

OCTOBER 2025



AST CONNECT

Where Theology Connects with the World.

Message from the President

While I usually work with a literal open door to my office, I close it when I'm participating in online meetings, so as not to interfere with the work of my colleagues in the business and administration offices here in the President's Lodge.

Three weeks ago, I opened my door after a morning of such back-to-back meetings to discover a small stuffed rabbit perched on my doorknob. Colleen, who works in the business office, told me that it was left there by a student who wanted to give it to me, "to thank you for allowing her to be a student at AST."

I named the rabbit Harvey (pictured), and he's sitting on my desk propped against an AST mug full of pens, reminding me of why I do what I do.

Sometimes in the busyness of the day-to-day, I can forget what a truly special place AST is. That's why I'm grateful for the relaunch of a regular AST newsletter.

Whether you're an alumnus/a, a current student, staff or faculty or friend of the school, this newsletter will help us all to remember what an amazing place this is, and all the ways God is using us to shape faithful and effective leaders in a world that really needs them.

The Rev. Dr. Heather McCance

President, Atlantic School of Theology



Harvey

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Reach out

AST Connect is our monthly newsletter dedicated to reviving relationships, celebrating alumni impact and student stories, and keeping you linked to the heart of the AST community.

Do you have news about your ministry, an upcoming project or suggestions for the newsletter?

We would love to hear from you!

Email: astcommunications@asttheology.ns.ca

Message from the Academic Dean

As fall unfolds in beauty all around us, I am thankful for this AST community and the new people who are having such a positive impact on our school.

At matriculation last month, we welcomed new students and new staff to our community and each of them is helping to shape AST in wonderful ways. We honour the contributions of those who served here in the past – Dawn, Colin, Jennifer and Kevin, and we welcome, Jen, Jen, Thea and Ibukun.

Change brings challenges and also opportunities. This monthly newsletter is a great initiative to tell stories of interest to our community and I am excited to read the first edition.

Thanksgiving is a lovely October holiday, and I will spend it at my cottage with my family. Thanksgiving or gratitude is not a once-a-year event; it is a spiritual practice and one I lean into, especially when the daily news tells us there is every reason not to be grateful.

I find it helpful to look for moments of joy, to identify concrete things daily for which I can utter a soft “thank you.” From the mundane of daily coffee to the excitement of travelling the world, I am filled with gratitude. Life is a gift and one not to be taken for granted.

Thanks to each of you reading this newsletter for your contribution and connection to AST. I am grateful to serve as the Academic Dean – at least most days.

The Rev. Dr. Susan MacAlpine-Gillis
Academic Dean, Atlantic School of Theology





Alumni Check-In: Rev. Jonathan Walter Tait

“God steadily nudged me to AST and ultimately ordained ministry,” shared Rev. Jonathan Walter Tait, an alumnus of AST, who graduated with his Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree in 2005.

Rev. Tait was recently appointed as the Regional Minister for Congregational Health for The Synod of Central, Northeastern Ontario and Bermuda of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

“I am excited and humbled by my new appointment and consider it a great privilege and responsibility to serve in what has been my home Synod for many years now.”

Looking back, what’s a favourite memory from your time as a student that you still think about?

One of my favourite memories was sitting on the campus beach in between classes and considering the sheer vastness and goodness of God. I also lived in the residence for a year and have joked many times that it was my first and likely only ocean view from the comfort of home.

How did your education and experience at AST prepare you for your ministerial role?

I really appreciated the ecumenical flavour at AST. I often had two professors teaching the courses I took. I found great benefit in having the topic of study considered from various faith traditions. Fr. Charles Pottie SJ and Dr. Susan Slater were gifts to my faith journey, and I will forever be grateful for their teaching and guidance. In particular, Dr. Slater’s course on Jeremiah was formative, so much so that my wife and I named our son Jeremiah.

What are your hobbies or interests outside of work?

I am fascinated with the history of hockey – both in terms of the rule changes and the development of equipment. I still play hockey every winter in Barrie, Ontario, where I currently live. My family says I know way more about CCM Tacks ice skates than any human being should ever know. I also enjoy the history of popular music and searching for specific vinyl record pressings.

