



AST

ATLANTIC SCHOOL
of THEOLOGY

*The Story of
Atlantic School of Theology*

Researched and Written by
Yvette Swan, MDiv (Hons)
AST Class of 2010

In honour of AST's 40th Anniversary



The Story of Atlantic School of Theology

AST Past

Laying the Foundations

Forty years ago, the three largest Christian denominations in Atlantic Canada took a leap of faith. Inspired by hope and called by that love in which we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, they merged their three historic theological institutions into what was to be called Atlantic School of Theology. It has not always been a smooth voyage. But we travelled forward together sustained by that faith, that hope, that love.

When Atlantic School of Theology was founded in March 1971, it was to carry on in a bold new way the work of Holy Heart Theological Institute, which was previously Holy Heart Seminary (Roman Catholic); King's College Divinity School (Anglican), and Pine Hill Divinity Hall (United Church). Atlantic School of Theology was incorporated on June 28, 1974, by an Act of the Nova Scotia Legislature, which gave the School the power to "confer degrees in its own right."

As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of this institution, it is important to note that in the years before 1971, students and faculties of the three theological seminaries had already started to work together,

having lectures together, creating the foundation for an ecumenical school. This would be the first time in Canada that three denominations had ever come together to form one institution, especially one that included the Roman Catholic Church.

This was made possible largely because Vatican II and the "Decrees on Priestly Formation and Ecumenism" gave the Roman Catholic Church the freedom to extend its theological education and work with other ecumenical entities. After 75 years of providing theological education, Holy Heart Seminary closed. Under the direction of Archbishop James Hayes of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Halifax, the Holy Heart Theological Institute was established. This body continued the Seminary's work and the collaboration with the other two theological colleges. In keeping with the opening for ecumenical cooperation, students of Holy Heart Seminary and Theological Institute had begun attending classes with those of Pine Hill Divinity Hall and the King's College Divinity School.

King's College traces its origin to 1789 in Windsor, Nova Scotia, having been founded by the Anglican Church for the education of its clergy. In 1923, Kings College was moved from Windsor to Halifax. During the 1960s, the enrolment of candidates seeking ordination in the Divinity School was declining. There was also a reduction in Faculty members. This opened yet another door.

Near the end of the 1960s, Dr. C. M. Nicholson, Principal of Pine Hill Divinity Hall, after 25 years of service, announced his intention to retire at the end of the 1970-71 academic year. The committee appointed to search for his successor was also charged with making a recommendation about the future of Pine Hill Divinity Hall. After considering its future as an independent institution, they decided to consult with representatives of all three denominations in order to examine the possibility to embark on a collaborative ecumenical program of theological studies that would serve all three denominations. Members of Holy Heart Theological Institute, King's College Divinity Faculty and Pine Hill Divinity Hall commenced negotiations for merger.

They asked the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, the accrediting body for theological educational institutions, to assist with these negotiations. Dr. Milton C. Froyd was sent by the Association to Halifax as a consultant for this



project. Working with Dr. Froyd were theological consultants of all three Institutions. The planning committee included the Honourable Chief Justice Gordon Cowan who would later become the first chair of the new Board of Governors. On the recommendation of the Planning Committee, the Atlantic School of Theology (AST) was established as an ecumenical

theological school. The Articles of Agreement were signed on March 29, 1971, by Archbishop James Hayes, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Halifax, Bishop William Davis for the Board of Governors of the University of King's College, and Donald F. Archibald for the Board of Governors of Pine Hill Divinity Hall. Operations began officially

