



HISTORY & TRADITIONS

2023-2024

HISTORY

Founded in 1909 by the Brethren in Christ Church in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to “educate men and women for home and foreign mission or evangelistic work,” Messiah Bible School and Missionary Training Home originally had 7 faculty and staff members and 12 students. By the end of the first school year, enrollment had risen to 37 students, and construction was under way for Old Main, the first building on the University’s current Grantham Campus.

In 1924, the school’s name was changed to Messiah Bible University. This change accurately reflected the institution’s broadening curriculum and the junior university status it achieved in 1922. By 1951, the University was approved to confer baccalaureate degrees and was renamed Messiah University. Accreditation from the Middle States Association of Universitys and Secondary Schools was achieved in 1963. Messiah initiated a satellite campus in Philadelphia in 1968 and in 1983 launched Messiah University—Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, leading to the chartering of Daystar University in 1993. During the past three decades, the University significantly increased the number of majors offered in the liberal arts and introduced degree programs in several applied areas. Messiah University now offers more than 85 academic majors. In 2020, Messiah University became Messiah University corresponding to the growth in post graduate programs.

Growth in the student body and in facilities accompanied growth in the academic program. Contributing to the growth in number of students was the University’s policy, declared in its earliest official statements, of welcoming students from all denominations and church traditions. From a first-year total of 37 students, the student body has grown to more than 3,300 undergraduate and graduate students, representing over 60 denominations and church traditions.

Until 1972, Messiah University was owned and operated by the Brethren in Christ Church. Today, the University and Church share in a covenantal relationship, through which each of these two communities works to further the ministry of the other. Legal control is assumed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees. The University is presently under the leadership of Dr. Kim S. Phipps.

With the changes and developments of over 100 years, various elements in the history of Messiah University have remained constant—an emphasis on education for service, acceptance of students and faculty from diverse backgrounds, a commitment to excellence, and an endeavor to make Christ preeminent.

TRADITIONS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Many traditions and special events have come to be associated with Messiah University over the years:

UNIVERSITY MOTTO

“Christ Preeminent” points to Jesus Christ as both the ground for personal salvation and pattern for life and service.

UNIVERSITY COLORS

University colors are navy blue and white.

UNIVERSITY MASCOT

The University mascot is the Falcon.

NEW STUDENT CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

A memorable aspect of Welcome Week is a candlelight ceremony and worship service that signifies the entrance of the new class into the University community.

UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION

This event marks the annual opening of the academic year. The ceremony includes an academic procession of the Community of Educators, a welcoming address, and academic awards.

HOMECOMING

Homecoming is an annual event for the entire Messiah community which is held each fall to welcome alumni back to campus. Women’s powder puff football and men’s cheerleading competitions have become a traditional part of Homecoming. To reign over the day’s festivities, a Homecoming host and hostess are elected from the student body.

SERVICE DAY

In April, the University sponsors a day of service in which faculty, staff, administration, and students serve in campus and local community service projects.

COMMENCEMENT

The annual Commencement ceremony is held at the end of the academic year. The ceremony includes an academic procession of the Community of Educators and graduates in regalia and the awarding of honorary and earned degrees. The ceremony is held on Starry Field, overlooking the Chapel, and includes a procession through the covered bridge.