Is there a particular quote or philosophy that guides you in your work or life?

Psalm 37 verses 5-7 inform my way of being and understanding the world. I also strive to honour 1 Corinthians 10:31 by doing everything for the glory of God.

Your message to fellow AST alumni?

Remain open-minded and forever be an intentional lifelong learner.



“Camino days are some of the happiest days of my life”

- Carla Agnesi on Camino Nova Scotia

Carla Agnesi walked her first Camino in Spain in 2018. Her experience was memorable, to say the least. “I knew this was something I wanted to do again and again,” shared Agnesi.

Camino Nova Scotia entered her radar when she started researching pilgrimages in Canada. When she eventually came across Rev. Dr. Rob Fennell’s book titled “Camino Close to Home,” something more profound caught her attention. Agnesi participated in Camino Nova Scotia in September of 2023, spanning Cape Breton, and June of 2025 in the South Shore.

Camino Nova Scotia was founded by Rev. Fennell, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Atlantic School of Theology, who dreamed of a way to bring the blessings of pilgrimages like the Camino de Santiago in Spain to Nova Scotia for quite some time.

The first event took place in June 2014 with 15 participants. AST has been home base from day one.

Agnesi shared about what participating in Camino Nova Scotia was like for her. Here are some excerpts from the chat.

Can you describe a typical day on the Camino Nova Scotia? What was it like to walk for 15 to 25 km each day?

On a typical Camino Nova Scotia day, we rise early, naturally, because we go to bed early. It’s “lights out” at 10 p.m., but most of us are in our sleeping bags before that.

We set off as a group at 9 a.m., but with different walking paces, we soon spread out. We have fleeting conversations throughout the day as we leapfrog one another. Sometimes we have longer, more intimate conversations, too. It’s surprising how quickly we became very comfortable with each other in that environment.

When we arrive at our destination, we are greeted by the leaders.

We didn’t have access to a shower every night and it was really okay. Sometimes, the church we stayed at would have showers and sometimes, we went to a campground to use the showers.

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The leaders would prepare our evening meal while we rested, swam or chatted. Sometimes we did crafts, played cards or a game like Bananagrams.

For dinner, we sat together to sing grace and eat together.

After eating and cleaning up, there would be a bit of leisure time before our evening circle. The circle is a space for reflection of the day and usually includes a spiritual reading.

Sometimes, we walked to the beach to watch the sunset. We tucked into our sleeping bags side by side on the floor, tired and content.

What was the most physically or mentally challenging part of the pilgrimage for you, and how did you navigate it?

The biggest challenge for me is the last few kilometres to the destination when my energy starts to wane. On the Cape Breton Camino, my gang of three started “Camino karaoke”. We would play music on a phone and sing along. It was always Nova Scotia music – Stan Rogers, The Rankins, Spirit of the West. It lifted our spirits and boosted our energy.

What was it like to form a community with people you may have just met?

We befriended each other with ease, right from the beginning. This was my experience on both trips. There is a sacred chemistry created both by the structure of Camino Nova Scotia and the kind of person who chooses to spend their holiday time on pilgrimage.

What was your most memorable conversation on the trail, and what did you learn from it?

I had so many touching conversations in Nova Scotia. On the last day of my South Shore Camino, one of the leaders invited me into the sanctuary and we prayed for one of my special intentions that I had told her about earlier in the week. She gave me a God's Eye that she made.

One day, I confessed to a new friend that I wasn't feeling 100%, and she offered to put my daypack inside hers to make the day easier for me.

Did you have a specific moment on the pilgrimage, perhaps a conversation or a period of solitude, where you felt a profound sense of connection to yourself or to God?

It's not a specific moment, but on the Camino, we live simply – sleeping on the floor, packing light, washing my clothes in the sink and hoping they are dry by morning and eating what is offered. All of this is outside the comforts of home, and yet Camino days are some of the happiest days of my life.

What is the single most important lesson or feeling you've carried with you since completing the program?

On pilgrimage, I can count on the kindness of strangers.



