



Faithful Stewardship, Belonging, and Columbia's Future

For nearly 200 years, Columbia Theological Seminary has prepared faithful, imaginative, and effective leaders for Christ's Church and God's world. Every generation entrusted with Columbia's care inherits both a gift and a responsibility: to steward this institution wisely so that future generations may continue to benefit from its mission.

Today, higher education and theological education face significant challenges. Nationally, institutions are responding to demographic shifts, changing enrollment patterns, rising operational and healthcare costs, evolving student expectations, uncertainty in public policy, and the changing needs of the Church. Columbia has experienced these pressures as well, including persistent inflation, increasing benefit costs, deferred maintenance on our historic campus, and structural budget deficits over the past three fiscal years.

A Discerned Path Forward

Consistent with Columbia's governance structure, recommendations were developed by institutional leadership through extensive financial analysis, organizational assessment, strategic planning, consultation with external experts, and prayerful discernment. At every stage, our guiding question was simple: *How do we steward Columbia's resources faithfully today while ensuring that future generations can benefit from this institution's mission?*

After extensive financial analysis, organizational assessment, strategic planning, consultation with external experts, and prayerful discernment, the President's Council recommended and the Board of Trustees approved a [comprehensive plan](#) to strengthen Columbia's long-term sustainability. That plan included:

- Maintaining a hiring freeze and eliminating twelve vacant positions.
- Offering an Early Retirement Incentive Program.
- Implementing a reduction in force affecting staff and administrative positions.
- Posting [new position](#) descriptions that will enhance the implementation of our mission for the foreseeable future.
- Adopting a revised healthcare cost-sharing model effective January 1, 2027.

These decisions were difficult and carried real human consequences. We recognize the loss experienced by colleagues whose positions were eliminated and remain deeply grateful for their faithful service. Each affected employee received severance benefits, transition assistance, counseling resources, and ongoing Human Resources support.

Strengthening Our Mission

Importantly, these actions were designed to strengthen—not diminish—our mission. No faculty positions were eliminated through the reduction in force, no academic degree programs were discontinued, and we continue to invest in enrollment growth, student formation, intercultural learning, and innovative educational initiatives.

Belonging, Diversity, and Representation

Many members of our community have raised thoughtful questions about the demographic impact of these changes. We recognize that the workforce reduction disproportionately affected colleagues of color, and we acknowledge the pain and concern this reality has created.

At the same time, these decisions were based on institutional needs, organizational structure, and long-term sustainability—not the race or ethnicity of individual employees. Recognizing that distinction does not lessen the impact of the outcome, nor does it diminish Columbia's commitment to diversity, belonging, equity, and justice.

That commitment to belonging, diversity, and representation remains visible across our institution:

Leadership

- Three of seven President's Council members are people of color.
- The Council includes four women and three men.

Workforce

As of June 9, 2026:

- 47% of employees identify as persons of color.
- 53% identify as white.
- Approximately 60% of employees are women.
- Approximately 40% are men.

While demographic data never tells the full story, diversity remains an important characteristic of Columbia's workforce.

Faculty

Over the past three years, Columbia has hired four faculty members of color, reflecting our ongoing commitment to building a faculty that represents the breadth of the Church and the world. In Biblical Studies, faculty of color now comprise the majority of the department, while women represent 71% of its faculty.

Students

For the 2026–2027 academic year:

- 66% of the entering students identify as persons of color.
- 34% identify as white.
- Approximately 70% of the student body, including the graduating Class of 2026 are persons of color.

Beyond demographics, Columbia's commitment to belonging is embedded in our educational mission. Through our Quality Enhancement Plan, students develop intercultural intelligence, cultural humility, and cross-cultural leadership skills. The creation of the Senior Advisor for Flourishing and Belonging position and the ongoing review of the Repairing the Breach initiative further reflect our commitment to cultivating a community where all people can thrive.

Looking Forward Together

Reasonable people may disagree with specific decisions, and we respect those differences. What remains unchanged is Columbia's commitment to its mission and to the values that guide our life together.

We will continue to listen, engage in honest dialogue, and seek transparency while honoring appropriate legal and confidentiality obligations. Our work is not simply organizational or financial—it is theological. We are called to practice faithful stewardship, nurture belonging, pursue justice, and sustain a community that reflects the reconciling love of Jesus Christ.

Organizational renewal is a process rather than a single event. As colleagues adapt to new responsibilities, reporting relationships, and new ways of working together, we ask for the continued patience, grace, and understanding of our students, alumni, churches, donors, and friends. Meaningful institutional change requires time, thoughtful collaboration, and a shared commitment to our common mission.

Columbia is developing and will implement intentional opportunities for communal lament, focused professional development, professionally facilitated dialogue, and mediated reconciliation while continuing to strengthen support for employees, students, faculty, trustees, alumni, and other constituents. Like the Church itself, Columbia is continually being reformed, learning and adapting to meet God's call in changing times. We move forward with humility, gratitude, and confidence in God's faithfulness.

I invite our community to join in this work—with honesty, grace, courage, prayer, and hope. The future of Columbia will be shaped not by avoiding difficult conversations, but by engaging them faithfully together.

Grace and peace,



President
Professor of Practical Theology
Columbia Theological Seminary