



## From our president, Harold Horell

The most frequently viewed news stories on the internet in 2015 were those about the November 13th terrorist attacks in Paris. Some of us also recall that in 2015 there were mass shootings in Paris (offices of Charlie Hebdo); Uherský Brod, Czech Republic; Würenlingen, Switzerland; Naples, Italy; Charleston, SC; Chattanooga, TN; Roseburg, OR; Colorado Springs, CO; and San Bernardino, CA. We also remember the April 2015 reports of the fatal police shooting of Walter Scott by a North Charleston, SC police officer, and the death of Freddie Gray, Jr. while in the custody of Baltimore police.

As people have struggled to make sense of recent violence, we have seen the rise of fear-based and further-violence-inducing public rhetoric. This has included comments that heighten fear of the other, that is, of those from non-dominant religious, ethnic, racial, or socio-economic backgrounds. It has been suggested, for instance, that the United States and western European nations should enact strict immigration policies to limit or even deny access by all people of certain ethnic or religious backgrounds because of supposed threats they pose. Additionally, some ethnic, religious, and racial groups have been made the scapegoat for present-day fears. There are those who suggest that these groups are the cause of social violence, and that their members must in some way be responsible for any violence directed against them.

How should we as religious educators address present-day violence and fear-based and violence-inducing rhetoric? Before responding to this question, it is significant to note that the REA is committed to exploring how we can integrate into all facets of life a

concern for religious expression and openness to God / transcendent truth and value. Hence, at the 2013 REA Annual Meeting in Boston Siebren Miedema called us to be both bold and pragmatic in investigating the role of religion in public life. At the 2014 Annual Meeting in Chicago we were led by Mai-Anh Le Tran in wrestling with how religions contribute to the making of violence, and we were asked to imagine how religious education can foster a more peaceful and just world. At the 2015 Annual Meeting in Atlanta we focused on imagination and religious education, and explored imaginatively how people's faith convictions can inform the ways they approach the opportunities and challenges of contemporary life.

Building upon core commitments of our organization, I suggest that as religious educators we ask: How can we help create teaching/learning opportunities where people become aware of and reflect upon the nature, extent, and causes of contemporary social violence, and then discern how, personally and communally, we are called by God to respond? How can we build bridges across ethnic, religious, and racial divides, and foster greater understanding of our shared humanity and the common good? How can education in faith provide the members of our specific faith communities with a secure grounding in our religious traditions while, at the same time, enabling us to remain open to what is true and holy in other religious traditions?

Last month the Steering Committee of the REA issued a public statement that raises these questions and suggests how we can begin to respond. We are including it here in its entirety — please help us to share it widely!

Harold (Bud) Horell  
President of REA

## Statement on the current climate of “disimagination”

24 December 2015

It has been just over a month since the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Religious Education Association, when 188 scholars and practitioners from more than 12 countries gathered for a weekend in Atlanta to probe the ways in which imagination is “central to humanity’s sense of its own worth,” with connecting, transforming, and even disrupting power that enable us “to look at things as if they could be otherwise.”

Invigorated as we were by the generativity of academic discourse, we are stunned to confront reality as it currently is, in particular, the continuous assault on human worth and dignity through escalating acts of local and global violence. It is devastating to witness the prevailing manipulation of religion and worldview toward a terrorizing end. More distressing are the paralyzing effects of disimagination at work in public responses to tragedies and atrocities, when public leaders continue to misdirect collective consciousness by locating the cause of fear and terror squarely on the bodies of those most vulnerable in our societies.

We find reprehensible the public pedagogies of “misinformation and demagoguery” persistently deployed against individuals and groups. More than irresponsible social and political wrangling, these are forms of moral-ethical malpractice, an affront to any collective commitment to the ultimate concerns which propel steadfast work toward the flourishing of all persons and of this earth.

We scholars and practitioners of Religious Education believe in the power of public conscientization to generate active hope. We have seen this power exercised by local communities and trans-local movements that challenge destructive ideologies and unjust policies. The Religious Education Association ([www.religiouseducation.net](http://www.religiouseducation.net)) is more committed than ever to partner with communities across national, cultural, and religious borders to promulgate the study and practice of faith and worldview for the sake of civil, peaceable, and just societies. We call on teachers, faith leaders, politicians and pedagogues to lead as critical learners, to make manifest the rich repertoires of cultural, religious, and educational resources that bolster a “consistent ethic of decency and civility,” characterized by

- Empathic understanding and mutual respect
- Deep study and reflective dialogue
- Inclusive friendship and accountable solidarity
- Steady vision and passionate action for the common good.

This is a season of sacred preparation and celebration for many cultures and faith traditions. It is no time to stand aside and wait and see. Let us teach as if the world could be otherwise.

