



Fostering Excellence
In the Study of Religion

American Academy of Religion

In This Issue

Colleagues:

Greetings from the American Academy of Religion! I hope this finds you well and enjoying summer pursuits. This month's e-bulletin contains a number of items. Most important, I want to give you an update about how our Academy is weathering the current economic challenges and how our fiscal coping might affect you. This e-bulletin also contains an announcement of a search for a new Editor of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, some links to important announcements about our 2009 Annual Meeting in Montréal, and some news about our Regions.

With every good wish in this summer season, and with thanks for your participation in the work of our Academy, I remain

Sincerely yours

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jack Fitzmier'.

Jack Fitzmier
Executive Director

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CHANGES TO THE AAR

The AAR, like nearly every other college, university, seminary, and scholarly association, is feeling the effects of the current

recession. Our balance sheet, like many others, was negatively impacted, and we struggled to keep revenues and expenses in line. In all, we remain fiscally healthy. In the fiscal year just begun (July 1, 2009–June 30, 2010), the Academy was able to project a balanced budget, but only after our Finance Committee worked very hard to find ways to increase revenues and cut expenses. Though we had to make some hard decisions and take some painful actions, I believe that the Committee’s recommendations were fair and appropriate. And so did our Board. Following are a few of the board recommendations, which will impact our budget in the coming year:

AAR Membership Dues will be increased. The Board elected to significantly simplify the dues structure by reducing the number of categories from twelve to six. As a result of the new structure and in an effort to sustain member services in the challenging economy, we are forced to implement our first significant dues increase since 2001. The average dues increase per member is \$15. Our new dues structure will be effective August 1, 2009. If you have yet to renew for calendar year 2009, please do so in the next few weeks to take advantage of the current rates. We will begin to accept 2010 memberships later in the year.

Traditionally, the AAR convenes over twenty Committees, Task Forces, and Juries for face-to-face meetings in the spring of each year. These groups form the “backbone” of our national leadership corps. In order to save expenses, this year’s budget eliminates most of these spring gatherings. Groups will continue to meet at the Annual Meeting, and our Executive Office has purchased some desktop videoconferencing software to allow for live video meetings of the groups in the spring. We hope to return to face-to-face spring meetings in 2011, ideally in the form of a Leadership Summit Weekend that was so successful last spring.

Most painfully, the Board determined that we needed to cut personnel expenses in the Executive Office here in Atlanta. Between attrition, the combining of positions, and in two cases, layoffs, we have reduced our Personnel Expense budget — the largest of our expense lines — by over 20 percent. In 2006, our staff numbered sixteen; now we number twelve. So far, there has been no appreciable decline in our level of service to our members. We aim to keep it that way in the year to come.

In order to present a balanced budget, a host of other expenses were reduced. Some of these were modest items such as office expenses. But others, notably a number of our Centennial Celebration events and expenses for our Montréal meeting, were reduced rather sharply. You may not “see” these cuts as quickly as the others, but they have indeed been made.

I can assure you that the leadership of the AAR explored every option short of these actions. But in the end, we felt that prudence required us to make sacrifices and to pass the economic impact to all corners of our organization.

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I can also assure you that our Board and Executive Staff are planning a number of exciting new initiatives:

- Our planned Centennial programs in Montréal in 2009 and Atlanta in 2010 are shaping up beautifully.
- We are about to announce a new research grant program, aimed to serve students and our international connections initiatives.
- In the area of technology, we are making huge strides. In May, we had our first live scholarly videoconference (between AAR members in Atlanta and at the University of Cambridge), which turned out to be a great success, and we have adopted a strategy to help us do desktop videoconferencing as well.
- We are planning an AAR member wiki, and we are working toward the development of an intellectual networking tool that could revolutionize the way our members relate to one another and to colleagues in other associations.

Despite the current challenges, the future of the AAR — in its second century — remains bright.

JAAR EDITOR SEARCH

Professor Charles Mathewes will complete his term as Editor of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* at the end of 2010. The Academy is initiating a search for his successor. Professor Frank Clooney, longtime AAR Board member, has agreed to chair the search. A link to the Editor's Job Description and directions for making nominations or applications is [online](#).

RELIGIOUS STUDIES NEWS MOVING ONLINE

The idea of moving *Religious Studies News* to an electronic format has been under discussion for some time. The environmental impact of producing a paper *RSN* — paper and ink used, delivery-related transportation, etc. — is significant. Beginning in 2010, *RSN* will be published only electronically. We are currently researching various technologies for the new format and think that we can incorporate new features, such as the capacity for readers to comment on articles.

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE POSTING OF GRADUATE AND PLACEMENT RECORDS BY GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION

At its spring meeting, the AAR Board of Directors, on the recommendation of our Job Placement Task Force, adopted a statement entitled “Best practices for the posting of graduation and placement records by graduate programs in the academic study of religion.” This important action will, it is hoped, encourage a new level of transparency and integrity in admissions and placement processes in our members' home institutions. A link to the best

practices statement is [online](#).

ANNUAL MEETING

Annual Meeting *Online Program Book*

The 2009 [Online Program Book](#) is accessible now. You can browse the entire program, or search by title, program unit, participant name, day/time, symbol, or keyword to find the sessions that you want to attend! You can even find the room locations of sessions by logging in with your surname and AAR ID. You can expand the listings to show abstracts, and you can even save your favorite sessions to print your own Annual Meeting Schedule! [Additional Meetings sessions](#) may also be found.

Annual Meeting Registration and Housing

AAR Annual Meeting Registration and Housing is now open! You must be registered to secure housing. "Advance" registration rates are in effect until September 15, 2009. Check your March issue of *Religious Studies News* for the Registration and Housing brochure containing all the details, and register and book housing [online](#).

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS AVAILABLE

Regional Development Grants provide funds for special projects within the regions that promise to benefit the scholarly and professional life of AAR members and the work of the regions. Workshops, special programs, training events, and other innovative regional projects may be funded through this source. Where possible, projects should be designed so that they may be duplicated or transported to other regions. It is best for those wishing to develop proposals to consult with their Regionally Elected Director early in their deliberations. Applications should include a narrative description of the project, not to exceed two pages, detailing how the project promises to benefit the scholarly and professional life of AAR members and the work of the region. Please include comments on how these projects or activities may be adapted to other regional groups. The application should state the time period covered by the project and provide a detailed budget (office expenses, travel expenses, honoraria, stipend, and other expenses). Institutional overhead costs should not be included in this budget. No grant will exceed \$4,000.00.

Grant proposals due to [appropriate RED](#) by **August 1, 2009**.
Notifications will be sent out on October 15.

RECEIPTS FOR MEMBERSHIP AND ANNUAL MEETING

Did you know that you can generate a receipt for your membership

dues from your membership account? Simply log in to [My Account](#) using your last name and membership ID number. Select “Your Renewal History” or “Your Giving History” to generate receipts for the desired year.

Annual Meeting Housing and Registration receipts are mailed to members along with their name badges, or generated immediately if you register onsite. To request a duplicate receipt, contact Experient at aarreg@experient-inc.com or call them at 1-800-575-7185 (+1-330-425-9330 if outside the United States or Canada).