

# ATS names awardees to be honored at upcoming Biennial Meeting

By LISA KERN

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) will honor two veteran theological educators and a third posthumously at the upcoming 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting in Atlanta this June. The Distinguished Service Award is given at each ATS/COA Biennial Meeting in recognition of the extraordinary contributions that awardees have made to the advancement of theological education. The ATS Women in Leadership (WIL) Trailblazer Award identifies and celebrates women of exceptional vision, leadership, and influence who advance the gifts, skills, and capacities of women leaders in significant ways to the benefit of all.

## Distinguished Service Award



**Marsha Foster** is currently serving as academic officer and interim chief academic dean at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. She is president emerita of Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit—a milestone achieved upon her

2013 retirement from the presidency after seven years of distinguished service.

Prior to her presidency, Foster was director of accreditation and leadership education at ATS. She and William R. Myers are credited with founding the Association's



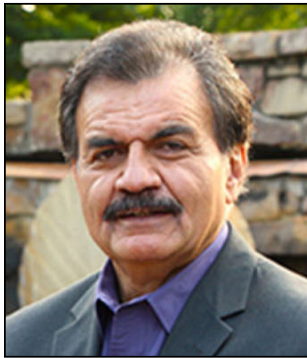
signature leadership education programming. She also promoted the leadership of women and racial/ethnic persons in member schools, which led to the formation of the Committee on Race and Ethnicity and the Women in Leadership initiatives.

Foster has a long record of distinguished service in ATS institutions. She was associate professor of pastoral care and counseling at United Theological Seminary and academic dean at Payne Theological Seminary. In addition, she was interim vice president of academic affairs and academic dean at Luther Seminary, and interim president of Chicago Theological Seminary—the first African American woman to hold each position.

Having previously served on the board for the In Trust Center for Theological Schools, Foster is presently a board member for the Pacific School of Religion and for the Marcus Foster Education Institute in Oakland, California, named for her late father. She is a retired member of the American Academy of Religion and a life member of the Society for the Study of Black Religion. Among her many honors and awards are the conferral of the Doctor of Humane Letters *Honoris Causa* from Payne Theological

Seminary and inductions into the Morehouse College Board of Scholars and the Turner Theological Seminary Alumni Hall of Fame. She also received the Virginia Union University Wyatt Tee Walker Social Justice Society of Preachers and Prophetic Witnesses Award, the Black Religious Scholars' Distinguished Scholar Award, and the ATS WIL Trailblazer Award.

Foster earned a PhD in religion and psychology from the Graduate Theological Union and her MDiv from the Interdenominational Theological Center.



**Oliver McMahan** is being honored posthumously with a Distinguished Service Award. McMahan, who died peacefully at his home in Cleveland, Tennessee on March 26, 2024, was serving as the vice president for institutional effectiveness

and accreditation at Pentecostal Theological Seminary, as head pastor of Cross Pointe Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee, and he was providing counseling at Health Management Services in Cleveland at the time of his death. He had previously served as associate professor of Bible and dean of students at Northwest Bible College in Minot, North Dakota, and as dean and professor at Jimmy Swaggart Bible College and Seminary in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

McMahan was a strong contributor to the mission of ATS. He was a member of the Board of Commissioners of the ATS Commission on Accrediting and was vice chair of the historic Standards Redevelopment Task Force that gifted ATS with the 2020 *Standards of Accreditation*. In addition, he chaired the Committee on Race and Ethnicity, participated in more than 57 accreditation visits, and he supported various ATS programming that included student personnel administrators' events, the *Educational Models and Practices Project*, the Leadership Education Council, the Diversities Initiative, and the *Global Awareness and Engagement Initiative*.

Known affectionately as "Dr. Mac" by friends and colleagues, McMahan was actively involved in various counseling associations and theological organizations including the American Counseling Association, the Tennessee Counseling Association, the Society for Pentecostal Studies-Practical Theology/Formation Interest Group, and the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling. He also provided thought leadership in the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, the Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, the International Academy of Family Psychology, the International Association of Marriage and Family Counseling, and the Global Forum of Theological Educators.

McMahan earned a PhD from Georgia State University and his MDiv and DMin from Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University.

Awardees for the Distinguished Service Award are chosen according to: (1) exceptional service to the Association and other organizations committed to the improvement of theological education, (2) innovative contributions to the establishment of forms and structures of theological education, (3) significant advancements of scholarship in the theological disciplines, or (4) unique contributions to the understanding and advancement of theological education.

### ***ATS Women in Leadership Trailblazer Award***



**Joanne Rodríguez** is the executive director of the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI), whose mission is to cultivate Hispanic/Latiné PhD students for leadership positions in the academy, in the church, and in the world. An ordained minister in the

Presbyterian Church USA since 2011, she has worked with students, faculty, deans, nonprofit educational program directors and presidents to ensure that HTI

doctoral students complete their studies and become leaders who make an impact in theological and religious education as well as in the larger landscape of education.

During her tenure, Rodríguez led HTI in establishing a consortium of PhD-granting institutions that focus on the academic and professional development of Hispanic intellectual leaders and role models to inspire Hispanic students. She has fundraised more than \$9.9 million and she has helped more than 140 PhD students graduate in an average time of five and a half years. She believes in “*en conjunto*” partnerships to do impactful and result-driven transformational work.

Rodríguez has participated in many ATS events, including the Ethnic Diversity and the Black and Hispanic Dialogue consultations, Hispanic/Latiné annual meetings, and the theological education ecology group gatherings. She has presented at several ATS WIL conferences, and she recently served as a mentor for the three-year ATS WIL Mentoring Program.

A teaching elder at the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton, New Jersey, Rodríguez earned a ThM and her

MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary. She writes and speaks throughout the nation regarding the educational development of Hispanic students in PhD studies.

Awardees for the WIL Trailblazer Award, chosen by the WIL Advisory Committee, are selected based on: (1) exceptional service to the Association and other organizations committed to the improvement of theological education, (2) innovative contributions to the establishment of forms and structures of theological education that value and support women in leadership, (3) an established career and significant advancement of scholarship in the theological disciplines and/or studies related to women in the academy, (4) unique contributions to the understanding and advancement of theological education, (5) demonstrative capacities for mentoring/coaching next generation women leaders in theological education, and (6) broad-based understanding of the role of theological inquiry in shaping faith and practice.



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