The Steering Committee of the Board of Directors  
Religious Education Association

Mai-Anh Le Tran  
Harold Horell  
Siebren Miedema  
Bert Roebben  
Kevin Sandberg  
Virginia A. Lee  
Joyce Mercer  
Jack Seymour  
Lucinda Huffaker  
Mary Hess



## Atlanta meeting biggest in years



Emilie Townes opened our meeting with a rousing address focused on counter memories, and the ways in which imagination can reshape and liberate our shared learning and work for global justice. One of her comments was tweeted and retweeted numerous times — “we are not disembodied dipsticks, your experience is not where God ended revelation!” You can access the video recording of her address at [our vimeo channel](#).

Our 2015 annual meeting, held in Atlanta from the 6th to the 8th of November reached new levels of paper submissions and attendance. With a theme focused on imagination, we had 188 registered participants. This total compares to 114 in 2010. We had 56 student participants, compared to 24 in 2011. 88 presenters offered their work, with 59 RIG papers, 26 colloquy papers, and 6 workshops. We also had three poster presentations this year. Full

papers are available for open download in the [2015 Proceedings](#). Five plenary sessions were offered, with 12 speakers. These plenaries are available as video recordings at our [vimeo site](#). We hope that you will find ways to introduce your students and communities to these resources — we put them up precisely so that you can share them!



During the Business Meeting members approved a budget for the next year which includes funding to do a substantial survey of our membership base. Our staff offered their reports (which are also [available online](#)).



The current Board of Directors has been working hard to regularize the timing of individual position elections, so that unlike what has happened at some points in the past, the whole board does not turn over at once. With all of the tweaking that goal involved, the following people were elected unanimously from the slate offered by the Nominations Committee: Mualla Selçuk as 2017 program chair, Tony Vrame as chair of the standing committee on Religious Education in Academic Disciplines and Institutions, Barbara Morgan as chair of the standing committee on Religious Education in Public Life and Global Community, Katherine Turpin as chair of the Proposals Selection Committee, Justus Baird as chair of the Harper / Wornom Committee, Maureen O'Brien as member of the Harper / Wornom committee, and Carmichael Crutchfield as Member At Large. Jennifer Ayres and Hosffman Ospino were



approved as new members of the standing committee on Religious Education in Academic Disciplines and Institutions, Hyun-Sook Kim and Jose Irizarry were approved as new members to the standing committee on Religious Education in Public Life and Global Community, and Marian Plant and Sara Tauber were approved as new members of the standing committee on Religious Education in Faith Communities.

This diverse and substantial slate of active leaders is clear evidence of the vitality and robust nature of our association. Each of them invites your input into our future efforts and planning. All of our board and committee members and association staff can be contacted through [our website](#).

Additionally, the annual meeting offered the occasion to celebrate Jack Seymour, who is stepping down from a very successful stint as editor of our journal, and the beginning of Joyce Mercer's tenure as editor. Program Chair and incoming President Harold Horell [shared a video](#) remembering Maria Harris' crucial work in religious education and imagination. And finally, for the first time in several years, we had a full fledged bookstore available.



## CFP for 2016 meeting announced



Bert Roebben, program chair for our 2016 annual meeting to be held in Pittsburgh from November 4-6, 2016 has announced the theme — “Generating hope: The future of the teaching profession in a globalized world” — now available on the [2016 meeting website](#). “Make a difference: become a teacher.” This kind of advertisement can be found on many corners of the street — nowadays and worldwide. Teachers and educators are considered to be agents of change in communities. What makes them special? What is the scope of their profession? How do they respond professionally to their vocation in a globalized world? And what would be the specific contribution of the religious educator or the religious education teacher to larger communities of educational practice? The 2016

REA conference in Pittsburgh will bring together passionate scholars and reflective practitioners with a vision of teaching for a new world. Please help us to [share the CFP](#) widely as nonmembers are free to propose sessions (they must join the association if their proposal is accepted). The proposal submission process will open in March.

## Drawings highly successful in encouraging evaluations

This year at the annual meeting the Board tried a new method of encouraging participation in evaluating the conference. Along with the use of evaluation links connected through the [web-enabled schedule](#) (using the digital tool Sched), the Board offered the incentive of a drawing for Amazon.com gift cards after each main plenary, based on submission of evaluation forms, and one for doing evaluations of breakout sessions. Much hilarity ensued (including spur of the moment limericks by association president Mai-Anh Le Tran). Six participants received Amazon.com gift cards, and our grand prize for completing the full conference evaluation (a free registration for next year's meeting) went to Kieran Scott. We celebrate the winners of those drawings, but even more so, we celebrate that we received 828 evaluation forms! The Board is going to ponder the evaluation data at its spring retreat. If you have any further feedback to offer, please send it to [Mary Hess](#), our networking coordinator or [Arch Wong](#), chair of the evaluation subcommittee.