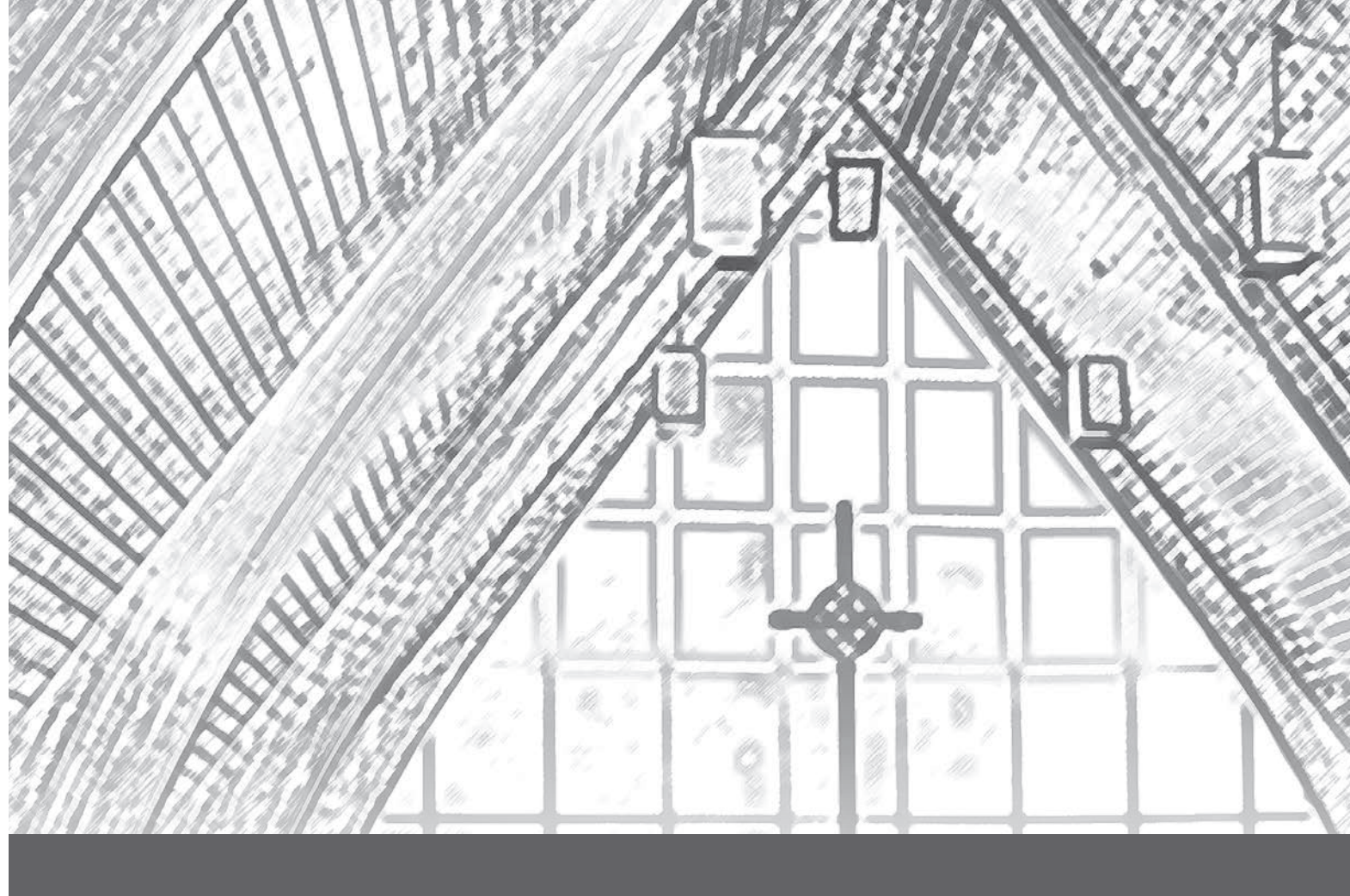
on July 1st, 1971, in time for the 1971-1972 academic year. The Board of Governors named the Reverend Dr. Lloyd Robertson as the first president of the new Atlantic School of Theology.

AST Present The Journey Thus Far

That we have arrived at the 40th anniversary of this school is an achievement worth celebrating. Not everyone was convinced this venture would succeed. The magnitude of merging institutions with decades, even centuries, of history is fraught with uncertainty and, for some, signals a sense of loss of tradition and identity along with the opportunities for fresh approaches and invigoration. Much has changed in the four decades of the school's existence, in the churches and in the communities they serve.

