

Episcopal Divinity School to join Union seminary in New York

EDS students will earn Union degrees, and EDS appointed Kelly Brown Douglas as dean.

by [Celeste Kennel-Shank](#) in the [June 21, 2017](#) issue



Union Theological Seminary's quad in New York City. Photo by G. Jeffrey MacDonald for the *Christian Century*.

Episcopal Divinity School has stopped granting degrees at its Cambridge, Massachusetts, campus, but the school is not closing. Instead it will join Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

EDS and Union signed an agreement on the collaboration May 19, and Kelly Brown Douglas, an Episcopal priest, scholar, and author of *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, was named the first dean of EDS at Union.

“Working together, EDS and Union aim to advance the causes of social justice and theology in the world, and Kelly is the ideal leader for this new venture,” said Gary Hall, chair of the EDS board of trustees, in a statement.

Students in the EDS program, beginning in 2018, will earn their degrees from Union while fulfilling requirements for ordination in the Episcopal Church.

After the EDS board of trustees decided to pursue a possible affiliation with Union and began negotiations earlier this year, [Hall told the *Christian Century*](#) that EDS had been losing \$8 million a year and had only 40 students total, and it did not want to burn through its remaining \$53 million endowment.

EDS’s board closed off the possibility of a merger with another small school, such as General Theological Seminary in New York City, which also trains Episcopal priests. EDS’s trustees instead sought “to take our resources and align them with a place that was robust and sustainable,” Hall said.

The collaboration between EDS and Union will resemble the arrangement Berkeley Divinity School, an Episcopal seminary, has with Yale. EDS will offer Anglican studies instruction for Union students much as Berkeley does for Yale.

EDS will hire a professor of Anglican studies in addition to Douglas joining the Union faculty.

Douglas sees EDS and Union as sharing a common mission, she said in a statement: “What I am really happy about for the wider EDS community is that this isn’t the typical bad news of a small seminary closing. This is the news that this place believed enough in its mission that it went out and found a way to carry that mission forward in a viable fashion, and found a way for the mission to grow.”

EDS plans to sell its Cambridge campus and add the funds from the sale to its endowment, then purchase a floor of a new building to be constructed on the Union campus. The building project is designed to raise money for repairs that the school is required to make on its older buildings. After Union announced that project, [some students, faculty, and alumni objected](#) to the school selling development rights to construct private housing. The new space will include dormitories, faculty homes, classrooms, and offices for Union.

Serene Jones, president of Union Seminary, noted as negotiations were beginning that Union's enrollment is increasing and its operating budget has been healthy for the past decade. She said of the partnership with EDS that it was not "springing from a sense of mutual benefit in terms of infrastructure; it's a deep sense of calling."

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