,” said James P. Wind, who retired as president of Alban earlier this year. “The market got tougher to thrive in.”

Total assets from the institute fell from \$5.1 million in 2010 to \$3.2 million in 2012, according to its most recent financial disclosure forms.

Alban is in talks with Duke Divinity School about assuming the remaining assets, estimated between \$300,000 to \$500,000, with the possible creation of an “Alban Endowment Fund.” Duke will also acquire Alban’s intellectual property and mailing lists.

A letter from the chairman of Alban's board, Case Hoogendoorn, said the changes will allow Alban's mission to continue, "albeit in a different form."

Wind earned in 2011 a salary of \$276,243, according to Hoogendoorn. The same year, Alban's director of institutional advancement received a salary of \$155,214, and its chief financial officer received a salary of \$152,540. Hoogendoorn said the board compared Wind's salary to that of seminary leaders in the Washington area.

Wind's compensation package, including a housing allowance, was appropriate, Hoogendoorn said, because he was also involved in overseeing the Center for Congregations in Indianapolis, an Alban program which in 2003 became a separate nonprofit organization controlled by the institute in Virginia.

Alban Institute and the ICC combined had 40 employees in 2002 but that dropped to 24 the next year due to layoffs and attrition. Departures in 2011 and 2013 brought the staff average down to 12. The board cut Wind's salary by 10 percent at one point. Six employees remained when the organization shut down.

[Hoogendoorn, in an interview with the *Century*, said, "The programs which most supported Alban were always consulting, education, and publishing. What really changed in 2010 and 2011 was not only the business model itself but also that the consulting, education, and publishing became too costly to support."

[With Wind's recent retirement and a downsized staff, Hoogendoorn said, Alban's customary programs were unlikely to secure the Lilly Endowment's further support. "We told consultants that they would have to be self-supporting, and we decided to sell off our publishing assets," he said.]

Alban's publishing program has been acquired by the Rowman & Littlefield publishing house, which will continue to publish books with the Alban imprint. The books will continue to focus on church governance, leadership, and development, with editorial oversight from Duke.

The purchase includes about 270 active titles from authors such as Diana Butler Bass, Peter L. Steinke, and Roy M. Oswald. The publisher's CEO told *Publishers Weekly* it will produce 25 to 30 books a year alongside its other religious imprints.

"The Alban Institute is a huge symbol of continuing education and refreshment for me," said Ed Bacon, the rector of the 4,000-member All Saints Episcopal Church in

Pasadena, California. “It was bringing in the very best practices of organizational development and applying them to church organizations.”

Alban was sustained largely by money from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment, as well as its consulting and education services. But ultimately, it wasn’t a sustainable model, said Kirk Hadaway, research director for the Episcopal Church.

“They weren’t driven by profit in the same way that other parachurch organizations could tend to be,” Hadaway said. “The lack of profit motivation may have been a problem in their long-term survival.”

As the finances of mainline Protestant congregations have been deteriorating, it’s no surprise that an organization such as Alban would close, said David Roozen, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, who studies organizational change.

“I wasn’t aware that they were this close to closing, but on another level, it doesn’t surprise me that they’ve been feeling some real stress,” Roozen said.

The Center for Congregations, which was launched under the Alban Institute name, will continue as a stand-alone venture. Some of Alban’s consultants will continue independently, while eight others work together under the “Congregational Consulting” umbrella. —RNS/added sources

*This article was edited March 31, 2014.*