Student Spotlight: Rebecca D'Mello

Rebecca D'Mello loves being part of the ecumenical community at AST.

D'Mello is currently following the M.A. in Theology and Religion program and hopes to graduate in 2028 or 2029.

"I'm a Roman Catholic," shared the AST student. "I did the Diploma in the New Evangelization program a few years ago (2020-2023). At that time, I was sponsored by my Archdiocese."

"Dipping my toes in the pool of theology kept me wanting more and hence I returned to AST to learn more," added D'Mello.

We caught up with D'Mello for a brief chat. Here's what she shared.

What are your first impressions of AST?

AST is a community and I've realized that it's so because of the people I've met here on campus or virtually. I've also met so many people in my church life who have been a part of the AST family and there is always this shared bond with those who have been part of the AST experience.

What is your most favourite thing about AST?

The knowledge that each person who is at AST loves Jesus is my favourite part of the AST experience. The campus is also really quaint and beautiful.

How do you think your course of study is going to influence your particular calling/work in life?

I know that everything I am learning right from Genesis to Revelation and from Aquinas to Augustine is a part of my formation for my state in life. Although I do not have a clear picture of what exactly God is calling me to at this point in my life, I do know that He is preparing me for something unique and I believe my time at AST is a key part of that foundation.

What is your message to other students of AST at the start of this new term/year?

All the new things can be overwhelming. Trust me, I'm overwhelmed myself. But also trust that the One who has brought us here is the One who will help us achieve all that is meant for us, both intellectually and spiritually.

In the Student Quad



Meet our Student Wellness Champion Andrea Ngui, DNE

We are excited to welcome Andrea Ngui as AST's new Student Wellness Champion! Andrea is a DNE student and is passionate about supporting student wellbeing and bringing creative ideas to campus wellness initiatives.

"As Student Wellness Champion, I understand wellness not merely as managing stress, but as living into God's shalom," shared Andrea. "I often encourage fellow students to embrace rhythms of grace, finding balance in practices like Sabbath, prayer and fellowship that sustain both scholarship and the soul."



Convocation – graduation application

All students who expect to complete program requirements by the end of winter term 2026 are required to submit a graduation application.

This application is essential whether you plan to attend the graduation ceremony in person or participate in absentia.

If you foresee graduating in May 2026, please take a moment to fill out the graduation application and send it to the Registrar no later than November 1. The graduation application can be found on the Students page of the AST website under the heading "Convocation" – www.astheology.ns.ca/students

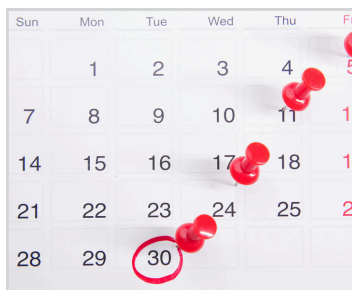


Convocation – Saturday, May 9, 2026

Convocation will be on Saturday, May 9, 2026. More details will be provided closer to the date.

On the Friday before convocation, there will be a rehearsal in the afternoon. All graduating students who plan to be at the convocation ceremony should attend the rehearsal.

It is important to consult with your Faculty Advisor to ensure that you have completed all the necessary courses for graduation before the winter term begins.



Tuesday, October 28, 2025, 7:00 p.m. AST
Student Union General Meeting

Saturday, November 15, 2025, 1 p.m. AST
The First Annual Student Union Theological Cookie Bake Off

Thursday, December 4, 2025, 12:30 pm AST
Student Union Christmas Lunch

Email Beverly.thompson@astheology.ns.ca for more details.

September in pictures

A brief photo series featuring AST events and special moments from last month.



September 2
Welcome/Welcome Back event
(Orientation)



September 5 and 6
Rev'd Canon Dr. Jody Clarke at
ISTDP San Diego



September 10
Faculty and Staff Retreat with
Rev. Canon Trudy Lebans



September 11
Fall Term Matriculation



September 23
"Almost Like the Blues: Preaching and
Teaching with Leonard Cohen and the
Apostle Paul" with The Rev Dr. Matthew
Anderson



September 25
Thursday chapel service preparing to
mark National Day for Truth and
Reconciliation

September in pictures

A brief photo series featuring AST events and special moments from last month.