New understandings of ministry, where and how it takes place and who can serve in both lay and ordained ministries, along with whole new approaches to the classic disciplines of theology, new pedagogies and technologies, have all shaped the evolution of Atlantic School of Theology. To facilitate ongoing research and ensure that the student body had access to the latest in theology, a new library was constructed in 1994 that today houses 86,000 volumes, the largest theological collection east of Montreal.

The musical component of preparation for ministry has been enhanced by the acquiring of a Helmuth Wolff organ and a Yamaha 7-foot grand piano for installation in St. Columba Chapel. As cited on the organ builder's website and a CBC CD recording featuring music dating from the 16th to 19th centuries performed by the



late David MacDonald, the organ's builder said "The main intention in building this organ...was to create an instrument to be part of a living liturgy. It brings together historical features with the best aspects of organ reform in the 20th century."

Master of Divinity students at AST have benefitted from a well-rounded theological education including field-based learning. More recently, a significant research component in the form of a Grad Project has been incorporated. In addition to the MDiv degree, the

school offers a Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies, an Adult Education Certificate in Theological Studies, and a Diploma in Youth Ministry. As well as traditional residence-based delivery of programs, it has created an innovative summer distance program with great success.

AST continues to serve the Anglican, Roman Catholic and the United Church of Canada denominations in Atlantic Canada and beyond. The school has an ongoing relationship with the Anglican

Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the Anglican Diocese of Fredericton, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Halifax, the Maritime Conference, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Conference of the United Church of Canada. Increasingly, students of the founding denominations and other denominations and faiths come not only from Atlantic Canada, but also from across Canada and internationally.

AST Future Challenges and Opportunities

Forty years ago, the challenge was the integration of three distinct Christian traditions and teachings for the purpose of edification, mutual understanding and common witness in an ecumenical context. Today the growing religious diversity in Canadian society and enhanced communication in the world has brought a whole new set of challenges. Today, young people grow up in a social media culture, surrounded by people of many backgrounds. In addition to serving as clergy in our churches, AST graduates now serve as chaplains in hospitals, universities, and military units around the world where they minister to people of different faiths and none at all. Against the background of religious diversity and enhanced communication, people are now also questioning the proper role of the church in the public sphere, whether it can or should be a moral voice for community and family, social and economic justice, and care for creation.

In March of 2002, AST entered into an affiliation with Saint Mary's University. This partnership resulted in the joint formation of the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Public Affairs (CCEPA) as well as a new joint Master of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies degree. The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Public Affairs (CCEPA)

provides an arena for critical thinking, public discussion and research into current ethical challenges in our society. Through its speaker series and lectures, the Centre has stimulated conversations about ethics in business and economics, science and technology, sports, citizenship responsibilities and other areas. The highly successful joint M.A. is an innovative program where students of theology and students of religious studies learn together, from each other, and from a talented and engaged faculty from both schools. This program encourages graduate research with and for local communities and for

those who wish to pursue doctoral studies.

The Atlantic School of Theology Association (ASTA), the school's first alumni association, was founded in 1974. In 2010, a successor called the AST Integrated Alumni Association (ASTIAA) was formed. The new association embraces alumni, faculty and friends of AST as well as all those from the founding seminaries. To assist our alumni to stay in tune with cutting edge theology, the new association sponsors regional workshops. Recent subjects include topics such as God and Money,

Holy Humour, and Rethinking Church and Popular Culture.

Forty years ago, AST began reshaping theological education to suit changing times. Every decade produced challenges that called for steadfast faith, abundant hope, and deeper love for one another and God's world. This is what AST was, what AST is, and what AST is called to be as it begins the next decade of the journey. We ask God's blessings upon AST's present faculty, staff, Board of Governors, Senate, alumni and students in their continuing journey of faith, hope and love.





Celebrating 40 Years of
Excellence in Ecumenical Theological Education