

Theological Education: Nurturing Vital Ecosystems to Serve Our World

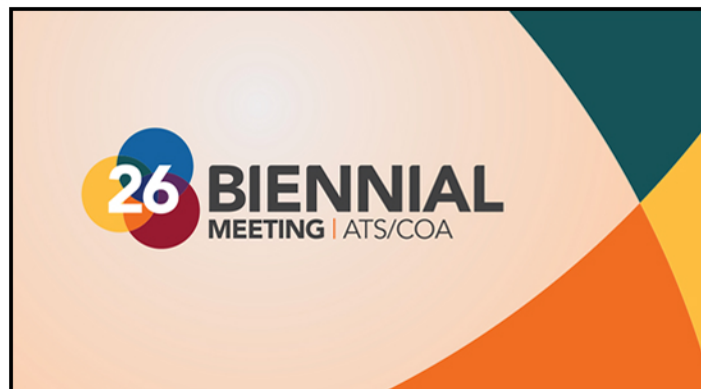
By FRANK M. YAMADA

This June, leaders from The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) will gather at the 2026 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting under a theme that names both our calling and our practice: Theological Education: Nurturing Vital Ecosystems to Serve Our World. The theme affirms a simple truth. Theological education does not stand alone. Like a living ecosystem, it flourishes through interdependence. Schools, denominations and congregations, clergy, donors, and partners each play a vital role in a shared mission. To nurture this ecosystem is to sustain the conditions in which theological education can serve the common good.

Activities to advance the ATS vision state

The 2026 Biennial theme is closely aligned with the new ATS vision state, which emerged through careful discernment and has been adopted by the ATS Board of Directors. It now guides our work for the coming years as a collaborative, generative community that fosters transformative innovation and faithful stewardship of theological education. The Biennial theme gives that vision state tangible expression. Collaboration reflects our shared responsibility for one ecosystem, where the health of each part affects the whole. Generativity calls us to practices that bear fruit in and beyond the present season. Stewardship invites wise and forward-looking care for the human, spiritual, and material resources entrusted to us.

This integration will shape the Biennial Meeting itself. The opening plenary will offer an in-depth assessment of religious life in North America. Business sessions will focus on the essential work of ATS and COA in service of quality



and improvement. Presentations, workshops, and a resource expo will explore important theological education topics. Our new Gathering Spaces sessions will create opportunities for affinity groups, leadership cohorts, and advisory committees to connect, learn, and collaborate. The meeting will conclude with a plenary on mission and viability, introducing the new ATS Financial Viability Tool and inviting schools to consider how financial decisions rooted in mission affect access, affordability, and sustainability for the future of theological education.

Taken together, these activities embody the Biennial theme and advance the ATS vision state. They nurture our shared ecosystem through collaboration, generativity, and faithful stewardship to strengthen theological education for the benefit of communities of faith and the wider world.

I will announce featured speakers and the opening of registration in the coming weeks. Watch your inbox and social media for details. I look forward to seeing ATS member school leaders in person in June.



Frank M. Yamada is executive director at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.