

# ATS members gather in Pittsburgh for 2022 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting

By *MARISSA DECHANT*

*A group of more than 450 gathered on June 22 and 23 in Pittsburgh to reconnect and learn alongside one another at the 2022 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting Onsite Conference. For the first time since 2018, the meeting was held in person—convening members around the theme A Better Future Together—at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown.*



Mark Young, outgoing ATS Board of Directors president, welcomes Biennial Meeting participants to the celebration banquet.

## **ATS Executive Director Frank Yamada notes "critical moment" for Association**

In his opening address, Yamada shared evidence of the position of strength ATS and its member schools currently find themselves, which includes:

- ♦ successful adoption of the new *Standards of Accreditation*,
- ♦ the impact of the Lilly Endowment Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative—90 percent of ATS-accredited schools received \$50,000 planning grants in the first phase and 84 schools received grants between \$500,000 and \$1 million in the second phase to implement their projects toward more effectively preparing pastoral leaders for communities of faith,
- ♦ the ATS Commission on Accrediting received renewal of recognition from both the US Department of Edu-



Frank Yamada speaks at the Biennial Meeting.

cation and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation for the maximum periods,

- ♦ the New Century Fund exceeded its growth goal of \$30 million in 2021, providing funding for timely projects, pilots, and experiments on important issues facing theological schools,
- ♦ and thousands of ATS administrators and faculty have participated in online engagements, webinars, asynchronous and synchronous educational experiences, and Engage ATS in the past two years.

## **Onsite conference offerings well-received by participants**

The conference included keynote speaker Paul LeBlanc, president of Southern New Hampshire University, in discussion with Charla Long, executive director of the Competency-Based Education Network; a panel discussion with Theological Education between the Times project participants; a series of workshops and community conversations centered on various topics related to theological education; and opportunities to network among colleagues and peers.



Paul LeBlanc and Charla Long speak during plenary session.

One participant noted, “I really appreciated the two workshops [I attended]; they were both excellent and gave me really good tools and ideas to take back to my school. I also enjoyed the opportunities for networking. It was great to be in person!”

“It was great talking with colleagues from other member schools. Also, lots of the discussions in the plenaries and breakout sessions really started to open my mind to what is possible in higher education,” shared another attendee.

One participant said main takeaways from the meeting were feeling “less afraid to innovate; [I] also got some good ideas to reflect on relating to assessment and the Standards [of Accreditation].”

### ***Eleven schools approved for Associate membership***

New Associate members were recognized during a welcome ceremony at the onsite conference.

The week prior, the 11 applicants were all approved for Associate membership during the Biennial Online Business Meeting held June 14 via Zoom. The new Associate members are:

1. Christ School of Theology of the Institute of Lutheran Theology (Brookings, SD)
2. Crown College Graduate School of Ministry (St. Bonifacius, MN)
3. Dickerson-Green Theological Seminary of Allen University (Columbia, SC)
4. GETS Theological Seminary (Covina, CA)
5. Heritage Christian University Graduate School of Theology (Florence, AL)
6. Hope International University—Pacific Christian College of Ministry and Biblical Studies (Fullerton, CA)
7. Horizon College and Seminary (Saskatoon, SK)
8. Inter American University of Puerto Rico—Metropolitan Campus (San Juan, PR)
9. International Reformed University and Seminary (Los Angeles, CA)
10. The Master’s Seminary (Sun Valley, CA)
11. University of Northwestern—St. Paul, School of Theology and Ministry (Roseville, MN)

Associate member schools are members only of ATS and not the ATS Commission on Accrediting. Associate members have met the membership eligibility criteria and are elected to a five-year term of membership by the member schools of the Association. Degree programs are not approved by the Commission until a school has attained accreditation.



Representatives from new Associate member schools are welcomed during the Biennial Meeting.



## Five organizations granted Affiliate status

Additionally, during the welcome ceremony, ATS recognized the five new Affiliate status organizations that had been approved during the online business meeting. Affiliate organizations have a substantial interest in theological education but are not involved in educational programs leading to a degree. The new Affiliates are:

1. Digital Theological Library (Upland, CA)
2. Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies (Baltimore, MD)
3. Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation (Omaha, NE)
4. The Islamic Seminary of America (Richardson, TX)
5. Toronto School of Theology (Toronto, ON)

## Pathways for Tomorrow event gathers participants in person

Prior to the Biennial Meeting Onsite Conference, participants from ATS member schools who received the phase two Lilly Endowment Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative grant gathered in person for the first time on June 21 in



Jo Ann Deasy speaks at the Pathways for Tomorrow coordination event.

Pittsburgh. The program was led by ATS staff members Jo Ann Deasy, director of institutional initiatives and student research, and Christopher The, director of student research and initiative management. Participants attended peer learning conversa-

tions and discussed their schools' projects, which currently involve implementing a plan to strengthen their educational and financial capacities to prepare and support pastors and congregational lay ministers for the long term. [Read more](#) about the Pathways coordination event.

## Distinguished Service Award and Trailblazer Award recipients honored

During the celebration banquet on June 23, the ATS Distinguished Service Award was presented to Daniel O. Aleshire, former ATS executive director. The award was presented to Aleshire by his friend and colleague, Barbara Wheeler, former president and director of the Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary.



Marsha Foster Boyd and Daniel O. Aleshire are awarded at the banquet.

The award—presented at ATS Biennial Meetings since 1988—honors a “person of exceptional vision, leadership, and influence who advances the causes of our enterprise in very significant ways to the benefit of all.”

Also honored at the banquet was Women in Leadership (WIL) Trailblazer Award recipient Marsha Foster Boyd, interim president of Chicago Theological Seminary. Mary Young, ATS director of leadership education, presented the award. The 2020 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting marked the inaugural recognition of the WIL Trailblazer Award. The WIL Advisory Committee decided to honor a woman leader in theological education with this award at each ATS/COA Biennial Meeting moving forward.

## Redevelopment Task Force recognized

The Redevelopment Task Force, a group of both ATS staff and member school leaders who led the redevelopment of the ATS *Standards of Accreditation*, were also recognized during the banquet. Sarah Drummond, founding dean of Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School, served as cochair of the 19-person task force. She described the two-year process of researching, listening to the membership, and drafting the *Standards*, and thanked the colleagues who worked alongside her.

Outgoing ATS president Mark Young (Denver Seminary) and outgoing COA chair Todd Lajiness (Our Lady of Good Counsel) were also thanked for their work during the past biennium. Incoming president Mary McCormick



Sarah Drummond speaks at the banquet, surrounded by other members of the Redevelopment Task Force.

(Saint Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology) and incoming chair Betty Holley (Payne Theological Seminary) were welcomed into their roles, which they assume immediately.



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