



ACADEMIC LEADERS CONFERENCE

September 29-30, 2026 | Orlando, Florida

THE MISSION AND THE MOMENT

Academic Leadership in a Shifting Culture

Academic leaders serve at the intersection of institutional mission, student formation, and academic excellence. As cultural assumptions continue to shift, today's leaders are challenged to prepare graduates who are not only academically equipped but also deeply rooted in biblical truth and equipped for faithful Kingdom service.

The Academic Leaders Conference brings together chief academic officers, provosts, deans, faculty leaders, and academic administrators to explore the cultural forces shaping today's students and the leadership needed to respond with wisdom, conviction, and hope. Through biblical reflection, practical presentations, and collaborative discussion, participants will strengthen their approach to academic leadership while remaining firmly grounded in the mission of biblical higher education.

This 1½-day conference begins at 9:00 AM on Tuesday, September 29, and concludes with lunch on Wednesday, September 30.

Who Should Attend?

Designed for chief academic officers, provosts, vice presidents for academic affairs, deans, faculty leaders, department chairs, assessment leaders, and others responsible for academic leadership and institutional effectiveness. Whether you oversee curriculum, faculty development, assessment, or academic strategy, this conference provides practical encouragement and peer learning for leaders serving biblical and Christian higher education.

What You'll Gain

- ▶ Practical approaches to leading academic programs in today's cultural landscape
- ▶ Fresh perspectives on student formation and institutional mission
- ▶ Meaningful conversations with fellow academic leaders
- ▶ Ideas you can apply within your own institution

Conference Experience

This conference combines practical presentations, interactive Q&A, and meaningful peer discussion to help academic leaders engage today's challenges with biblical conviction and practical wisdom. Participants will explore ideas alongside experienced practitioners, learn from peers across the ABHE community, and leave with fresh perspectives to strengthen their leadership and their institutions.

Pricing

On-Site Registration

ABHE Members: \$500

Early Bird Member Rate: \$450

Non-Members: \$600

Early Bird Non-Member Rate: \$550

Early Bird Deadline: September 1, 2026

On-site registration includes full engagement in the conference program, Q&A participation, networking and fellowship with attendees and presenters, access to video recordings after the conference, lodging at the nearby Hilton Garden Inn for the nights of September 28 & 29, all conference meals and refreshments, and access to conference resources.

Virtual Registration

ABHE Members: \$200

Non-Members: \$300

Virtual registration includes full engagement in the conference program, Q&A participation, access to video recordings after the conference, and access to conference resources.

Location

Conferences are held at: The ABHE Weber Center, 5850 T.G. Lee Blvd., Suite 130, Orlando, FL 32822
Virtual participants will join via Zoom.

Cancellation Policy

In the event of a personal registration cancellation, fees paid in advance are refundable, less a \$50 cancellation fee, provided written notice is received by ABHE no later than three weeks prior to the event. No refunds will be granted after that date. No refunds are provided for no-shows.

DAY 1 TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 29, 2026

9:00 – 9:15 WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS — Philip Dearborn, President | ABHE

9:15 – 10:00 SESSION 1: THREE CULTURAL THROUGHLINES: NAMING WHAT'S SHAPING OUR STUDENTS

Chad Ragsdale, Chief Academic Officer | Ozark Christian College (MO)

After more than two decades in Christian higher education, one truth stands out: students haven't changed as much as the culture shaping them. Incoming students arrive with nearly the same limited biblical literacy as those of twenty years ago, yet the cultural forces forming them have shifted dramatically. This session names three cultural throughlines and proposes modest, practical responses.

- ▶ Identify three cultural throughlines (uprootedness, technique, and desecration) shaping student assumptions and habits
- ▶ Examine how a shifting cultural landscape, more than declining biblical knowledge, drives student formation challenges

Consider practical steps for addressing these throughlines in classrooms and campus culture

10:00 – 10:30 Q&A DISCUSSION

10:30 – 10:45 REFRESHMENT BREAK

10:45 – 11:30 SESSION 2: THINK BIG, START SMALL! THE PLACE OF THE NEXT GENERATION IN BIBLICAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Esther Zimmerman, Program Chair of Undergraduate Ministry Studies | Lancaster Bible College (PA)

The church cries that many young people are deconstructing their faith and abandoning the pews, while Bible colleges cry that fewer are considering God's call and those who enroll often lack biblical foundations. Bible colleges exist to help the church equip the next generation of Christian leaders. How are we proactively addressing these challenges and contributing to long-term solutions?

