

2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting— the who, what, where, when, and why

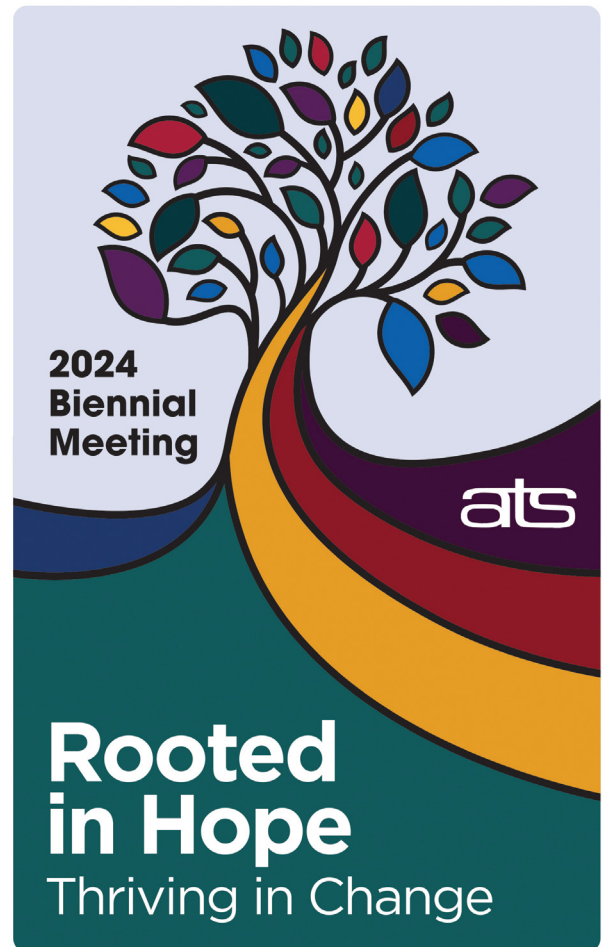
BY FRANK M. YAMADA

I have recently received numerous inquiries about the 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting. Some have come from presidents and deans with several years of experience, but many more have come from those who have just begun their leadership journeys at an ATS school. This is not surprising given how many new leaders have recently come into their positions. Within the past six years, there have been more than 500 leadership transitions among CEOs and CAOs at ATS schools—many for whom this will be their first Biennial Meeting. In response to those questions, here is what you need to know about the upcoming event.

Who attends the Biennial Meeting?

The Association of Theological Schools is not located at 10 Summit Park Drive in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The ATS office is in Pittsburgh, but ATS is located at the hundreds of locations of the various member schools across North America. ATS is a membership organization, comprised of more than 280 member schools. The Biennial Meeting is the called meeting of the member schools—it is the schools' meeting.

According to the bylaws, “...each Member [school] may send as many representatives to any meeting... as it chooses” (Section 2.7). However, each school is entitled to one designated voter—the CEO or a person appointed by the CEO—to vote on the business of the meeting. In past years, the chief executive officers (presidents or executive deans) and the chief academic officers (academic deans or associate deans) of ATS schools have been most of the attendees at the Biennial Meeting.



However, as the bylaws make clear, the school can send as many representatives as the school would like.

What is the Biennial Meeting?

The Biennial Meeting is the guild meeting for theological education. In the same way that the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature are the guild meetings for their respective academic societies, the ATS/COA Biennial Meeting is the space in which those who work in member schools and other organizations interested in theological education will gather to learn from one another, network among one another, and share best practices about how to improve and advance theological education.

"[The Biennial Meeting] provides an opportunity to witness how theological institutions have adapted to the rapidly changing religious and cultural landscape. I always return home with new ideas, increased hope, and strengthened resilience."

ATS held its first fully online Biennial Meeting during the global pandemic in 2020. In 2022, the membership returned to Pittsburgh for its first ever hybrid meeting—an online business meeting and an in-person conference. **Both the business meeting and the conference will return to a fully in-person gathering for the 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting.**

The theme for this year's Biennial Meeting is ***Rooted in Hope, Thriving in Change: Navigating Transitions in Theological Education***. Graduate theological education is in the middle of tectonic shifts. We see these shifts in the larger religious landscape of North America and within the broader ecology of higher education. Theological schools sit at the crosscurrent of these larger rivers of change. Within these big transitions, we hear many stories of hope and challenge.

This year's Biennial Meeting will focus on those areas of grounding that sustain the hope of schools, while sharing how schools are navigating these shifting currents with both difficulty and grace. Within each victory and failure, there are things that we can all learn as we navigate these uncertain times together. We are better together, and when we gather, the cumulative hope and inspiration can sustain us as we lead from our various places.

Where is the meeting?

The 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting will be at the Hilton Atlanta in Atlanta, Georgia. Registration will open in February. The price for early registration, which lasts until May 17, is \$400. The price after May 17 is \$500.

When is the meeting?

The dates for the Biennial Meeting are June 19–20, 2024, with Tuesday, June 18 being the travel day to the meeting, and Friday, June 21 as the day of departure.

Why should members attend the Biennial Meeting?

The primary objective of the Biennial Meeting is to enact the Association's life as a member organization. This associational life includes the following goals:

- 1) learning about the larger industry trends in theological education,
- 2) voting on the business of the Association and the Commission,
- 3) education and development of leaders in theological schools,
- 4) networking and sharing of best practices, and
- 5) celebrating milestones and recognizing distinguished service in theological education.

These goals reflect the reasons leaders choose to attend the Biennial Meeting—to learn from one another; to be encouraged with sustenance for the journey; to engage and share with one another; to network, to celebrate, and to vote on items of business before the membership. These goals are also reflected in the testimonies of

"... I regard ATS and its member schools to be among our primary partners in theological education. Furthermore, I have found the Biennial Meeting not only to be informative but have also found it to be a time where I am enriched, refreshed, and encouraged for the ongoing work. I look forward to seeing you in Atlanta in June 2024!"

ATS leaders who have regularly attended the Biennial Meeting. The goals reflect the membership at its best, and they are outworkings of the Association's four core values: (1) quality and improvement, (2) diversity, (3) leadership, and (4) collegiality.

I vividly remember my first Biennial Meeting. I was in the first year of my presidency at an ATS member school. The job was still very new

to me, and I was learning so many things that the often-quoted phrase, "drinking water from a firehose," felt like my reality. Not only was the position new for me, but the moment that my school faced seemed like a sea of uncertainty.

I found a community of peers—hundreds of them—at my first Biennial Meeting. We were all facing similar challenges and were working toward various promising possibilities. We shared our hopes and fears, what was working and not working. I learned much in those two

days, and I met many fellow travelers who became lifelong friends and colleagues. Most of all, I learned that I was not alone. I experienced what it meant to be part of a community of practice in which

schools from diverse theological perspectives came together to improve in this time of significant change in theological education.

Come, taste, and see for yourselves.

"The plenary sessions, topic specific seminars, and personal interaction with fellow leaders in theological education have provided opportunities for learning, fellowship, and encouragement. I can say with all honesty that ATS Biennial Meetings have helped me navigate the complexities of leading a theological school through some of the most difficult years that many of our institutions have faced."



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