

# Attendees appreciate “collaborative nature” of development officers’ conference

BY LISA KERN

*“New Practices for Changing Times: Inspiring Generosity” served as the theme for more than 80 development and communication professionals who attended the annual ATS Development Officers’ Conference earlier this month in Newport Beach, California.*

Kerry Alys Robinson is founding executive director and global ambassador of Leadership Roundtable, an organization of laity, religious, and clergy working together to promote best practices and accountability in the management, finances, communications, and human resource development of the Catholic Church in the US including greater incorporation of the expertise of the laity. Her presentation opened the conference and focused on the spirituality of fundraising, citing obstacles to development and solutions to overcome them.

“Faith, spiritual maturity, mercy, a commitment to the dignity of the human person, a zest for life and all that life has to offer, a belief in transcendence, access to hope, tenacity, humility, awe, generosity of spirit, joy and the divine ability to imagine abundance—these are all hallmarks of your success in fundraising,” said Robinson.

“Kerry’s personal story plus the key maxims to ‘live by’ in development set a perfect foundation for the rest of the conference,” said one participant. “I also very much valued the personal connections I made and ideas in one-on-one sessions.”



Chanon Ross, program director of religion for Lilly Endowment Inc., speaks to development and communication professionals earlier this month in Newport Beach, California.

James Hackney Jr., senior director of development at Yale University Divinity School and chair of the event’s steering committee, welcomed attendees at the start of the event and later moderated a talk delivered by Chanon Ross about the “big picture view” on foundation generosity. Ross, program director of religion for Lilly Endowment Inc., spoke about the various theological programs and initiatives currently supported by the Endowment, explaining that it strives to “make a strategic impact with congregations and with strong leaders who can support, sustain, form, mentor, and grow.” He went on to say that the Endowment values and encourages partnerships and welcomes the opportunity to talk with development officers and connect them with others who may be doing similar work.

“The collaborative nature of the presenters and the attendees was most valuable,” said one participant. “The space created encouraged true sharing and cross-pollination of ideas and practices.”

Aimée A. Laramore, philanthropic strategist for the first PhD in African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric at Christian Theological Seminary, is the owner and lead

consultant for ALLyd Image Solutions—a boutique consulting firm dedicated to building organizational capacity and effective development practices. She presented on donor designation at the intersection of sustainability and generosity, noting that “sufficiency” seemed to be an appropriate word to describe development work.

“How much is really enough?” asked Laramore. “We must think about a God who has been sufficient . . . do we have enough to do this work and to do it well?” She went on to explain how generosity and sufficiency can be discussed in the same conversation, focusing on the importance of extending the benefit of the doubt to others.

Lewis H. von Herrmann is a senior consultant with Sharpe Newkirk, a company that delivers training, consulting, and a complete package of donor communication support to charities and nonprofits. His talk focused on how giving will be different in 2019, giving examples in the areas of taxes, effective marketing, blended giving, and new opportunities.

Frank M. Yamada, ATS executive director, shared his thoughts on how this moment in theological education can be seen as a crossroads—a critical point at which there is both opportunity and challenge that can inspire hope and creativity.

“Both the ATS Board of Directors and the ATS Commission on Accrediting Board of Directors have engaged in strategic processes that seek to address this critical moment for theological schools,” said Yamada.

He updated the group on the progress of the redevelopment of the ATS standards of accreditation and talked

about how a process has begun to identify strategic priorities that will set the parameters for strategic investment in programs, initiatives, and research that will support the member schools.

Led by moderators Kitty Norton, assistant dean for development and external relations at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and Shelia M. Virgil, assistant dean of development at Wake Forest University School of Divinity, participants engaged in development table conversations by affinity group. Groups such as denominationally-affiliated schools, embedded schools, evangelical schools, and Roman Catholic schools, among others, discussed annual giving, planned giving, and major gifts as well as other items.

In addition, two sessions of workshops were offered, ranging from inviting donors to give big to rebranding for changing times. Following suit with the other ATS administrator group conferences this year, time was also devoted to a focus group meeting to hear input regarding the redevelopment of the ATS standards of accreditation.

“The design of the conference facilitated deep conversations with our colleagues not only about our successes, but about our missteps, failures, and challenges,” said another attendee. “I felt a generosity of spirit and a decided lack of competitiveness among all participants. We each seemed interested in one another, our growth and our successes.”



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