

Lilly-funded *Pathways for Tomorrow* Initiative highlights growth, creativity

BY MATT HUFMAN

More than 325 people representing 108 ATS-accredited schools gathered in Atlanta for a one-day *Pathways for Tomorrow* Coordination Program Gathering on June 18. The gathering, which came the day before the 2024 ATS/COA Biennial Meeting, was the third gathering of grantees for the project. It marked the halfway point of the initiative, which allowed for grants of up to five years.



Pathways for Tomorrow grantees partake in a Lego-building activity at the *Pathways* Coordination Program Gathering in Atlanta.

ATS is coordinating the initiative, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., along with the In Trust Center for Theological Schools.

To open the session, Jo Ann Deasy, ATS director of institutional initiatives who oversees the coordination work, noted that the purpose of the gatherings has been to continue “to form a community of learning.” She said online programming and events gave grantees time to learn from one another “to reflect on (the) work and con-

sider the pivots you might need to make as you seek long-term sustainability of the purposes and the core why of the projects.”

The *Pathways* gathering kicked off the Biennial Meeting theme—*Rooted in Hope, Thriving in*



Jo Ann Deasy presents onstage.

Change—with plenaries and giveaways that included chocolate-covered sunflower seeds.

Deasy said she hoped that, through the event, the grantees would “be encouraged, knowing that while we may be tilling soil, planting seeds, watering the earth, as it says in 1 Corinthians 3:7, it is God who gives the growth.”

The daylong event included several breakout sessions and short plenary events that featured discussion time. The plan was to give grantees time to work together as teams and learn from other schools.

The opening plenary session, “Rooted in Hope: Forming Ministers,” featured panelists Father John Kartje, of University of St. Mary of the Lake Mundelein Seminary; Bill Harrison, of Lutheran Theological Seminary; and Stephanie Crumpton, of McCormick Theological Seminary, discussing the formation of ministers. Grantees were asked to consider their “self-knowledge,” how the land and place are important to their visions of theological

education, and how trauma impacts their institutions and students.

The second plenary, “Thriving in Change: Equipping Ministers,” brought together Gabriel Salguero, of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition; Kara Powell, of Fuller Theological Seminary; and Jessica Young Brown, of Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology of Virginia Union University. Grantees were asked to consider their assumptions about their work, what they could do to build trust and train leaders to build more trust, and what they could do to learn and be curious.

The final plenary, “Bearing Fruit in the World: Transforming Communities,” brought Agnes Chiu, of China Evangelical Seminary North America; Father Ferdinand Okorie, of Catholic Theological Union; and Yamil Acevedo, of Wesley Seminary in Indiana. The plenary then invited grantees to consider what they could do in both the short- and long-term to prosper. Using the theme, grantees were asked to consider whether the soil and climate were suitable for their projects and what pruning they may need to do.

Deasy noted the biblical theme of pruning and said, “We prune to help plants thrive and prosper, and leaders are called to do the same.”

A variety of breakout sessions throughout the day allowed grantees to delve more deeply into projects and what their peers were learning, along with sessions with consultants and practitioners who could help schools

consider how to tend to their projects. In addition to peer learning about projects, topics included mental health issues in theological education, creating partnerships, board engagement, and managing crises and communications.

Several themes that came up throughout the day included sustainability, assessment, capacity, and leadership transitions, particularly at schools that have had leaders change during the course of the grant.

In an episode of the In Trust Center’s *Good Governance* podcast after the event, Amy Kardash, president of the In Trust Center, noted that rich learning opportunities and great engagement among grantees highlighted the event.



Amy Kardash speaks to participants.

“The opportunity to bring everyone together brought a lot of energy, encouragement, and enthusiasm to the grantees,” Kardash said. “Regardless of where anyone is in their project, one of the best parts about coordination is building the peer communities. There was a real collegiality in the space that I found so encouraging and refreshing.”

Pathways for Tomorrow resources

- [ATS Pathways webpage](#)
- [ATS Pathways grant directory](#)
- [2024 Pathways report](#)
- [In Trust Center Pathways webpage](#)
- [Good Governance episode on the Pathways gathering](#)



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