

# Hope in a new year—ATS executive director shares updates

BY FRANK M. YAMADA

*Whenever I ask the ATS staff what they value most about our work, the answer is always the same—they enjoy supporting the schools and watching them improve. It is a source of great hope to see schools doing good work in this time of significant disruption in both higher education and in graduate theological education.*



In the new year, there are many signs of hope in the second year of living through this global pandemic—hope in the adaptations and innovations among theological schools, and hope in the students who continue to be formed and educated to serve communities of faith and the broader society. In this midwinter, I am pleased to share more concrete signs that the future remains promising even in the middle of significant challenges.

## ***Pathways for Tomorrow***

Late last year, Lilly Endowment Inc. announced that 84 grants of between \$500,000 and \$1 million, totaling \$82 million, were given to accredited ATS schools from the United States and Canada. These awards were part of the second phase of the Pathways for Tomorrow initiative to prepare pastoral leaders now and into the future.

In phase one of the initiative, 234 ATS schools—almost 90 percent of the membership—were awarded \$50,000 planning grants. The second phase of the initiative supports theological schools as they implement plans to innovate and adapt educational programs to be more accessible and affordable for future leaders. This is

incredibly great news for theological schools and represents the Endowment's significant investment in the future of theological education and in the leaders whom these schools form and educate.

It was also announced that the Endowment had awarded ATS \$5.567 million to run the coordination program for the Pathways for Tomorrow initiative. This coordination program will be done in collaboration with the In Trust Center for Theological Schools, which also received a \$1.36 million grant.

The coordination program will support those schools that received Pathways grants while providing resources and educational opportunities to benefit all ATS member schools. Between the grants for Pathways and the coordination program, Lilly Endowment Inc. has awarded just over \$100 million toward the future of theological schools.

In tandem with the redeveloped ATS Standards of Accreditation, which provide schools with a road map to continuous improvement and quality while providing contextual

flexibility, the Pathways initiative provides resources for schools to make significant progress in innovating toward their diverse futures.

## **2022 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting**

On the topic of the futures of theological schools, I am also pleased to announce the plans for the 2022 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting. One of the convictions we have at ATS is that we are better together. We are better together as a diverse set of theological schools that are all committed to the common mission “to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.” We are better together when we learn from one another as schools pursue their diverse paths toward their futures. Consequently, *A Better Future Together* seemed like a fitting theme for this year’s Biennial Meeting.

In 2022, ATS will host its first ever hybrid meeting. In the spring, there will be online courses and resources that

will prepare member schools for the Biennial Meeting. The Association and the Commission on Accrediting will hold their business meetings via Zoom on Tuesday, June 14. An onsite conference—centered around *A Better Future Together*—will take place from June 20 to June 24 (includes travel dates), at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown. The conference will include speakers on the future of theological education, workshops, an innovation and adaptation expo, consultants, and high-impact leaders as we explore better futures together. Save the dates and plan to join us for this series of member engagements to envision and create *A Better Future Together*.

It is often in the middle of crisis that the deepest and most profound hope surfaces. In the Christian and Jewish scriptures, it is from the watery chaos that creation emerges. It is in this context that God says, “Let there be light’ and there was light.” (Genesis 1:3). A new day is dawning for theological schools, and that day has begun.



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