

Reflections on redevelopment

By TOM TANNER

Editor's Note: *Just before the membership voted on the motion to authorize a comprehensive redevelopment of the ATS Commission Standards and Procedures, Harry Gardner, outgoing chair of the ATS Board of Commissioners, asked Tom Tanner to say a few words in his role as Commission staff liaison to the redevelopment process. Here are his words during the June 2018 Centennial Biennial Meeting in Denver.*



Dan Aleshire once said his best day at ATS (and he had nearly 9,900 days at ATS) was June 24, 1996—right here in Denver. That was the day the membership voted *unanimously* to approve a completely redeveloped set of Standards and Procedures that remain mostly intact to this day. It was the first major revision of the Standards in nearly a quarter century. The vote was so overwhelming (not just numerically, but also emotionally), that after the final tally, the 300+ members in that Denver ballroom stood and sang the Doxology in unison. That was a good day—a *once-in-a-generation* good day.

Twenty-two years later, we find ourselves again in a ballroom in Denver . . . for another *once-in-a-generation* day: to vote on a motion to do something that hasn't been done *in a quarter century*—a comprehensive redevelopment of our Standards and Procedures. You can find the motion on page 32 of the [Biennial program book](#). On the pages that follow you will find: a rationale, a work plan, a two-year timeline, and key questions and concerns (the focus of the Working Forum session this afternoon). Before you vote, let me briefly highlight two things about

this proposed two-year project: **first**, the process will be *broadly participatory*, and **second**, the product will likely be *principle-based*. Let me explain.

First, the process will be broadly participatory.

The motion to authorize a redevelopment has these concluding words: “with a substantial participation process.” This is **YOUR** work. It needs your broad participation. And everything that has led us to this point has been *broadly participatory*. More than 90 percent of the membership has been engaged in the Educational Models and Practices project that Stephen Graham summarized yesterday. More than 200 of you spent two years sharing your thoughts on new standards as part of the Peer Group Reports, posted last fall on the ATS website. This past year, Commission staff met with more than 150 ATS member schools to discuss the possibility of redevelopment. Over the last 15 months, we have published eight articles in *Colloquy Online* on the proposed redevelopment. If the motion is approved, we will develop a dedicated webpage on the ATS website later this summer

to keep you *informed* of the progress and to *invite your feedback* throughout the process. This coming year, we will host focus group conversations at every ATS leadership event and interact with dozens of other constituent groups. If you have other ideas on how to engage you, let us know. As noted on page 34 in your program book, the first of these two years is “a year of listening.” We have been listening to you. We are listening to you. We will keep listening to you. *This process will be broadly participatory.*

Second, the product will likely be principle-based.

We don't know yet what the final product will look like. Not a single word has been written—nor will it be for another year. We don't even know what the structure of the new standards will be. Still, we imagine something with an “elegant simplicity,” based more on quality, educational principles and less on individual, institutional practices. We envision that kind of *principle-based product* because that is what you've been telling us. One thing we have heard above all else, especially through the

Educational Models project, is this: **educational quality at ATS schools comes in all shapes and sizes, through increasingly different delivery methods, to increasingly diverse demographic groups—all in pursuit of our various missions.** If we are to develop *common* standards to address that much *uncommon* diversity, *we must aim high.* We must seek *not the lowest, but the highest* common denominator. We envision *that* to be a set of standards focused on quality educational principles—however those principles are defined by the membership over the next two years.

So, here we are on another June day . . . in Denver—22 years later. Once a generation, the membership develops standards that will define and deliver theological education for the next generation. The next two years could well determine the next two decades. This is your day. I pray it is a good day. And who knows? Maybe two years from now in a ballroom in Vancouver we'll sing again the Doxology in unison. THAT would be a good day.



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