September 25
Screening of “Doctrine of Discovery: Stolen Lands, Strong Hearts”



September 29
Induction of the Rev'd Dawn-Lea Greer as Chaplain at King's Edgehill School



Coming up ...



Nicholson Lectures 2025

Join us for this year's Nicholson Lecture Series, titled “EPIC Preaching for the Harvest: Reframing Proclamation as Everyday Adventure” with Dr. Sarah Han.

Date: November 4 & 5, 2025

Time: 7:00 p.m. AST

In person at AST or online

This two-part series reimagines preaching – not as performance, but as invitation.

- **Lecture 1:** EPIC Preaching I – Invited to Participate in God's Everyday Adventure (Nov. 4)
- **Lecture 2:** EPIC Preaching II – Sent with Compassion for the Harvest (Nov. 5)

Questions? Email
lydia.hood@asttheology.ns.ca



Mammon and the Market: When Faith and Finance Collide

A public talk by Dr. David Deane that will tackle Jesus' teachings on capital and ask a provocative question: Are our arguments for “ethical” investments and the modern financial system merely a contemporary version of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, who accused Christ of being unrealistic?

Date: October 23

Time: 7.00 p.m. AST

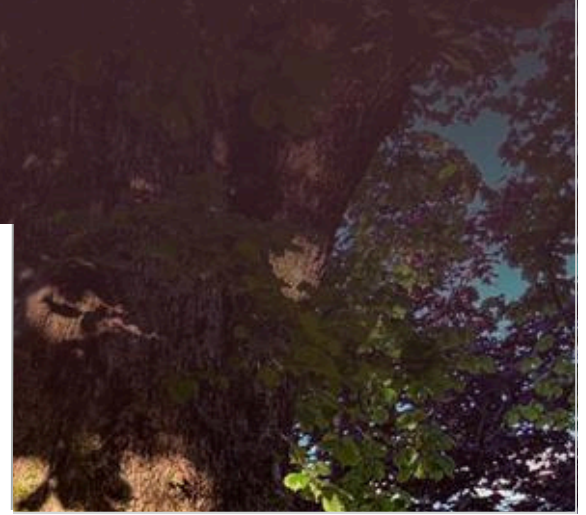
Venue: Barat Spirituality Centre, 1455, Summer Street, Halifax

To register:

Email baratspirituality@gmail.com

At Atlantic School of Theology, every program begins with a call to serve — a seed of faith planted in the heart of a future leader.

While our students dedicate themselves to deep theological study and pastoral formation, donor support ensures they have the essential tools to thrive.



Donors make an impact

Calling

Donor-funded financial aid helps students say “yes” to their calling.

Learning

Smaller classes with outstanding faculty lead to deeper learning.

Formation

Professional placement builds on-the-ground experience.

Purpose

Continuing education helps ministry leaders invest in their vocation, year after year.

Upcoming funding opportunity for AST Alumni

The Rev. Alison Etter Memorial Fund awards grants of up to \$2,500 to projects that cultivate the joyful activism Rev. Alison valued in her ministry. A call for applications will be issued in February 2026.

This year’s theme is:

Peace

To dive into this year’s theme, the committee recommends reading the collection of Ursula Franklin’s speeches and interviews entitled “Ursula Franklin Speaks”. Dr. Franklin was a leading Canadian scientist, educator, Quaker and champion of peace. Her words are great food for thought on how elements like curiosity, science, spirituality and ethics support and encourage peace. This book is available digitally via the SMU library. Get inspired to make a difference!

The Rev. Alison Etter Memorial Fund is continuously accepting donations to broaden its impact. Get in touch with Jen Hartmann, Manager, Philanthropy via jennifer.hartmann@astheology.ns.ca if you would like to learn more or contribute to the fund.

Due to the Canada Post strike, there will be delays in receiving mailed donations and sending out donor correspondence. If you have any questions, please contact jennifer.hartmann@astheology.ns.ca

**It's easy to give to AST online!
Scan here to get started.**