- ▶ Explore the next generation crisis facing the church
- ▶ Consider the next generation's place in theological and ministry training
- ▶ Explore how colleges and seminaries worldwide are addressing current gaps

11:30 – 12:00 Q&A DISCUSSION

12:00 – 12:15 A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR — CampusEDU

12:15 – 1:00 LUNCH BREAK

1:00 – 1:45 SESSION 3: PRIESTLY LEADERSHIP: A FRESH APPROACH TO CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

John Nugent, VP of Academic Affairs | Great Lakes Christian College (MI)

Christian leaders often turn to prophetic, kingly, or servant-oriented models to describe the church's relationship to culture. This session introduces the fourfold office of Christ (prophet, priest, king, and servant) as a framework for cultural engagement, arguing that the priestly paradigm best reflects the church's calling. Participants will explore priestly leadership as a model for institutional mission fidelity in a changing culture.

- ▶ Explore the fourfold office of Christ as a cultural engagement framework
- ▶ Evaluate the strengths and limitations of prophetic, priestly, kingly, and servant-oriented models
- ▶ Examine priestly leadership as a biblically grounded approach to institutional leadership and cultural engagement

1:45 – 2:15 Q&A DISCUSSION

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DAY 1 CONTINUED

2:15 – 2:30 REFRESHMENT BREAK

2:30 – 3:15 SESSION 4: STATE OF THE CHURCH, STATE OF OUR CAMPUSES: GOSPEL-CENTERED LEADERSHIP IN BIBLICAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Ed Stetzer, Dean and Professor | Talbot School of Theology at Biola University (CA)

Drawing on recent State of the Church research, this session considers how cultural turbulence, church decline, and spiritual openness should reshape institutional mission and strategy in biblical and Christian higher education. It connects these trends with challenges facing Christian colleges and seminaries, helping leaders align curricula, governance, and formation with a clearer gospel center and the church's emerging needs.

- ▶ Analyze how current church trends should inform institutional strategy
 - ▶ Strengthen gospel clarity and mission alignment across curriculum, hiring, and formation
- Identify leadership priorities that deepen partnership between institutions and the church

3:15 – 3:45 Q&A DISCUSSION & WRAP-UP

3:45 – 4:00 A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR — Logos for Education

5:00 – 6:30 DINNER

DAY 2 WEDNESDAY | SEPTEMBER 30, 2026

9:00 – 9:15 INSIGHTS FROM THE WORD — Philip Dearborn

9:15 – 10:00 SESSION 5: SUPPORTING THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF STUDENTS

Rob Lindemann, Chief Academic Officer | Vanguard College (AB)

Academic leaders are responsible for cultivating environments where spiritual formation is intentionally nurtured. This session explores how leadership, curricular design, and institutional culture work together to strengthen students' resilience and Christlike character, equipping participants with frameworks for aligning formation practices with mission and clarifying shared expectations.

- ▶ Evaluate how your institution's mission, tradition, and language shape formation expectations
- ▶ Understand how faculty, staff, and academic leaders view formation's role in student success
- ▶ Determine the place of formation across curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular structures using sequenced, mission-aligned approaches

10:00 – 10:30 Q&A DISCUSSION

10:30 – 10:45 REFRESHMENT BREAK

10:45 – 11:30 SESSION 6: ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION: YOUR STUDENTS, YOUR CULTURE, YOUR NEXT STEP

Discuss the most pressing issues of mission, formation, and cultural engagement you are facing with both the panel of presenters and attendee affinity groups. Create a draft of your Personal Action Plan based on the most significant and urgent issues you should address following the conference.

11:30 – 12:00 Q&A DISCUSSION & WRAP-UP

12:00 – 12:15 A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR — Gloo

12:15 – 1:30 LUNCH

Questions?

For registration or conference questions, email conferences@abhe.org or call us at (407) 207-0808

With Appreciation

ABHE gratefully acknowledges the sponsors and partners whose support helps make this Leadership Development Conference possible.



REGISTRATION OPEN

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