

ATS members gather in Atlanta for 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting

By *MARISSA DECHANT*

A group of more than 450 gathered June 19–20 in Atlanta to enjoy fellowship and learn alongside one another at the 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting. The meeting gathered members around the theme, *Rooted in Hope, Thriving in Change*, at the Hilton Atlanta.

This year marked the first time that, in addition to top leaders at member schools, all member school staff were encouraged to attend the Biennial Meeting.

ATS Executive Director Frank Yamada reflects on leadership transitions

In his opening address, Yamada noted the unprecedented number of leadership changes occurring at ATS member schools, which was reflected in the 2024 Biennial Meeting theme. He also discussed the hope that lies in learning from, for, and with one another in theological education, and talked about “enacting Associational life” by learning together and networking at the gathering.



Frank Yamada facilitates a panel discussion at the Biennial Meeting.



ATS member school designated voters take part in the Biennial Meeting business sessions.

Biennial Meeting offerings appreciated by participants

The gathering included a plenary focused on storytelling, presented by Terry LeBlanc, director emeritus of NAIITS An Indigenous Learning Community, and Shari Russell, director of NAIITS; a panel discussion with theological leaders centered around leading through change; a series of business sessions, workshops, and a Resource and Innovation Expo; and opportunities to network among colleagues and peers.

One attendee appreciated the “deep commitment to learning together” and the “reality that we are a community, at our best.”

Another participant valued learning “the concept of starting with story and specifically, positive stories, to work toward solution rather than problem-based approaches.”



Nathan Helling (Kairos University) and Anna Robbins (Acadia Divinity College) sit on a "Thriving in Change" panel.

New to the Biennial Meeting this year was the use of the Whova event app, which allowed attendees access to their personal agendas, meeting documents, and engagement with fellow participants. The app had an 85 percent adoption rate.

One attendee shared, "All—or at least the majority of us—carry our cell phones with us all the time. Having an app that provides ready access to the agenda and links to all relevant documentation was a tremendous help."

Ten schools approved as Associate members

Associate applicants were voted in as members and recognized during a welcome ceremony in Atlanta. The new Associate members are:

1. Charlotte Theological Seminary (Charlotte, NC)
2. Clamp Divinity School at Anderson University (Anderson, SC)
3. Indianapolis Theological Seminary (Indianapolis, IN)
4. Life Pacific University Seminary (San Dimas, CA)
5. Northwest University College of Ministry Graduate Studies (Kirkland, WA)

6. Pacific Theological Seminary (San Diego, CA)
7. Seminario Teológico de Puerto Rico (San Juan, Puerto Rico)
8. Stark Seminary of Stark College and Seminary (Corpus Christi, TX)
9. Trinity Graduate School at Trinity Bible College (Ellendale, ND)
10. University of Dayton Department of Religious Studies (Dayton, OH)

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.

Three organizations granted Affiliate status

Additionally, during the first business session, ATS approved three new Affiliate status organizations. Affiliate organizations have a substantial interest in theological education, but they are not involved in educational programs leading to a degree. The new Affiliates are:

1. The Center for Muslim and Christian Studies, Houston (Houston, TX)
2. The North American Mobeds Council—Institute of Zoroastrian Studies (Toronto, ON)
3. WCAT Radio (St. Louis, MO)



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

Distinguished Service Award and Trailblazer Award recipients honored

During the celebration banquet on June 20, the ATS Distinguished Service Award (DSA) was presented to Marsha Foster, interim academic dean at Interdenominational Theological Center. The award was presented to Foster by her friend and colleague, Angela Sims, president of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School.



Marsha Foster receives the DSA at the concluding banquet.



Holly Salicco accepts the DSA on behalf of her late father, Oliver McMahan.

Oliver McMahan, former vice president for institutional effectiveness at Pentecostal Theological Seminary, was posthumously honored with the DSA. His daughter, Holly Salicco, accepted the award on his behalf, which was presented by friend and former colleague David Han, vice president for academics and dean of the faculty at Pentecostal Theological Seminary.

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 Joanne Rodriguez, director of the Hispanic Theological Initiative. Robin Steinke, president of Luther Seminary, presented the award.

Since 2020, the WIL Advisory Committee has honored a woman leader in theological education with this award.

Outgoing ATS president Mary McCormick (Saint Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology) and outgoing COA chair Betty Holley (Payne Theological Seminary) were also thanked for their work during the past biennium. Incoming president Margaret Mwenda (Calvin Theological Seminary) and incoming chair Joe Harrod (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) were welcomed into their roles, which they assume immediately.



Joanne Rodriguez (right) receives the WIL Trailblazer Award. Robin Steinke (left) presented the award.



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