## REA session at the American Academy of Religion

Once again we held an REA session at the American Academy of Religion meeting in November through our status as a related scholarly organization. Our session was moderated by Kathy Winings, our current chair of the standing committee for Religious Education in Faith Communities, and was titled “Valuing the Teaching of Religion: Connecting, Disrupting, Transforming Power.” The session featured Judith Bishop of Mills College (recipient of the AAR’s 2015 Excellence in Teaching Award), Andre E. Johnson of Memphis Theological Seminary, and REA member and Horizons author, Sarah Tauber. Unfortunately we had barely 20 people in attendance for what was a lively and fascinating discussion, which we hypothesize might have been partly due to the session time and location. The Board seeks further input on how to plan, publicize, and implement future sessions at AAR. It should be noted that our sessions are included in the official program book.



## Seeking support for travel fund

The association continues to have more applications for support from our graduate student travel fund than we have funds available to offer. In December we tried asking for individual donations as people considered their end-of-the-year giving, but we have to date received very few. Anyone can contribute at any time, using the Donate button on the bottom of every page of our website. In addition, if you designate the REA as your [Smile.Amazon](#) partner, a small percentage of your purchases at that site will come to us. Finally, we remind people that purchasing books through the [REA Amazon bookstore](#) also brings us some small funds.

## Highlighted resource

In this issue of eREACH we highlight the [Fahs Fellows research presentations](#). The Fahs Fellows program is sponsored by Meadville Lombard Theological School, and offers a collaborative opportunity to religious professionals and lay persons who want to “go deep” on a topic, better understand its nuts and bolts, and then go public with an alternative way of thinking, feeling, and practice. The Fellows are expected to deepen scholarship and re-shape Religious Education practice. The program lasts for a year at a time, and offers a small research budget and honorarium. Each year the fellows present the results of their research, making them available online. You can access these presentations at the [Fahs Fellows website](#). Recent projects included: mourning practices in the UU context, meditation training for millennial activists working in social justice, and dance/theater movement in faith formation.

## Member news

Virginia Theological Seminary is proud to announce the promotion of **Lisa Kimball**, Ph.D. to the position of Associate Dean of Lifelong Learning. Lisa is a long time member of our association, joining the VTS faculty in 2009 as Director of the Center for Ministry of Teaching (CMT), and Professor of Christian Formation and Congregational Leadership. Under her direction, the CMT has grown into one of the leaders in modern formation. Beginning January 1, 2016, Dr. Kimball’s role will be to build up, develop, and support the various web based, consultancy, and non-credit opportunities that really help the Seminary support the Church, utilizing the resources of three of the Seminary’s centers – Lifetime Theological Education, the Center for Liturgy and Music, and the Center for the Ministry of Teaching – to maximize the opportunity and serve the Church well.



*Practicing Compassion*, a book by Claremont School of Theology Professor **Frank Rogers**, has been named as a Finalist for the USA Best Book Awards in the Spirituality category. Rogers, who is CST's Muriel Bernice Roberts Professor of Spiritual Formation and Narrative Pedagogy as well as the co-director of the Center for Engaged Compassion at CST, wrote the book to share how to incorporate compassion practices into everyday life.

**James Ellis'** book *Tell the Truth, Shame the Devil: Stories about the Challenges of Young Pastors* is now available. It is a collection of first-person essays from pastors, mostly under the age of thirty-five, candidly sharing some of tough experiences as pastors that they have endured. The contributors represent a variety of theological traditions, from United Methodist and Assemblies of God to Episcopalian, Lutheran, Mennonite, Disciples of Christ, and more.

**Jennie Knight** and **Renee Harrison** announce their new book, *Engaged Teaching in Theology and Religion*, published by Palgrave Macmillan, which offers a process of self-reflection that leads to intentional, transformative teaching, dialogue, and reform in theological education and religious studies.

**Jack Seymour's** and **Margaret Ann Crain's** long careers were recently celebrated in the publication of a festschrift — *Educating for Redemptive Community* — in which eight of Seymour's and Crain's former PhD advisees join them in laying out a vision of redemptive community. Each contributor proposes ways in which Jesus' vision of redemptive community can become reality in churches and in the larger world including: helping young adults claim vocation, developing coalitions for ministry and mission, and empowering persons to address violence, incarceration, economic injustice, and racism.

**Mary Hess** is pleased to announce that during the 2016-2017 academic year she will take up the Patrick and Barbara Keenan Visiting Chair in Religious Education in the Faculty of Theology at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto.

**Barbara Senecal-Davis** writes that she and her ministry colleagues are excited by a new book out by Lisa Miller, faculty member at Teacher's College in New York. *The Spiritual Child*, published by St. Martin's Press, explores the clear, scientific link between spirituality and health and shows that children who have a positive, active relationship to spirituality have significantly more positive markers for thriving including an increased sense of meaning and purpose, and high levels of academic success.

**John Hull's** student Abdullah Sahin has recently published a piece on the "Future of Islamic Education" which is [being made available for free](#) at the European Wergeland Center.



eREACH is a newsletter of the Religious Education Association, an Association of Professors, Practitioners, and Researchers in Religious Education.

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